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**JUMPIN' WITH JUBILEE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF INCLUSION AND  
THE EMOTIONAL LIVES OF A BILINGUAL PRE-KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM  
IN WASHINGTON, D.C.**

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by

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## ABSTRACT

As public preschool and inclusion education are increasingly debated and made, though disproportionately, accessible across in the United States, Washington D.C. Universal Pre-Kindergarten is a unique case to examine experiences of changing policy and practice at the school and classroom level. While D.C. has long been recognized as a leader in early childhood education, United States Department of Health and Human Services, United States Department of Education, and D.C. Office of the State Superintendent reports similarly suggest that inclusion programs have not grown proportionately with the expansion of Universal Pre-Kindergarten to three-and-four-year-old's, following a history of D.C.'s noncompliance with national requirements of the Least Restrictive Environment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (United States, 2015; DC Office, 2009).

This dissertation study explores national and local landscapes of inclusion through a year-long ethnographic case study of the Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom at Jubilee JumpStart, a Community Based Organization in Adams Morgan, Washington D.C. Jubilee Jumpstart, whose stated mission is to serve low-income, Spanish-speaking, immigrant children and their families, is notable for being an inclusive, dual-language (Spanish-English) program. Likewise, Jubilee is notable for its equal emphasis on the emotional and educational lives of students through partnerships with The Washington Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis and developers of The Creative Curriculum. Through sustained fieldwork, formal and informal interviews with administrators, teachers, children, parents, therapists, and special education service providers at the school, this study reveals a portrait of children and adults' individual and shared complex emotional experiences of inclusion education. I discuss the inclusive potential, pitfalls, and paradoxes of Jubilee's teaching and community practices that purposefully attend to the emotional lives and labor of *all* school community members—children and adults alike. This dissertation concludes with a discussion of implications for early childhood inclusion education, research, and policy.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables .....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
<b>Chapter 1</b> Introduction .....	<b>1</b>
“The Dead Dog Story” .....	1
My Dealing with “The Dead Dog Story”: (over)looking for in/exclusion.....	4
“Those are the interactions we want.” .....	7
“It’s a referral type of situation.”.....	10
A Curious Absence of Children with Disabilities .....	11
“You take their placement, or you don’t get services.”.....	14
“It’s the culture of Jubilee JumpStart.” .....	18
Disproportionality in Special Education.....	21
Disproportionality and Language .....	22
Disproportionality and Poverty .....	23
Consequences of Disproportionality for Students.....	24
Universal Pre-Kindergarten in Washington, D.C.....	25
Overview of Dissertation.....	26
<b>Chapter 2</b> The Site.....	<b>28</b>
Subsidized Childcare .....	29
Young Children “At Risk” .....	30
Parent Engagement.....	32
“My son has special needs” .....	34
“Are we truly immersion or dual language?” .....	35
Partnership with the Washington Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis.....	38
Special Education at Jubilee JumpStart.....	43
<b>Chapter 3</b> Theoretical Framework .....	<b>45</b>
Overview .....	45
Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education.....	49
(Reconceptualizing) Bilingual Early Childhood Education .....	49
Reconceptualists, Psychoanalysis, and Psychotherapeutic Approaches to Inclusion .....	51
Disability Studies in Education .....	53
Disability Studies in Education on Inclusion and Inclusion Education.....	54
Disability Studies in Education on Intersectionality .....	54
Culturally Responsive and Culturally Sustaining Practices .....	55
Intersubjectivity and Collectivist Integration .....	57
<b>Chapter 4</b> Methods .....	<b>59</b>
Overview .....	59
Gaining Entrée to Jubilee JumpStart .....	59
Study Design and the Research Questions .....	62
Fieldwork.....	65
Building Rapport with Children .....	66

Building Rapport with Adults.....	69
“This is between us”: Informal Interviews and Off-the-Record Conversations.....	75
Formal Interviews.....	79
The Ethnographic Case Study .....	81
“Empirically Emotional” Research (and My Failure as an Amateur Ethnographer) .....	82
Anxiety and Resistance to the Group .....	83
<b>Chapter 5 Pursing “The Why” through “The Dead Dog Story” .....</b>	<b>86</b>
Excerpt: “The Dead Dog Story” .....	86
“‘That seems cut off, and kind of overly grown-up managed.’”.....	87
“‘I knew it had to be causing feelings.’”.....	89
“‘I’m acting like I’m a special education teacher, and I’m not.’”.....	91
“‘She’s still trying to control the behavior.’”.....	94
My Misguided Search for In/exclusion .....	96
“‘The PNC Visitors’”.....	97
“‘If you’re not crying at some point, you’re probably not at Jubilee JumpStart.’” .....	98
“‘She needed it from everyone in the classroom, not just her teachers.’” .....	101
<b>Chapter 6 “The Purple Loop Story”.....</b>	<b>105</b>
Introduction .....	105
Meet Jack.....	106
Meet Adelle .....	107
Meet Manuel.....	107
Episode One: “He just has trouble with where to put his hands”.....	108
Episode Two: “Does he want the purple one?”.....	109
Episode Three: “I know, I’m not angry with him.”.....	111
Episode Four: “He is totally different. It’s because of his disability.”.....	112
Assuming Competence and Meaningful Communication.....	114
“‘The ABA is like a firefighter. I’ve got water!’”.....	115
“‘Inclusion is their job... even if they don’t necessarily want to.’”.....	117
“‘But who is the child?’”.....	120
“‘Speaking for’ and ‘Speaking with’”.....	121
“‘If they’re in the room, they should be able to interact with him.’”.....	123
“‘To paint an honest portrait of inclusion’” .....	125
<b>Chapter 7 Implications for Inclusion Research, Practice, and Policy .....</b>	<b>127</b>
Discussion vs. Dialogue .....	127
Implications for Early Childhood Education Inclusion Policy.....	130
Lessons on Inclusion Research.....	133
Lessons in Teacher Education: Towards “A Relational Ethos” .....	135
Lessons on Psychoanalysis in Early Childhood Education .....	138
<b>References.....</b>	<b>142</b>

**LIST OF TABLES**

**Table 1** Key Informants ..... 64

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### “The Dead Dog Story”

On the first warm day of spring in Washington, D.C., while conducting fieldwork at the prekindergarten program Jubilee JumpStart, I watched as “The Tigers” class of three-and-four-year olds readied themselves for morning recess. The air in the classroom was filled with anticipation. While waiting for the playground door to be unlocked, I could feel the Tigers bursting with boundless energy, eager to reclaim the climber and bouncy balls after a long winter of indoor playtime. The Tigers’ enthusiasm was infectious. I felt bored and pent up in the classroom and found myself feeling equally excited to escape to the playground.

All of the Tigers stood ready in line except four-year-old Etta<sup>1</sup>, who was almost always last to join the group. Etta was in her own world, running circles around the big blue carpet in the corner of the room. As I stood near the waiting children, I felt myself becoming increasingly anxious anticipating how the teachers or social worker might intervene, and for Etta’s inevitable backlash. Her playful energy often quickly escalated to anger and aggression toward both adults and peers. The longer the children on line waited, the more restless they became—the more restless I became. The collective noise of their voices grew louder, and I sensed the teachers’ and consultant’s impatience with Etta’s typical antics.

Then, slowly but surely, I watched as the Tigers’ near-perfectly straight and forward-facing recess line began to collapse. It started when Manuel left his position in line and thrust himself between Adelle and Tyler.

“I was here! He’s... Miss... ah!” Tyler shouted as he tried to push back. Manuel was bigger and stronger than Tyler and barely budged. Manuel smiled triumphantly.

<sup>1</sup> I use pseudonyms for the names of all people in this dissertation to ensure the confidentiality of my informants.



“Owww,” Tyler dropped to the ground dramatically and began to cry. Adelle stood by unflustered, staring expectantly at Miss Bianca.

“Manuel!” Assistant teacher Ms. Bianca warned, “you need to go to the back of the train.” She spoke another phrase to him in Spanish that I could not understand.

“No me gusta, Manuel. We don’t hurt our friends,” Ms. Michaela shook her head disapprovingly. Manuel looked at each teacher angrily and shouted something indiscernible before stomping to the back of the line. Jasmine, an ABA therapist, gently pulled three-year-old Jack backward to make space for Manuel.

“Oye, no! ¡No tu!” Manuel protested. He waved his hands frantically, directing Jack and Jasmine to stand in front of him. He continued yelling at them, but his speech was slurred. I couldn’t make out a single word he said.

I looked over to the carpet area, where Etta had stopped running circles. Etta had dropped her jacket on the floor and was now kicking and shouting at it playfully.

“Alright, we are going outside now Tigers,” Miss Bianca announced, urging Etta along with her eyes.

“Hey! No! They are goin’ without me!” Etta wailed.

“Stop messin’ with your jacket. I don’t have no time for your antics today,” Ms. Lidia, a social worker, scolded Etta. Etta shot evil-eyes at Ms. Lidia, but reluctantly put on her jacket and joined the recess line. Without further prodding, Etta stood straight and alert on the line behind Manuel. At last, Ms. Bianca opened the door, and the Tigers were finally set free. The children rushed through the door, stumbling up the concrete stairs to the skinny strip of rubber asphalt behind the school that was their playground.

As I stood next to Ms. Michaela watching the playground scene unfold, Etta ran over to us, dropping pieces of chalk from her hands. She looked up to us both, gushing, “Guys, I have something really serious to tell you.”

“Oh, what is it?” Michaela asked.

With wide-eyes, Etta told us, “I was at Gramma’s, and I was watchin’ this commercial where people leave their dogs outside and then they are DEAD! It was so.... so...,” she finished in a huff, “really sad.”

At that moment, Ms. Michaela’s jaw dropped open. “Oh, wow... that’s not good,” she said to Etta slowly. She looked concerned, adding, “I’m gonna talk to Mommy about that, about you watching scary things... that’s scary. You shouldn’t watch that.”

Etta stood still as her eyes darted between Ms. Michaela and me as if she were unsure about how to respond. I too found myself uncertain about what to say to Ms. Michaela or Etta, if anything. I could not help but feel pulled between my current role as a non-intervening researcher and my instincts as a former preschool teacher. I felt pulled to say *something* to Etta, to say *anything*, really. Instead, I stood there as if I could make myself invisible, watching Etta’s eyes now darting between Ms. Michaela and a group of children a short distance away drawing with sidewalk chalk. I waited for Ms. Michaela or Etta to say more, but they both said nothing.

Across the playground, Ms. Gabrielle opened the doors to a large plastic shed that held bouncy balls, frisbees, and other playground toys. I watched Etta’s face light up as she opened her mouth and let out a piercing screech. Without another word, Etta spread her arms out like wings and took flight toward the toy shed. In that same moment, Ms. Michaela hurried across the playground to referee an argument that was quickly escalating between a group of boys on the climber.

With both Etta and Ms. Michaela gone, I stood alone on the edge of the playground, trying to make sense of what just happened. Or, more accurately, I stood there trying to process my own muddled emotions enough to make sense of what I was thinking *and* feeling. At first, I found myself greatly disappointed with Ms. Michaela because I viewed her exchange with Etta as a missed opportunity to talk through complicated emotional experiences. At that moment, I too shared four-year-old Etta’s desire to engage in conversation about “The Dead Dog Story.” Shortly after, I came to wonder if I felt more hurt for Etta than Etta felt herself, especially after seeing

how she ran toward the shed so enthusiastically. In my initial reading of the scene, despite the Etta's clear communication that seeing the dead dogs made her "so sad", it seemed that Ms. Michaela had prematurely and without any meaningful engagement with Etta assigned her own, teacherly, adult-centric meaning and resolution: Etta had watched a scary commercial that was not age-appropriate and this needed to be addressed with Etta's mom—end of discussion.

As a former preschool teacher, I initially found myself struggling to gain enough distance from my memories of engaging with my former three- and four-year-old students about popular media, as well as the sadness and finality of death. In my mind, the public service announcement seemed an opportune moment to learn about how Etta was or was not making sense of the commercial and her feelings about it. Standing on the playground that day, I kept wondering: What did the scary commercial mean for Etta? What did the short exchange with Ms. Michaela mean for Etta? What did this scene reveal about their teacher-student relationship?

### **My Dealing with "The Dead Dog Story": (over)looking for in/exclusion**

Among my data, "The Dead Dog Story" initially caught my interest as a mundane classroom interaction, and yet, an emotional interpersonal encounter between lead teacher Ms. Michaela, and four-year-old Etta: a low-income, non-white child with perceived emotional and behavioral differences, whom school staff struggled to understand and support. Etta's in/exclusion at the school and in the Tigers Classroom was particularly interesting given the long-documented disproportionate representation of children with multiple markers of difference in special education programs outlined later in this introduction. In my fieldwork, I 'followed' "The Dead Dog Story", using my vignette as an interview prompt to understand the meanings my informants were making of "The Dead Dog Story", Etta, in/exclusion, disability, and difference in the Tigers Classroom.

In short time, my initial reading of "The Dead Dog Story" unraveled, as it became more entangled and multiplicitous while following its many threads in interviews and through casual

conversations with informants at Jubilee JumpStart. In proceeding discussions, “The Dead Dog Story” took on a life of its own, prompting informants to reflect on and share stories both related and unrelated to this scene, Etta, Ms. Michaela, their teacher-student relationship, as well as other students, teachers, social workers, and therapists. The threads that unraveled from sharing “The Dead Dog Story” provided insights about not only the multiple but also the often contradictory and conflicting ways that informants were (or were not) making sense of the story, of Etta, of Ms. Michaela, of difference, and of inclusion.

This dissertation explores emotional experiences of inclusion, disability, and difference in the Tigers Classroom throughout the 2018-2019 school year. In the chapters ahead, I illustrate my processes of coming to understand inclusion at Jubilee JumpStart as well as emerging theoretical and ethical considerations in ethnographic research on inclusion and multiple markers of difference in early childhood education. I conceptualize “inclusion” not as the mainstreaming or presence of children with differences in general education classrooms, but as a way of everyone present (children and adults, with and without disabilities) relating to one another, such that individuals and the group are responsible for and shaped by the ways they affect and are affected by each other. Therefore, I shift my focus in this dissertation from emotional experiences of moments of in/exclusion (such as “The Dead Dog Story” encounter) in the Tigers Classroom, to how children and adults continued to relate to those experiences, to themselves, to each other, and to difference.

My experience as a participant-observer in “The Dead Dog Story” encounter, in proceeding interviews and conversations, and in the writing of this ethnographic case study forced me to repeatedly confront what Vincent Crapanzano (2003) described as the everyday *and* existential challenges of conducting fieldwork – that is, how to avoid the inevitable entraps of realism and how to deal with the ethnographer’s ethnocentric perspective (Valente, 2015). Crapanzano’s (2003) suggestion for ethnographers was to directly address *in situ* during fieldwork and especially during the writing up of fieldwork the ways she/he were constituted by

the subjects of and the subjects encountered in research. Practically, this meant that I had to accept, as Valente (2015) explains, the vulnerability of my position as a knowledge seeker, the limitations my informants and I were bound within and, “the solidity of the ground we imagine is beneath us” (p. 18). For me, this meant repeatedly studying my emotional experiences of research at the site and of my informants, alongside mine and my informants’ initial and developing understandings of “The Dead Dog Story” and later, in Chapter Six, “The Purple Loop Story,” that were revealed through interviews.

My observation of the “The Dead Dog Story” was an example of the inevitable and everyday emotional experiences of difference, ableism, and instances of in/exclusion in any classroom, but is not so much the point. Through interviews, I came to realize the question ought not to be what Etta’s story or their encounter means, or even what Etta and Ms. Michaela meant to each other, but instead I needed to track the “how-s.” My attempts to pin down the “meaning”, or rather what Stern (1985) called the “what-s” and “why-s,” distracted me from productively exploring (in fieldwork, interviews, and in the writing up of this dissertation) the “how-s” of my informants’ ways of relating (e.g., Stern, 1985; Valente, 2019a; Valente, in review). I describe in this dissertation a realization late in my fieldwork, that my informants’ discussion around emotional experiences (and, most often, emotional *labor*) around perceived difference, was itself an inclusive practice that I had overlooked. A unique feature of this community practice was the built-in expectation of discussing difficulties around working with children honestly, and that teachers, therapists, and parents would collectively come up with solutions. Ms. Michaela and Erica, the Director of Education services, had conversations throughout the school year with Lidia and Etta’s mother about possible sources of Etta’s outbursts, surrounding Etta’s emotional needs, and how best to meet those needs at school and home. In what follows, this introductory chapter provides context surrounding “The Dead Dog Story” specific to Etta and more generally on special education and inclusion at Jubilee JumpStart, situated within historical to

contemporary, local and national landscapes of public early childhood education. Finally, I provide an outline of subsequent chapters.

**“Those are the interactions we want.”**

When I interviewed Ms. Michaela specifically about the “The Dead Dog Story,” she related to me that she felt more connected to Etta these days, and the conversation quickly swerved to her feeling concerned about Etta emotionally because her behavior was not improving. Ms. Michaela reflected on Etta’s story, telling me, “...something made her sad, something had bothered her... I was validating like, “You’re right, that is serious. I’m sad that you would see that too,” and that I would talk to an adult to make sure that she’s not afraid anymore, or that she’s not sad anymore.” I wondered how Etta had experienced their conversation; was Ms. Michaela’s response emotionally validating? In interviews, Ms. Michaela and administrators spoke about how Etta might have experienced watching the dead dog footage, as well as Etta’s desire to talk with her teacher about it. However, I found it curious that unlike other informants, Ms. Michaela did not discuss how Etta might have experienced what Ms. Michaela said in response to Etta’s story.

It was clear from the interview that Ms. Michaela was still struggling with whether her strategies for Etta were helpful, and whether there were cognitive differences that were contributing to Etta’s emotional and behavioral setbacks. Ms. Michaela told me, “With Etta, I’m always amazed by her IQ. The fact that she was able to recall what she saw in a movie, something so vivid. Wow, I know that I’m dealing with a child that you can have a conversation with because she’s going to understand. At the same time, I was worried just how much she was taking in because she’s so young.” I was surprised by Ms. Michaela’s comment that she could have a conversation with Etta when it seemed she had chosen not to on the playground that day *because* of that expressed desire to protect Etta. It seemed to me that Ms. Michaela prioritized her

emotional desire to protect Etta over her apparent understanding of Etta's maturity and emotional needs.

Ms. Michaela had expressed concern that Etta was regularly exposed to violent or mature television during her visits to her grandmother's house. In an interview, Ms. Michaela told me:

"The fact that she was aware of these things at such a young age alarmed me and was one of the reasons I wanted to have a conversation with mom because I felt as if she needs to be protected. Etta knows a lot, and that's good, though parents can treat their child a lot older than they are, due to the fact that they are cognitively smarter and developmentally smarter than their age. Etta comes across as an older child, but they still have to remember that she's four. So even though she's able to sit there and internalize it, she's still four. She didn't want to nap that day. She was scared to go to sleep because she kept having these visions of what she saw. It was traumatic for her because she's still four."

Ms. Michaela told me that through follow-up conversations with Etta at naptime and with Etta's mother later that afternoon, she learned information about "The Dead Dog Story" and about Etta's family that would inform her ongoing emotional engagement with Etta. She explained,

"Etta later told me that it was a movie. She told me that her grandma and uncle watch those movies. When I talked to her mom, she explained that when she drops Etta off, she can't control what Etta does at grandma's... Etta's family dynamic is interesting itself. Unfortunately, she's dealing with a lot of layers there... but I like the fact that Etta can talk to me because I want her to always do that, especially if it's something really bad, if something worse happens".

During my fieldwork, I observed Etta make frequent pretend trips to her grandmother's house in the dramatic play area of the classroom. While Etta played independently and distanced from her peers most of the time, she would sometimes ask for my help if I was seated close by. Under Etta's guidance, I dutifully handed her stuffed animals, baby dolls, clothing, and toy food that she cheerily packed into a bright plastic suitcase. From our play together, I assumed that Etta must

enjoy visiting her grandmother, but I was surprised to learn from Ms. Michaela during a later interview that Etta more often resisted going and challenged her mother with explosive tantrums on those days. Ms. Michaela said that Etta knew her grandmother was stricter, “more old-school,” less likely than Etta’s mother to tolerate her behaviors. I later learned more about Etta’s family during an interview with Catherine, the school’s Director of Program Operations. Catherine told me that Etta was living in transitional housing with her unemployed mother. “This is a mom who’s asked for help,” Catherine said, “she consistently asks for help but then doesn’t make a commitment. But she asks, and we support her. We don’t give up on them. We keep offering help.”

When I interviewed Erica, she told me that she and Ms. Michaela often discussed connections between Etta’s experiences and behaviors in school and at home. When I shared “The Dead Dog Story” along with Michaela’s later reflection in our interview, Erica praised Ms. Michaela for her attention to Etta’s related behavior at nap time and her conversation with Etta’s mother. Erica explained,

“I think the processing of it as a teacher speaks to what we try to get teachers to focus on here...those are the interactions we want. Seeing it as more than just ‘Oh, some crazy story that Etta shared’, and being dismissive, but hearing it, empathizing with her, letting her know that she was heard, and then connecting it directly with later behavior how that makes Etta, Etta. I think that gets to the heart of our program... We know Etta. Etta is concerned about animals, Etta is concerned about people or things dying, Etta has this exposure at home. This complete insight is how we want our teachers operating.”

Of the administrators I interviewed about “The Dead Dog Story,” Erica seemed the least critical of Ms. Michaela’s response to Etta on the playground, which may have been because of how closely Erica and Ms. Michaela had been working together to support Etta and her mother. Their discussions, new experiences, and subsequent approaches to working with Etta are further described in Chapter Five of this dissertation.



**“It’s a referral type of situation”**

A theme that emerged multiple times throughout interviews was informants talking about how each child’s “difference(s)” contributed to what they were observing, and informed how they would or would not engage with the child or one another about it. One sentiment that was repeatedly shared by many whom I interviewed was whether a behavior was typical or not of a child depending on the child’s age, home circumstances, language, identified disability, or difference. “The Dead Dog Story” therefore also emerged to me as a window into the precarious position of young children with multiple markers of difference.

In interviews, Ms. Michaela explained to me that while Etta does not have an identified disability, she often wondered what Etta’s diagnosis would be if she were to be evaluated. “You’ve seen their behaviors. It’s aggressive; there’s something else going on,” she told me, “it’s a referral type of situation.” I had seen the behaviors Ms. Michaela was referring to, nearly every day of my fieldwork. I often watched Etta fidgeting in her seat or running through areas of the classroom, knocking down materials or other children in her wake. Etta frequently disrupted or left the group during circle and lunchtime. At nap time, Etta ran circles around the classroom, throwing her shoes through the air, unless an adult sat beside her or confiscated the shoes. Even Etta’s displays of affection were explosive, and her joyful shouts and forceful hugs seemingly overwhelmed some of the children.

Ms. Michaela wondered, “how much of it does she not want to do, and how much is difficult because there’s other things going on for her? Emotionally, and also cognitively. If there’s something, if she would get a screening, what the diagnosis would be, with a referral.” Ms. Michaela’s suggestion that classroom routines and interactions might be difficult for Etta emotionally was congruent with my own, limited understanding of Etta. It had seemed during my classroom observations that Etta was able to or willing to behave as expected when she was not frustrated or upset by peers or teachers’ expectations. I learned through interviews with Ms.

Michaela and Erica that they were working together with assistant teacher Ms. Gabrielle to understand and better predict those moments that Etta would become frustrated or upset.

I asked Ms. Michaela what having a diagnosis for Etta would do for the staff and for Etta. “That would let us know what we’re dealing with,” she told me, “we would know, ‘this is what’s wrong.’ You can’t treat something that you don’t know”. Without a documented diagnosis, Ms. Michaela worried that the school couldn’t support Etta with necessary accommodations. Ms. Michaela told me that Etta often required one-on-one attention during daily transitions to mitigate her meltdowns, which meant that teachers were unable to meet the simultaneous demands of the classroom group. In an interview, Ms. Michaela argued that an inclusive classroom must have a special education teacher. She explained feeling inadequate to meet the needs of children with such significantly challenging behaviors, who warranted special education services.

Erica told me in an interview that it would be unlikely for DCPS to ever provide a special education teacher to Jubilee JumpStart’s prekindergarten classroom. Erica also explained that Jubilee JumpStart is required to bring in consultants like Lidia to assess children’s social and emotional development, fulfilling a requirement of their Universal Pre-Kindergarten grant. Often, Erica told me, these providers’ ideas don’t match the ‘Jubilee JumpStart approach’ to working with children’s challenging behaviors, but that incorporating those consultants is nonetheless necessary to sustain free childcare for families in need. In Chapters Five and Six, I write about how administrators and teachers navigated working with consultants as well as therapists provided by Strong Start Early Intervention Program. Chapter Seven includes a discussion of the implications of Jubilee JumpStart’s collaboration with those consultants and therapists for Washington D.C. Universal Pre-Kindergarten and special education policy.

### **A Curious Absence of Children with Disabilities**

While Universal Pre-Kindergarten is guaranteed for all three-and-four-year old’s in Washington D. C. regardless of income, Catherine explained to me that priority enrollment in

Pre-K at Jubilee JumpStart is specified for low-income families and children receiving special education services. Still, Ms. Michaela told me that Etta had not been diagnosed with a disability, and there was only one child in Pre-K yet identified as having a disability. In one of our first meetings, I learned from the school director, Mary, that three-year-old Jack was the only child, of fifty children across the school's five classrooms, with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and an identified disability. While Jack was commonly referred to by staff at the school as having an IEP, I later learned in interviews with Jack's mother and with Ms. Michaela that Jack did not have an IEP, but an extended IFSP. Children with disabilities below the age of 3 in Washington D.C. do not qualify for IEPs, but instead IFSPs, Individual Family Service Plans. Other than children receiving speech therapy, Mary told me that Jubilee JumpStart had only enrolled one other child with a disability in the last decade.

I was surprised when Mary told me that Jack was the only child with an IEP in the entire school for nearly ten years, given local special education enrollment data and federal mandates for inclusion. The federal Early Head Start Program subsidizes infant and toddler preschool classrooms at Jubilee JumpStart. Head Start's mandate (45 CFR §1302.14(b)) requires that "a program must ensure at least 10 percent of its total funded enrollment is filled by children eligible for services under IDEA", the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Head Start Performance Standards, 2016). In an interview with Catherine, I learned that the language in this mandate could be misleading, as it does not require ten percent of enrollment in each Head Start-funded childcare center, but rather ten percent of each organization granted funding. In December 2018, I attended a Quality Improvement (QIN) Policy Council Meeting to understand better how this funding structure affects the enrollment of children with disabilities. I learned that the Washington D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), the federal award grantee that supports Early Head Start enrollment at Jubilee JumpStart, oversees 15 other Community-Based Organization (CBO) childcare centers and 19 home providers. There are no legal requirements for even enrollment of children with disabilities across those centers.

Given the longstanding disproportionate representation of minority students in special education programs (Artiles, 2011; Artiles et al., 2005; Harry & Klingner, 2007), it further surprised me to learn that Jack, the only child with an identified disability at Jubilee JumpStart, was white, non-Spanish-speaking, and one of only three children in that classroom whose family did not financially qualify for subsidized after school care. In an interview, Erica told me that it was precisely because of Jack's socioeconomic status, and subsequent access to legal representation that he could be enrolled and receive special education services at Jubilee JumpStart.

Jack's mother, Rachel, is an attorney and has a longstanding relationship with the school as a board member of Jubilee JumpStart. In an interview, Rachel told me, "We have two attorneys and an education advocate for my son, which is crazy, because he's, how little? The services are amazing. The bureaucracy to get services that your kid needs..." Rachel trailed off but went on to say, "It makes me really sad for families who don't have the capacity that we do. If my son lived east of the river, he probably wouldn't be getting the services that he needs." Jack's family's legal team was able to negotiate extended services with the same team of therapists that had been dictated by his IFSP, for the duration of his Pre-K 3 school year. Rachel also explained that Jack's placement in a mainstream classroom might have been dependent on his disability label. She explained that in D.C. public schools,

"If he were to be diagnosed as Autistic, he would most likely be placed in a self-contained classroom. We don't know if he's Autistic, but it wouldn't really matter, because we're getting him the help he needs... (that diagnosis) could potentially work against what is in his best interest. We really think he benefits from being with his mainstream peers. His communication has improved exponentially since he started in this class. Some of my concern with a self-contained classroom is that he's not going to get exposure to do things that he needs to continue developing and that he needs to grow. I also have some friends who have said once you go that road, it's really hard to go back."

Rachel's concerns about Jack's exposure to mainstream peers and education are consistent with Disability Studies in Education and Critical Special Education scholars' critique of self-contained classrooms (Artiles, 2011; Harry & Klingner, 2014; Bal et al., 2019). Her comments also suggest that a child's diagnosis, IFSP, and IEP as early as age three can dictate their trajectory in public school. Disability Studies in Education scholars similarly argue that low-income families are more significantly affected by "the bureaucracy" of special education services.

**"You take their placement, or you don't get services."**

In an interview following "The Dead Dog Story," I asked Erica if the school was pursuing any evaluations for Etta. She told me, "we are working on really getting (Etta's) mom on board with the idea that Etta could use some support... it's a little bit of a struggle. We can do the Ages & Stages Social-Emotional Checklist, but we can't push it forward without (Etta's) mom". Erica was referring to the parental consent required by Early Stages, the program of Washington DC Public Schools, that screens and evaluates children for communicative, physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and adaptive skills. While the Strong Start Early Intervention Program develops IFSPs, Early Stages is responsible for developing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for children two years and eight months or older who qualify under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

I asked Erica if the goal of an evaluation or an IEP for Etta would be to get more support for her in the classroom. "Not necessarily," she told me, "we would probably lose her... they wouldn't send support here; they would send Etta where the support was. That's how they operate with CBO's. They don't fully support kids in the CBO's, they take them and put them in places." While Early Stages may place children in any public school, which include DCPS, public charter school programs, and CBO's like Jubilee JumpStart, students with IEPs are least likely to be placed in CBO's. The Washington D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education reported that while 10% of prekindergarten students district-wide receive special education services, only

19 children or 2% of those 1,323 students are enrolled in CBO classrooms (District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2019).

Students below the age of three already receiving special education services at CBO's through Strong Start IFSP's may also be unable to continue receiving those services at the CBO once they "age-out" of Strong Start and into Early Stages. In an interview, Mary explained,

"It probably has to do with logistics, a therapist going to more than their assigned schools. That's been our impression when we help families advocate for themselves. This has come up in a number of meetings with the Assistant Superintendent, because Strong Start, they go anywhere. They *know* that Early Stages, school-based early intervention, *should* go everywhere. Parents wind up just as confused as can be, because they've been being told by Strong Start and by us, 'you can keep getting your services here,' and then Early Stages says, 'No, you're gonna have to be at DCPS to get this.' The CBOs have been really vocal about this. In a meeting with the superintendent, they were like 'Oh, we have to follow up on that'... so it's really an administrative and implementation problem."

While Early Stages may be more likely to place students with disabilities in DCPS programs for financial and logistical efficiency, Erica explained that these decisions may too be swayed by longstanding stigma of policymakers and parents against CBO's, that traditionally had lower requirements than DCPS and public charter schools, such as those for teachers' postsecondary education. In an interview, Erica told me,

"CBO's aren't acknowledged in that way yet. In our Pre-k classroom, the qualifications for teachers match the requirements for public school teachers because we are recipients of the grant. We still aren't considered 'enough,' for lack of better words, for students with special needs, without (Early Stages) even knowing anything about us. There's no evaluation for the programs. They aren't looking at the scores of assessments performed in the classroom or anything."

This stigma against CBO's is unsurprising given longstanding attitudes toward Head Start preschool programs nationwide. In nationwide research on quality factors early childhood education, Head Start is typically conflated with other publicly funded preschool classrooms (Coley et al., 2016). Moreover, O'Brien (1993) explained that based on income, location, and parent biases, Head Start centers primarily serve homogenous groups of children. Head Start has therefore "become stigmatized or socially excluded from the mainstream of the early childhood education profession and function in a largely class-based defacto apartheid of early childhood programs in the U.S." (Swadener, 2012, p. 11).

Erica explained that if parents don't move their children into the recommended DCPS placement, "they will withhold services. So you take their placement, or you don't get services. Or, you have a really, really, really, really good legal team and the wherewithal to fight the system, which is kind of what's happening with Jack's family." In an interview, Erica told me that "sometimes parents get just sort of told things, and they don't really know if they can fight it. If they do know they can fight it, they're not quite sure how to fight it. And so that definitely trends towards people being placed in school systems versus remaining in CBO's for their eligibility." Economically disadvantaged students identified with disabilities while enrolled at CBO's are therefore more likely than wealthier peers to be removed and excluded from their original, local general education setting.

93% of Washington D.C. public prekindergarten students qualify as "economically disadvantaged" (District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2017). Moreover, the majority of these students are non-white: Etta is among the 60% of those CBO prekindergarten students, who are Black or African American (District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2019). These students, if identified as disabled, may not be able to attend a Community Based Organization program alongside their non-disabled peers. While Universal Pre-Kindergarten and special education services under IEPs are "free" in Washington D.C., access to CBO's is effectively *not* free for students identified with disabilities.

Access to CBO's for children with disabilities is dependent in part on parents' knowledge and ability to navigate the system, suggesting that there are socioeconomic and linguistic barriers to inclusion in these programs. It would not be possible for Etta, who was living in poverty, to continue to attend Jubilee JumpStart if she were diagnosed with a disability and provided an IEP unless she went without any special education services to which she would be legally entitled.

In an interview, I mentioned to Ms. Michaela that it appeared that low-income children with disabilities couldn't stay enrolled at Jubilee JumpStart. She was less concerned, and said of DCPS, "I think they're looking out for a child like her. I can't be mad at DCPS. It's not about shoving kids out, it's about meeting their needs." Ms. Michaela suggested that an IEP might allow Etta to spend part of the day at Jubilee JumpStart and part of the day at a nearby DCPS site. "I'm an advocate for the half-and-half," Ms. Michaela told me, explaining, "she cannot stay all day in the general ed setting... this is my honest take. I think there are too many people around her... in our classroom, she has to share the space with so many kids and do routines... I don't know if she's able to do things we're asking her to do every day". In an interview with Mary, she too talked about how DCPS might benefit Etta, adding,

"The fear that whatever a diagnosis would be, that she's gonna have to be at a public school, I mean, I think that's fairly real. I would see it probably happening as 'You would need to be in our school,' or 'We'll just have to wait to give you services until you're in our school'... Etta, she needs more than she's getting here, and the ways we work with parents... it's less demanding. The public school will demand certain things, provide assessments, or create some diagnosis or just her learning plan."

What emerged across these interviews was a shared interest in supporting Etta emotionally and for keeping her at Jubilee JumpStart. However, Ms. Michaela and the administrators described ongoing internal discussion about whether they could meet Etta's needs, given the limited special education services available to CBO's. All of the informants I interviewed seemed conflicted about whether it was "inclusive" to keep Etta in the Tigers Classroom at the potential expense of



her emotional development. Ms. Michaela and the administrators went on to explain several other benefits and drawbacks of DCPS and CBO programs for children with emotional, behavioral, disability, speech, or language differences.

**“It’s the culture of Jubilee JumpStart.”**

In a New York Times opinion column, Williams (2019) argued that attending a DCPS school for pre-kindergarten might allow children a smoother transition to elementary school, but there are also benefits of being in a CBO for pre-kindergarten. In an interview, Mary told me, “DCPS looks at the world from their schoolhouse steps... Pre-K kids come to school, and they look at them through an elementary school lens, not an early childhood lens”. She explained that an “early childhood lens” would be “much more individualized, developmentally-focused... continuing to let them grow up as young children rather than turning them into students.”

Erica told me she feels that it’s unfortunate that children with disabilities most often don’t have the option to attend Jubilee JumpStart, and argued that for many reasons, some children with disabilities might be better served by Community Based Organizations than their default DCPS placements. In an interview, Erica described several characteristics of CBO’s that may support inclusive practice:

“CBO’s are often smaller in number. They often have more teachers available, and they often have just the relationship with the students and families that helps. Relationships really are a cornerstone of education. Relationships totally help students overcome some of their challenges. The stronger you can build a relationship with a student, the farther a student can get. CBO’s often offer situations where a student may remain with the teacher for more than one year and build a different kind of relationship with the student and family, and therefore are able to work on things in a different kind of way.”

Ms. Michaela told me that the extra teachers in the Tigers classroom were especially helpful when Etta or Jack needed one-on-one attention. In an interview, Ms. Michaela explained, “it’s

unique having this many teachers in the classroom as opposed to just two. In my experience, we couldn't afford to have more than two teachers... I haven't had that experience anywhere else but at Jubilee." Mary echoed Ms. Michaela's sentiments in another interview, explaining, "We know every classroom is better with more teachers in it...so of course, it's helpful when you've got children with special needs. I can only imagine when you have two teachers trying to deal with a whole group. It's not going to be okay".

In an interview, Erica argued that Jubilee JumpStart's interventions for emergent bilingual students and children with disability, speech, emotional or behavioral differences are also unique to the school. "We know that language is compounded, or behaviors are compounded when there are speech and language issues," she explained, "so we approach the child differently... I think that changes how their work goes". She explained that administrators and teachers are not only attuned to potentially conflated differences, but also have a collaborative relationship with parents and service providers that informs ever-changing classroom practices. Erica told me,

"One of the gifts about working at Jubilee JumpStart is that we're not so stringently held to timelines. When we come across challenging behaviors, there's no... 'we have to stop this behavior immediately'... we have the opportunity to try to gather as much of the 'why's' for the behavior as possible... instead of just putting a Band-Aid on the behavior. This entails constant conversations with classroom teachers and parents and any of the specialists or consultants that come in, and being able to go through the process in a more complete way because we're not having to meet these timeframes."

I heard similar comments about "the whys" in countless informal conversations and interviews with administrators, teachers, and therapists throughout my fieldwork. Erica, Mary, and Catherine described this inquiry as unique to Jubilee JumpStart and as a foundation of their inclusive practice.

Jubilee JumpStart's extended school hours might also benefit those students with perceived language, disability, social or emotional differences. While Pre-K hours at Jubilee JumpStart are dictated by Universal Pre-Kindergarten funding, there is subsidized after-school care available for children who financially qualify, as do nearly all of the families in the Tigers classroom. In an interview, Erica explained, "...we don't have to cram everything into these squished, compact periods of time, we can work on speech or language in the morning, we can work on it at lunchtime, we can work on it while we're reading a book." I asked Erica if every Community Based Organization has this flexibility. She explained, "I think that it's because it's a CBO, but I also think it's the culture of Jubilee JumpStart... we really wanna know why a child comes in and has explosive aggression. We don't just want to stop it... I think that's very specific to Jubilee JumpStart."

Erica also explained that children are subject to the ideological approach of the school in which they are enrolled, suggesting consequences for how schools and teachers will relate to children's behavior and differences. She recalled, "I've been in a few other centers, and they're often behavior-based sort of incentives, and behavior-based classroom management. We focus on children's social-emotional needs so that the problems have a solution, not that it would just manifest itself in a certain way." Rachel, Jack's mother, explained how this approach was beneficial for her son. She told me, "We have friends at schools with these discipline models where people get stars, people who aren't doing well... they put you in a chair or timeout. Putting Jack in a time out chair wouldn't work for anything. What they're doing in the Tigers classroom definitely works for us." It became increasingly clear from these interviews that both access to Pre-K programs and inclusion within Pre-K programs in Washington D.C. was affected by national and local policy, children's demographics, and relationships between schools, children, and families.

## **Disproportionality in Special Education**

The removal or exclusion of poor, minority students from Community-Based Organizations is therefore much more than a problem of physical exclusion from local community schools. Artiles & Kozleski's (2007) finding that “*who* is placed in special education is related to restrictiveness of placement decisions (*where*) and shapes access to related services, interventions, and programs” here rings true (p. 358). Children living in poverty have access to specific kinds of interventions through DCPS special education placements. With the provision of an IEP, low-income children with disabilities are also subject to different relationships with teachers and service providers, suggesting that their experiences of special education and in/exclusion are different than those available to wealthy families. In Washington, D.C., as Artiles, Dorn, & Bal (2016) argued so often happens for minority students, the very identification and documentation meant to protect children in schools may also serve as a tool for their exclusion.

For over fifty years, Critical Special Education and more recently, Disability Studies in Education scholars, have scrutinized the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education and the consequences of special education placements, especially for students with multiple markers of difference (Dunn, 1968; Patton, 1998; Artiles, 2005; Harry & Klingner, 2007). Disproportionate representation has not been resolved despite more recent attention, including commonly referenced National Research Council (NRC) reports (Donnovan & Cross, 2002). Nearly half of the United States school population is white, but only 13% of students in special education are white (OCR, 2016). African American students are 1.5 times more likely than their peers to be diagnosed with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders (E/BD) and more than twice as likely to be identified as Intellectually Disabled (ID) than white peers (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Harry & Klingner, 2007; Artiles, 2011). Minority students are not disproportionately represented in categories of physical impairment, suggesting inconsistency and subjectivity in identification as well as inherent bias in clinical assessment (Harry & Klingner, 2007; Patton,

1998; Sullivan & Artiles, 2011; Donovan & Cross, 2002). Male students are overrepresented in the same disability categories as non-white students. 80% of students identified with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders, 70% of students identified with Learning Disabilities (LD) and 60% of students identified as Intellectually Disabled are boys (Artiles, 2011).

Patton (1998) argued that many African American students are misidentified as disabled and inappropriately placed into special education, which is further problematic given that the placement of students with comparable disability labels also varies by race. Minority students, especially in urban areas, are disproportionately removed from general education classrooms (Artiles, 2011; Artiles & Kozleski, 2007; Bal et al., 2019; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Parrish, 2002). Non-white students are more likely to be educated in self-contained classrooms (Skiba et al., 2006). Minority students face higher rates of disciplinary action for teachers' subjective experiences of their classroom disobedience or disruption (Skiba et al., 2002; Bal et al., 2019). In this way, schools effectively sustain racial segregation under the guise of special education (Ferri & Connor, 2005).

### **Disproportionality and Language**

As of 2016, 10% of students in United States public schools were English Language Learners (ELLs) (Migration Policy Institute, 2016). By the year 2025, the U.S. Department of Education (2006) expects English Language Learners to rise to 25% of the student population. English Language Learners have also been overrepresented in elementary and secondary special education programs (Artiles et al., 2016; Artiles et al., 2005). The majority of those English Language Learners in special education are Hispanic or Latino students diagnosed with learning disabilities (Artiles & Bal, 2008).

Sullivan & Artiles (2011) argue that because of limited research specific to Hispanic and Latino students, who are studied less than African American students, there is yet an incomplete understanding across the field of their representation in special education. The state and local-

level representation of Hispanic/Latino students in special education may also be masked by the examination of national data sets (Skiba et al., 2008). The overrepresentation of English Language Learners in special education varies across and within states, as well as within categories of ELLs. Some studies reflect underrepresentation or proportionate representation when Hispanic and Latino students are examined as an isolated classification (Sullivan & Artiles, 2011).

In Wisconsin, for example, Latino students were found to be less likely than white peers to be identified as Emotionally Disturbed, but more likely to be removed from the classroom on the basis of their behavior (Bal et al., 2019; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Sullivan et al., 2014). Research in disproportionality has also revealed trends in special education referral and placement of English Language Learners across grade levels (Artiles et al., 2005; Samson & Lesaux, 2009; Ortiz et al., 2011). In studies across kindergarten and first grade, English Language Learners are reportedly underrepresented in special education but overrepresented by third grade (Samson & Lesaux, 2009; Ortiz et al., 2011). In urban school districts in California, English Language Learners in secondary education are underrepresented in Speech-Language Impairments but still overrepresented in the categories of Learning Disabilities and Intellectual Disability (Artiles et al., 2005).

### **Disproportionality and Poverty**

Artiles and colleagues' (2005) study found that most English Language Learners identified with Mental Retardation (MR), Language and Speech Impairments (LAS) and Learning Disabilities (LD) also came from low-income families. Non-white students are more likely to live in poverty and attend high-poverty schools with fewer resources (Blanchett et al., 2009; Kozol, 1991). Only 23% of white students nationwide live in poverty in contrast to 70% of African American and 71% of Hispanic students nationwide (NCES, 2005). Those students living in

poverty are subject to fraught environmental and social circumstances that may increase their need for early intervention and special education services (Waitoller et al., 2010).

### **Consequences of Disproportionality for Students**

The academic performance of students placed in special education is unlikely to improve, in part because there are typically lower expectations for special education students (Artiles, 2011; Harry & Klingner 2014; Bal et al., 2019). Latino students, in particular, have been found to score lower on diagnostic tests after being placed in special education (Rueda et al., 2002).

Academic success affects students' ability to pursue post-secondary education, employment, and economic stability, especially for minority students already living in low-income, urban school districts (Bal et al., 2019). Therefore, special education placement "may exacerbate the historical marginalization of students of color by deepening the opportunity gap at the intersection of race, class, language, and disability" (Bal et al., 2019, p. 263.) This work also suggests emotional consequences for special education students, who, in addition to coping with feelings around being identified as disabled, may be stigmatized by teachers or peers on the basis of difference, especially when they are removed from the general education setting (Bal et al., 2019).

Young children in particular, and those of racial minorities, with disabilities, or who are living in poverty, are also subject to high rates of maltreatment, physical, and emotional abuse in schools. The Office for Civil Rights' data from the 2013-2014 school year shows that 100% of the students physically restrained or secluded in Washington D.C. public schools had identified disabilities (The Office for Civil Rights, 2014a). 84% of students physically restrained, and 87% of students secluded in schools were Black or African American (The Office for Civil Rights, 2014a). 71% of children expelled from Washington D.C. public preschools and 86% of preschoolers given out-of-school suspensions were also Black or African American (The Office for Civil Rights, 2014b).

Disability Studies in Education scholars cite a range of historical, institutional, and policy factors that contribute to disproportionality in addition to school, classroom, and interpersonal processes (Sullivan & Artiles, 2011; Bal et al., 2019). Bias against minority students appears present not only in adults' experiences of those students but also in "objective" clinical assessments (Klingner et al., 2019). Moreover, high-incidence disability labels are ambiguous and open to interpretation, such that a student's identification of disabled is dependent on the setting in which they are schooled and assessed (Reid & Knight, 2006). Given the inconsistent representation specifically of non-white students and English Language Learners across and within states, across disability labels, and across grade levels, Kangas (2014) argues for research that better understands local referral processes together with the availability of special education services.

### **Universal Pre-Kindergarten in Washington, D. C.**

This dissertation study is especially timely given the recent growth of Universal Pre-K in Washington D.C., traditionally our nation's leader in public early childhood education. Universal Pre-Kindergarten was first offered through the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) in 1972 and continued through the Pre-K for All Enhancement and Expansion Act of 2008, which made Pre-K available for all three- and four-year-olds in D.C. A chief argument for public Pre-Kindergarten is that children, especially those with identified disabilities or delays, may be better prepared for Kindergarten and therefore less likely to be placed in special education. There are suggested benefits specifically for minority students, who account for the most considerable increase of enrollment in pre-kindergarten since D.C.'s expansion (Malik, 2018). Emergent bilinguals, in particular, have shown improved assessment scores after enrollment in Pre-K, even surpassing native English-speaking children (Williams, 2019).

For these reasons, Washington D.C.'s Universal Pre-Kindergarten program has garnered recent attention in popular media as a potential remedy for the achievement gap. Jubilee



JumpStart, in particular, has been praised as an “exemplary Pre-K program” for its parent involvement and emphasis on “the whole child” in *The Washington Post* (Strauss, 2014). However, most discussions of D.C. pre-kindergarten are limited to DCPS and public charter school programs, that serve a much higher percentage of students. CBOs are therefore not popularized, and there is little understanding in both popular media and scholarly work of inclusion, or the potential of Community Based Organizations, for children with multiple markers of difference.

### **Overview of Dissertation**

This dissertation is a study of inclusion in one Community Based Organization, Universal Pre-Kindergarten Classroom in Washington, D.C. Over the 2018-2019 school year, I conducted an ethnographic case study of “The Tigers” Classroom at Jubilee Jumpstart that included fieldwork and interviews with teachers, parents, administrators, and therapists affiliated with the school. This dissertation consists of a total of seven chapters. In Chapter Two, I provide an introduction to the Jubilee JumpStart community and the unique features of the program that influenced my selection of the program as a valuable site to study inclusive practices. In Chapter Three, I define my theoretical and conceptual framework, grounded in Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education, Disability Studies in Education, and Inclusion Education. Chapter Four is an outline of my ethnographic methods, grounded in a psychoanalytic approach to anthropology that uses my emotions to explore the fundamentally intersubjective dimension of fieldwork, to better understand my experience of informants and the site.

In Chapter Five, I revisit “The Dead Dog Story” as a means to explore inclusion at Jubilee JumpStart. Following “The Dead Dog Story” revealed informants’ ideas about disability and inclusion as well as everyday challenges to inclusion. In this chapter, I trace Ms. Michaela and administrators’ pursuit of Etta’s “why” as it emerged in interviews about “The Dead Dog

Story.” I found that their search for “the why” involved collective discussions of their own and Etta’s emotional experiences, both in and outside of the classroom.

In Chapter Six, I follow “The Purple Loop Story,” a vignette excerpted from my fieldnotes that involves children and adults relating to both disability and language difference in The Tigers Classroom. Interviews with administrators and staff about “The Purple Loop Story” produced an equally messy and emotional portrait of inclusion as did “The Dead Dog Story.” Again, I found through interviews that my informants were already familiar and having frequent discussions about the adults and children I observed in “The Purple Loop Story,” and working together to support the inclusion of children identified as different. In this chapter, in addition to teachers and administrators’ practical solutions for inclusion, I consider empathy as a vehicle for in/exclusion.

In Chapter Seven, I speak across interviews with administrators and teachers about “The Dead Dog Story” and “The Purple Loop Story,” that suggest Jubilee JumpStart’s discussion around emotional experiences as ever-changing dialogue, and therefore, a collective response to inclusion. This concluding chapter includes potential implications of that discussion as well as my informants’ expressed navigation of local special education and Universal Pre-Kindergarten policy for inclusive early childhood education, teacher education, and inclusion education research. Central to the implications of my study is a consideration of the emotional labor of all educators, service providers, and children, living and working together in inclusion classrooms.

## Chapter Two

### The Site

Jubilee JumpStart is nestled into a quiet residential block off of a main street in the Adams Morgan neighborhood of Washington DC. The school takes up the bottom floor of a subsidized housing apartment building; one of ten buildings in this ward of DC owned by the non-profit organization Jubilee Housing. Jubilee Housing was founded in 1973 by members of the Church of the Saviour. In 1981, Jubilee Jobs was created to meet the employment needs of Jubilee Housing residents, adding to a growing alliance of social service organizations designed to meet the educational, housing, medical, mental health, and nutritional needs of the Adams Morgan community (“Our Story”, n.d.).

With increasing gentrification and cost of living, there is such great need for affordable housing in Adams Morgan and surrounding neighborhoods that Jubilee Housing’s wait list had been closed for nearly ten years until February 2019 when the organization opened 60 new available units for application (Jubilee Housing, 2019). Members of the church including pastor and Jubilee JumpStart board member Tom, often credited as the school’s visionary, founded the preschool in recognition that the inaccessibility of childcare impeded employment opportunities of many local residents. Jubilee JumpStart, whose stated mission is to serve low-income, Spanish-speaking, immigrant children and their families, has now served the Adams Morgan community for nearly a decade.

The features of the program described in this chapter all distinguished Jubilee JumpStart as a valuable research site in the context of contemporary research on inclusion surrounding the disproportionate representation of English Language Learners, minority and low-income students in special education. As described in Chapter One, Erica explained how some of these programs are unique to Community Based Organizations, and others unique to Jubilee JumpStart, such as their partnership with the Washington Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis. In what follows, I

describe Jubilee JumpStart's support for subsidized childcare and parent engagement as well as their bilingual and special education services.

### **Subsidized Childcare**

Subsidized extended-day childcare at Jubilee JumpStart gives many parents time and relief so that they can seek housing, employment, or continuing education opportunities. While around 25% of Jubilee JumpStart families are “full-pay”, or pay tuition to the school, 75% of children, who come from low-income families, attend tuition-free. Tuition for students under the age of 3 is subsidized by federal Early Head Start funding. The federal Head Start program was piloted in Washington DC in 1964 through the United Planning Organization (UPO), the same “hub” Community Action Agency (CAA) that oversees Jubilee JumpStart today. Head Start expanded operation nationwide in 1965, with the goal of breaking the cycle of poverty through early education, and children's medical, nutritional, and dental care provided at no cost to families. As there is no income requirement, Universal Pre-K classrooms may be less segregated by race and class than Head Start programs elsewhere; therefore, minority students are more likely to be educated alongside their white or higher income peers (Williams, 2019). 11 of the 14 children in the Tigers classroom qualify financially for subsidized after-school care, though many families who are unemployed, underemployed, or homeless are not able to take advantage of this support.

In an interview, Catherine explained that some families who are houseless and living temporarily with family or friends do not register as homeless the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center and therefore are ineligible for certain services. Moreover, low-income parents are required to be either employed or in school to qualify for a subsidy in Washington D.C. that would allow their child to attend after-school or summer camp at Jubilee JumpStart. This poses considerable challenges for parents who need childcare during the week so that they can seek out

work opportunities. As a recipient of Washington D.C. Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion funding, Jubilee JumpStart is required to help families in their applications for subsidized care.

Etta and her mother are one example of these ‘in-between’ families living in poverty that Jubilee JumpStart administrators have been working to support. I learned in July 2019 from Mary and Ms. Michaela that Etta was not able to attend Jubilee JumpStart this summer and will return in the fall, though she may not qualify for after-school care. In interviews, Catherine and Mary explained that Etta’s mother couldn’t qualify because she is not involved in either “activity”: school or work. When I spoke with Ms. Michaela, she explained that Etta’s mom had recently gotten a job, but that the majority of her scheduled shifts were weekend hours. Etta therefore did not qualify for publicly funded childcare through the summer. While the existing funding structures around Jubilee JumpStart may support the developmental and academic success of some low-income children, others, like Etta, may not have access.

### **Young Children “At Risk”**

Mary and Catherine told me they hope Etta will continue as a student at Jubilee JumpStart, so that they might also help Etta’s mother, who is considered “at-risk” by school staff charged with parent outreach. The administrators might believe they could better support Etta by supporting Etta’s mom, following a common practice of recognizing and supporting parents, caregivers, and their families who are “at risk” (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education scholars argue that the federal government’s systematic intervention through Head Start was grounded in discourses of “risk” and the assumption that children and families with minority status, socioeconomic, linguistic, or disability difference are culturally deprived (Genishi & Goodwin, 2008; Lubeck, 1988; Lubeck, 1994; Swadener, 2010). The identification of children as “at risk” is deficit-based in that it demands an intervention. O’Brien (1993) further argues that “although Head Start has emphasized the importance of parental

control and participation, the very nature of a program designed to remedy identified deficits may preclude such involvement from happening” (p. 16).

Therefore, Genishi et al. (2001) argue that we must “question the patterns of knowledge and social conditions that maintain unequal social divisions” (p. 1197). Lubeck’s (1985) work challenged the assumption that social and cultural differences cause inequality, instead suggesting that inequality causes differences. Lubeck and colleagues (2001) argued for the study of cultural practices in Head Starts so that centers may recognize, consider, and build on valuable implicit practices already at work. Wilgus’ (2005, 2006) ethnographic studies of teacher’s and parents’ beliefs and strategies in Head Start programs questioned whether these implicit practices could be understood solely as the product of culture, race, and socioeconomic class, arguing for a more nuanced account of their educational and caregiving practices.

Swadener (2012) suggests a culturally-responsive approach to all children “at promise”, beyond semantics, meaning for “everyone working with children and families to look for and build upon the promise in all children and to concentrate valuable energies and resources on building on these strengths while addressing the many structural and environmental factors that have been argued to place many children “at risk.” (p. 10). Jubilee JumpStart’s commitment to parent engagement and parent “development” programs is not just about making parents from low-income and historically marginalized communities “better” parents to their “at risk” children (Genishi & Goodwin, 2008; Lubeck, 1988; Lubeck, 1994; Swadener, 2010). Administrators from the school also advocated for institutional change. One example was their participation in meetings with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education where they joined other CBO leaders to fight for special education services for children who have aged out of Strong Start. It was clear from interviews that Mary, Catherine, Erica, Bea, and Ms. Michaela considered the extent to which programs internal to Jubilee JumpStart could support parents and children given persistent institutional and political constraints. Still, administrators, teachers, and parents at

Jubilee JumpStart collaborated to fulfill Early Head Start and Universal Pre-K funding requirements while also meeting the community's changing needs as expressed by parents.

### **Parent Engagement**

In line with the Washington D.C. "high quality" Pre-K distinction<sup>2</sup> and the longstanding tradition of Head Start programs nationwide, Jubilee JumpStart has a strong and continually developing range of programs designed to meet the economic, professional, and educational needs of families in the program. In interviews and informal conversations with Mary, Catherine, and Erica, the administrators spoke equally as much about their interest in supporting parents emotionally. There were several instances throughout my fieldwork where I also observed teachers' concern for parents' emotional experience at Jubilee JumpStart.

One morning, I was writing expanded fieldnotes in the back room of Jubilee JumpStart as the Tigers students were napping. Ashley, a teacher in the infant classroom and a parent of a two-year-old in the program, walked into the room with one of her co-teachers. I overheard Ashley tell her colleague that she'd had a conversation with the mother of one of their students that morning at drop-off time. Ashley said that the mother was quite frustrated, because the prior afternoon when she arrived, her child was already bundled up in her jacket and waiting by the classroom door. I heard Ashley say, "I know we do it to help the parents by getting the kids all ready to go, but her mom felt rushed out. She wanted that moment with her. It was an important moment. So we're gonna keep the jackets off". I shared this moment from my observations with

<sup>2</sup> For readers less familiar with early childhood education and discourses on "high quality", see, for example: Moss, 2018; Moss & Pence, 1994; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Bloch, 2013. Here, I refer specifically to "High Quality" early childhood education programs as designated by the Washington D.C. Universal Pre-Kindergarten Enhancement and Expansion Act. Eligible Community Based Organizations are considered "high quality" by meeting requirements including for developmentally appropriate classroom space, class size, adult-child ratio, teacher educational requirements, national program accreditation, comprehensive curriculum, and corresponding assessment.

Mary in an interview. In response, she told me that parents' emotional experiences were of interest to Jubilee JumpStart staff because, she argued, there is a direct connection between parents' and children's emotional experiences.

Adelle's mother, Briana, was one example of Jubilee JumpStart's dedication to supporting parents emotionally. In an interview, Briana told me, "everyone here is like family. I am comfortable because I know she's being well taken care of. It's reflected in the way she talks about her teachers at home. It's great to hear somebody cares as much as that for your child. Giving a child to someone to take care of, has a lot of things at the back of their head." At Jubilee JumpStart, teachers and administrators recognized that parents have inevitable but unique emotional experiences of their child's schooling. Mary explained that listening to and respecting parents' emotional experiences was necessary to understand and support parents' participation in school events as well as the outside community.

This might be important for children like Adelle, a non-white child of an immigrant family, given the contemporary political landscape of the United States where immigrant families are already subject to extreme institutional and emotional demands that can interfere with parents' comfort and ability to participate (Bossard et al., 2018; Adair & Barraza, 2014). Parents' apparent unwillingness or inability to participate in their child's education by white, middle-class, normative expectations can result in further stigma toward those families and their race, culture, and socio-economic status (Tobin et al., 2013; Adair, 2015). Those parents and children may in turn be further alienated from school communities. That stigma continues to contribute to pervasive class-ism and the racialization of intelligence and dis/ability of both children and parents (Artiles, 2011; Reid & Knight, 2006; Erickson, 1987; McDermott, 1987).

Jubilee JumpStart is also widely known for their more formal parent engagement programs, which include home visits, weekly coffee hours, family "Happy Hour" social events, support groups, and workshops. The recent (2019) NAEYC publication *Families & Educators Together: Building Great Relationships to Support Young Children*, featured Jubilee JumpStart's



“Coffee in the Lobby”. In the book, Mary is quoted, explaining that programs like coffee hour have allowed parents to stay in discussion with school administrators about their child’s needs, their own needs, and needs of the wider community (Koralek et al., 2019). At the outset of my fieldwork, Mary and Catherine had encouraged me to attend and observe during weekly coffee hours, which would allow parents an opportunity to get to know me and ask any questions about my work. The first two coffee hours I attended were especially important opportunities to secure signed consent forms from parents and begin to build rapport with the community. The following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes following the first coffee hour I attended.

**“My son has special needs”**

On a Friday morning in December 2018, I stood in the lobby area of the school, greeting families who stayed for the program’s weekly parent coffee hour. A mostly blank poster hanging on the wall asked parents to write “What kind of school would you like for your child?” with “diverse” and “safe” written as prompts. I watched as Rachel, Jack’s mother, returned from dropping off her son in “The Tigers” classroom. She paused to read the poster and took a marker to add “inclusive” and “friendly” to the list. I asked her what an inclusive school would look like to her. “My son has special needs,” she told me, “and we had a back-to-school night and a couple of the parents came up to me and said, ‘Is there anything we can do, or tell our kids, to make you and Jack feel more supported?’ which was super nice. Inclusion is feeling like it’s his school just like it’s everybody else’s school”.

Coffee hours were, as Mary and Catherine predicted, a space where I could learn about parents’ interactions and experience of the school. I overheard conversations between staff and parents each week that mirrored Rachel’s experience of support and inclusion. Parents chatted about the weather, their morning commute, upcoming events, their jobs or educational pursuits. At coffee hours, parents also showed interest in each other’s children. I was surprised early in my fieldwork by how many of the parents of infant and toddlers, many who are new to the school,

knew the children in the Pre-K classroom, and greeted them by name in the hallway as they stood with their coffee and pastries each Friday.

In the second coffee hour I attended, one parent from the Tigers classroom who had recently attended a workshop talked about her upsetting realization that there were several Jubilee JumpStart families who were still struggling to find permanent housing. I overheard her say that she was surprised to learn how many parents, like herself, were recent immigrants to the country. At a coffee hour, she asked Liana about the possibility of forming a support group outside of their typical planned, thematic workshops for parents to talk about those experiences. In that tiny lobby each week, I sensed the community at Jubilee JumpStart.

Occasionally, Jubilee JumpStart welcomed visitors from the community during Friday coffee hours for events that Mary calls “espresso shots” (Koralek et al., 2019). During my fieldwork, one of those visitors was a representative from D.C. Public Schools, who was available to answer parents’ questions about the Pre-Kindergarten lottery and public dual-language elementary school programs. In an interview, Catherine wondered, “... how many families are able to seek that out on their own? Programs like ours make that information available, especially for immigrant families or others with language barriers.”

### **“Are we truly immersion or dual language?”**

In addition to those coffee hour visitors, staff members like Liana, Jubilee JumpStart’s Family & Community Engagement Manager, know about and can connect families with other community programs accessible to Spanish speakers and immigrant families. Liana works at an unsheltered desk in the middle of the school lobby. Like the program team, she knows every child at Jubilee JumpStart by name. Each morning, Liana and a bilingual administrative assistant named Nell greet families in English and Spanish and help families transition down the hall and into the classrooms. At drop-off and pick-up times, Liana communicates with families in English

and Spanish about upcoming events such as monthly parent “JumpStarter Council” board meetings and social events.

While the Jubilee JumpStart website describes the program as “dual language” with English and Spanish speaking teachers in each classroom, over the last year, the program team has reconsidered their approach. “We wondered, are we truly immersion or dual language? Observing in classrooms, is it really immersion?” Catherine, the school’s Director of Program Operations, explained, “Because that would mean everything is in both languages and we’re not doing that, we’re providing staff. On tours, we’re leaving out the idea of ‘immersion’ until we can define it for ourselves.” This staffing exposes children to both languages and allows emergent bilingual students flexibility in their classroom language practice. In the Tigers Classroom, I observed teachers introduce new vocabulary to students in Spanish and English during circle or other group activity times. I also observed Ms. Bianca communicate in Spanish with native Spanish-speaking children who were upset or frustrated, not following directions, or seemed to be having difficulty communicating something in English. One week during my fieldwork that Ms. Bianca was on vacation, the extent of Spanish speaking between teachers and children that I observed were brief phrases such as “no me gusta” or “dos amigos” to direct children’s play during choice time. While Ms. Michaela and Ms. Gabrielle knew very limited Spanish, children were never expected to communicate in one language. Spanish-speaking children, including Manuel, Julia, and Daniella, also spoke Spanish among themselves as they played. Children were allowed and expected to use both languages interchangeably, effectively valuing their native language.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) reports that Dual Language Learners make up 23% of preschool-aged children in the United States (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2018). Given that non-English speaking families are disproportionately low-income, NIEER advocates for extra funding, bilingual instruction, and assessment in home languages to better prepare non-native English-speaking children for Kindergarten (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2018). Jubilee JumpStart both assesses children in their home languages and considers how perceived

social, emotional, and behavioral differences can be conflated with language acquisition. In addition to their bilingual staffing, these factors are important given that English language learners are likely to be identified as “at risk” in literacy development and further marginalized by subsequent intervention services. Given that students are most often referred to special education for challenging behavior or challenges in reading or speech, language difference and disability may be conflated during referral and placement of ELLs into special education (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Rueda et al., 2002; Figueroa & Artiles, 1999; Figueroa et al., 1989; Klingner et al., 2005; Kangas, 2017).

Beyond providing those students access to the group, there are potential implications for disproportionality as the availability of appropriate support programs for English Language Learners is a key factor in their referral to special education (Klingner et al., 2005). General education teachers may be unprepared to assess whether a child has a learning disability or is struggling in a natural process of language acquisition (Klingner, Artiles, & Barletta, 2006; Samson & Lesaux, 2009). English-only teachers may also mistake a child’s misunderstanding as misbehavior, for example, if an English Language Learner does not appear to be following directions (Chu & Florez, 2011). In “English immersion programs”, where the students’ “primary language is not used as an instructional tool but for clarification purposes only”, English Language Learners may be more likely to be identified with disabilities and placed in special education programs (Rueda et al., 2002; Artiles et al., 2005).

Jubilee JumpStart has also been selected as a model site for Teaching Strategies, Inc. and follows the Head Start Creative Curriculum in their 0-3 and Pre-Kindergarten classrooms. The geographic and language accessibility of Head Start programs has been found to affect the literacy practices of bilingual and multilingual children (Genishi et al., 2009). Genishi et al. (2009) argue that Head Start programs, which allow children to choose classroom activities, include extensive time for dramatic play, and support children’s communication and literacy in their home languages, especially support Emergent Bilinguals who might otherwise be referred to

Special Education. In Head Start curriculum, there is therefore “time and space for individual learners” (Falchi et al., 2014, p. 361).

### **Partnership with the Washington Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis**

I was first drawn to Jubilee JumpStart for its unique partnership with the Washington Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis (WBCP, previously Washington Center for Psychoanalysis). Before Jubilee JumpStart opened for enrollment, psychoanalysts from WBCP met with Tom and the school’s first director to organize a series of programs for teachers, parents, and children at the school. Over the next nine years, WBCP therapists offered pro-bono psychotherapy for teachers, parents and children of Jubilee JumpStart in both English and Spanish. Several therapists also consulted for teachers and parents struggling to understand or work with particular children. Despite Freud’s (1918) imagination of a “psychotherapy for the people”, psychoanalysis has remained predominantly a pursuit of upper-class individuals and training analysts (Aron & Starr, 2013). The partnership between Jubilee JumpStart and WBCP brought what would otherwise be financially inaccessible therapy to low-income families, many who have experienced or continue to experience serious trauma in their communities (Alperovitz, 2018).

Prior to the 2018-2019 school year, psychotherapists from WBCP also facilitated weekly “Work Discussion” groups, where teachers had the opportunity to reexamine classroom observations and their emotional experiences of working with children. Six psychoanalysts from WBCP facilitated three groups of “Work Discussion” each school year with five to six teachers in each. Ideally, those groups remained consistent from year-to-year, with exceptions for teacher turnover at the school. I learned about the groups in an interview with Annette, a licensed clinical social worker and psychoanalyst who facilitated one of the groups. I also interviewed three of the other Work Discussion group facilitators: Nora, Michael, and Lena. All six original Work Discussion facilitators were also faculty members at the Washington School of Psychiatry in the two-year infant and young child infant observation called “Seeing the Unseen in Clinical Work”.

Tom, the founder of Jubilee JumpStart, became a student in this program, along with Jubilee JumpStart teachers and administrators Catherine and Erica, two key informants in my study.

The psychoanalysts from WBCP have presented observations and videos from the Work Discussion groups at Jubilee JumpStart in annual conferences at the Washington School of Psychiatry as well as the Association of the Advancement of Curriculum Studies' 2016 conference. In 2017, they were awarded the American Psychoanalytic Association (APsaA) Schools Committee Anna Freud Educational Achievement award for their partnership with Jubilee JumpStart. In an interview, Annette described how the Work Discussion groups began at Jubilee JumpStart. Following the Tavistock Clinic's model, each week, teachers were asked to produce a written description of a thirty to sixty-minute classroom observation that would be shared in the group. Annette told me that this approach quickly became impossible as several teachers were challenged by the writing requirement. The analysts then changed the Work Discussion groups to an "oral model" where teachers would recall their observations from the classroom, that could then be translated by one of the bilingual therapists. Annette told me that the oral model, which lasted for the next four years,

"sometimes got off track... to difficulties that the teachers were having... In many of the groups, the teachers began to really talk about their unhappiness with the administration, unhappiness with the pay, as well as some concerns between the teachers. Some sessions we began to feel, 'well, we're getting into something that we're really not here for'... we were there to think about the children in the classrooms. Some teachers were able to make use of that kind of learning, and could talk some about a child and their situation, but it was a mixed bag."

Lena told me in an interview that while the groups brought to light tensions within teaching teams, Work Discussion also gave teachers a rare opportunity to talk across and learn from other classrooms' teachers. Nora similarly told me that it was a benefit for teachers to hear about other teachers' worries that were similar or different from their own, that might help teachers further

separate their feelings from their observations. Catherine told me that when these teachers came together, they also asked each other questions that informed their work with children, “such as, what’s going on at home for that child? Even, did the child have anything to eat yet that morning?”

Over those years, Jubilee JumpStart faced significant organizational changes including the turnover of teachers as well as several interim directors within a span of eighteen months before Mary began work at the school. Annette told me in an interview that following these changes, there was increasing disagreement between psychoanalysts, administration, and teachers about the productivity, focus, and goals of Work Discussion groups. A weekly meeting was therefore arranged between Mary, Erica, Catherine, Tom, and teachers from Jubilee JumpStart together with several of the psychoanalysts. Each week for one hour, Annette told me, they discussed how the groups could be most useful for the school’s changing needs. This meeting resulted in the development of a Work Discussion model unique to the school. Annette told me that at that time, her colleague Alison suggested a “video model” where teachers would record a five-minute video of a child in their classroom to bring to Work Discussion for discussion. The analysts then adapted the original Tavistock method, showing a video to the teachers each week and asking, “What do you see?” After the teachers shared their observations, the therapists would ask, “How did that make you feel?”.

“That model was very powerful for a long time,” Annette told me, “it got people away from talking about things that were irritating them about the institution, and I think it improved their observational skills by quite a lot.... for those teachers who really got it, it was quite transformational.” Alperovitz (2018) wrote of one example of a teacher’s self-described transformation through the video model of the Work Discussion groups. After watching a video of a toddler from her classroom, the teacher told the group,

“When I started watching this video, I felt dread, because my interactions with her are filled with dread as I anticipate her getting upset, because she often behaves like that. It is

not just her upset that bothers me, but her lack of confidence in herself makes me upset, because I know she can do more for herself. I see myself in her. I don't have confidence in my abilities, so I can empathize with her. In fact, watching this video made me see her completely differently now, and I know it will help me approach her from a different space" (Alperovitz, 2018, p.99).

Nora told me in another interview that one teacher described feeling "empowered" to work with a child who had "just seemed so miserable at the school". The teacher had repeatedly talked in Work Discussion about how her difficulty connecting with and understanding that child was weighing on her emotionally. Nora told me that as the teacher separated her feelings from her observations with the child, it didn't mean that the teacher's feelings or concern for the child subsided, but rather that she could make use of them.

I saw this as potentially inclusive for recognizing and valuing the child's emotional experience. Annette explained in an interview that through an awareness of their own emotional responses during work discussion groups, teachers might be more keenly aware of, and better attend to the subjective experiences of children in the classroom. Annette suggested that that ways that the adults in a classroom are affected by children may also give us clues into the child's feelings or and needs, and that the Wait, Watch, and Wonder prompts, separating "observation" from "feeling", "gives space for the child to tell the story". That conversation process, of being with the analyst, and child, and, and in, the classroom context in that moment might provide a space for children's desires alongside, together, and in conflict with adults.

Moreover, I saw potential consequences for the identification and placement of students in special education. I thought Work Discussion groups had inclusive potential for teachers to reexamine their ideas about children, their work, and subsequent in/exclusionary classroom practices. Disability Studies in Education scholars have argued that teachers' unexamined experiences and feelings about children are often complicit in disabling classroom environments and relationships (Naraian, 2011a; Baglieri, 2008; Ware, 2001). When I first learned about the



Jubilee JumpStart model of Work Discussion groups, I hypothesized that introducing the teachers' psychic and emotional perceptions of children's behavior would emphasize the indeterminacy of children's behavior and open possibilities for thinking empathetically about the multitude of ways that children behave and develop. I imagined from my discussions with Annette and Nora that Work Discussion groups might allow educators to be more receptive, rather than reactive, to children's needs.

Annette told me that while most of the analysts resisted giving teachers advice on how to work with children or manage the children's behaviors, many teachers asked for practical advice during Work Discussion groups. Nora similarly explained during an interview that the teachers "wanted to be told what to do" and often "walked away with, 'I didn't get any techniques'". For that reason, in an informal conversation, Catherine told me that while the school administrators saw value in the Work Discussion groups, the weekly meetings became a frustrating demand on teachers' time. These are some of the reasons that Mary, Catherine, and Annette all described the Work Discussion groups to me during interviews as a "mixed bag". During meetings between the analysts and administrators, Annette told me that they discussed whether the value of Work Discussion groups was translating into classroom practice. During my meeting with Mary, Catherine, and Erica in October 2018, they told me they were still questioning the extent to which teachers experienced the groups as useful to their practice and professional development. Annette and Nora told me during interviews that the teachers' use of the group to talk about frustrations with the school may also have been perceived as unproductive complaining about the administration, which fueled what they described as already tense dynamics between white administrators and an entirely non-white teaching staff.

In an informal conversation with Mary in August 2018, she told me that they were "putting a pause" on Work Discussion groups for the 2018-2019 school year. I wondered about the extent to which the tensions between teachers, administrators, and therapists described by the psychoanalysts contributed to that decision. However, Mary told me that it had been difficult to

arrange Work Discussion groups during the school day and keep classrooms staffed to legal requirements amid teachers' increasingly busy schedules. She told me that teachers were busy in preparation for an upcoming NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) re-accreditation site visit. Mary explained that in the 2018-2019 school year teachers would also begin weekly meetings with education coaches at the school to fulfill Quality Improvement Network and Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act requirements for teachers' professional training.

I learned in July 2019 that the groups would continue for the 2019-2020 school year with only the lead teachers from each classroom. In the conclusion of this dissertation, I reconsider the potential of Work Discussion groups as a step away from teacher training, toward a collective approach to inclusion that would make use of teachers' feelings around difference in addition to those of administrators and psychoanalysts at the school.

### **Special Education at Jubilee Jumpstart**

In Chapter One, I outlined the context of special education at Jubilee JumpStart and in Washington D.C. public early childhood education settings. While the 0-3 classrooms at Jubilee JumpStart have served children with disabilities on IFSPs, this was the first year where a child with a disability and significant service provisions enrolled in Pre-K. As will be described in Chapter Six, I learned early in my fieldwork through informal conversations with Mary, Catherine, Erica, and Ms. Michaela that there had been ongoing practical and ideological challenges to the inclusion of Jack and his therapists in the Tigers classroom. In an interview, I asked Mary about how they were approaching inclusion in the Tigers classroom. She told me,

“It’s just like, we have a special diet in another classroom. It forces folks to slow down and think, ‘how is this a place for everyone?’, not ‘how is this a place for most kids, and then, how do we tack on special?’. How do we make it inclusive for all? Instead of

special pancakes for an egg allergy, we just researched and made a pancake recipe with no eggs. And then it's the same pancakes for everyone.”

I was curious whether “the same pancakes” could metaphorically extend to Jack, Etta, or other children in the Tigers classroom such as four-year-old emergent bilingual student Manuel. I wondered whether practical accommodations necessarily facilitated their inclusion in the group, and, moreover, I wondered how Jack, Etta, and Manuel experienced inclusion or exclusion. In Chapters Five and Six, I explore practical strategies for inclusion, analogous to the egg accommodation, that administrators, teachers, and children used in the Tigers classroom throughout my fieldwork and recalled in interviews. I later realized that those strategies and accommodations that the informants talked about, and that many people talk about when they talk about inclusion, were only part of a more complicated practice of inclusion at Jubilee JumpStart. The presence of school programs and necessary accommodations for children with disability, language, and socioeconomic differences could not predict how inclusion would happen or be experienced by children or families. My attention therefore shifted from what was or was not inclusive, whether Etta, Jack, and Manuel were included, to how inclusion happened.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Overview**

What is inclusion? What is Inclusion Education? In short, there is no agreed-upon answer. If anything is certain, how to define inclusion and the landscape of Inclusion Education in the United States is a hotly contested one. Valente & Danforth (2016) explain that the terms “inclusion” and “inclusion education” have not been adequately defined and that “inclusion” is often conflated with “mainstream” and “integration” education models. “Inclusion” is defined ambiguously and, at times, paradoxically across national and state policies surrounding special education at Jubilee JumpStart.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education’s (2015) joint policy statement on the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs defines inclusion as “including children with disabilities in early childhood programs, together with their peers without disabilities” (p. 1). The report cites the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) position statement to argue that “inclusion” is predicated on access and support for children with disabilities into classrooms with their typically developing peers (United States, 2015, p. 1). According to federal policy, high-quality programs promote the participation of children with disabilities by providing individual accommodation and evidence-based services (United States, 2015, p. 1). Local Washington D.C. inclusion policy defines “inclusion” education by similar equity and progress-oriented goals, “to provide students with high-quality instruction that is aligned to grade-level expectations and gives them the opportunity to succeed in all areas” (“Academic Programs,” n.d.). Research and policy around inclusion are predominantly concerned with the presence of children with disabilities and legally-mandated Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE). In both federal and district policies, there is

little, if any discernible difference between “inclusion” and mainstream education for children with disabilities.

Across the 2015 federal policy statement and reports produced by the National Center for Children in Poverty (funded by the Department of Health and Human Services), researchers and policymakers argue that “inclusion” (as mainstreaming) is both beneficial and feasible. Lawrence et al. (2016) argue that children with disabilities make as much or more developmental progress receiving special education services in general education classrooms as in segregated (i.e., self-contained or pull-out) settings. Implicit in these government reports is that children with disabilities must, on average, demonstrate that achievement to justify their inclusion in early childhood education settings, which themselves are problematically defined by the enrollment of majority “typically developing children” (United States, 2015, p. 1).

While statistically there are fewer children served by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act than “typically developing children,” federal research and policy implicitly suggest that classrooms are for general education of typically developing children, where special education students may or may not belong. Disability Studies in Education Scholars (e.g., Connor, 2012) challenge the taken-for-granted assumption that individuals or groups of children with disabilities must earn the right to participation in schools, classrooms, and groups of which they are already members and entitled to participation.

The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Clause of the IDEA is open to local interpretation and does not require the meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities; therefore, the Least Restrictive Environment has been employed as “a ‘loophole’ that has since contributed to the separation of general and special education (Valente & Danforth, 2016; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Connor & Ferri, 2007). Connor (2012) argues that legal ambiguity and disagreement over what constitutes “appropriate” education has traditionally resulted in the exclusion of students on the basis their perceived need for special services and therefore special placement. Brantlinger (2003) argued that IDEA has further excluded children with multiple

markers of difference given that socioeconomic status determines families' capacity to both navigate and legally combat locally-interpreted LRE placements, as was evident in Jack and Etta's stories at Jubilee JumpStart.

Even our national government has admitted that the open-ended nature of the Least Restrictive Environment clause is a barrier to inclusion. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (2015) found that special education has been conventionally segregated for logistical or financial efficiency. Children may be placed in self-contained classrooms or removed from the general education classrooms part-time as "first resort" without considering service delivery in the child's present setting, alongside non-disabled peers (United States, 2015, p. 1). As of 2013, more than half of preschool children were separated from their non-disabled peers for special education services under IDEA (United States, 2015). Despite changes to federal and state inclusion policy, increased teacher education, and increased funding to public early childhood education and early childhood special education over the preceding thirty years, that percentage remained relatively consistent (United States, 2015).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (2015) report and the D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education similarly suggest that inclusion early childhood education programs have not grown proportionately with the expansion of Universal Pre-Kindergarten and Head Start programs. In Washington D.C., where public pre-kindergarten is guaranteed to all three-and-four-year-old's, this growing discrepancy is especially evident given a long-documented history of noncompliance with national LRE requirements (DC Office, 2009). As of 2009, Washington D.C. included only 21% of children with disabilities in general education for at least 80% of the school day (DC Office, 2009). Nationwide, on average, 58% of children with disabilities remained in general education classrooms for 80% of the school day (DC Office, 2009). According to national IDEA data, Washington D.C. has placed children with disabilities in entirely separate schools than their non-disabled peers more frequently than

any other state (DC Office, 2009). While Washington D.C. maintains standing as a ‘leader’ in public early childhood education, the district is a ‘loser’ in inclusion.

To investigate the muddled landscape of inclusion, this dissertation is theoretically and methodologically informed by scholarship in *Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education (RECE)*, *Disability Studies in Education (DSE)*, and likeminded scholars working on issues of inclusion and Inclusion Education. I borrow from these traditions and scholars in order to explore how individuals’ subjective understandings and experiences are shaped and constrained by dominant discourses about normalcy: normal bodies, normal children, and normal ways of knowing and being. Sapon-Shevin (2007) explains a major focus of scholarship in RECE and DSE has been flipping the script by turning the so-called “gaze” away from individual difference to instead attend to “disabling” practices in classrooms and schools, with the end goals of looking for ways to “widen the circle” of normalcy and to be inclusive of all differences – those real and imagined (Connor, 2012; Valente & Collins, 2016).

These fields do not deny real impairment or the lived realities of those marked as different but are sensitive to the ways that ubiquitous epistemologies and ontologies of difference affect us all, often perpetuating ideas and practices in both schooling and research that marginalize students who deviate from the desired norm. Ethnographic work within and across each of these fields has examined historical, political, and institutional contexts of classroom, school, and community practices. This work is characterized by an ethical attempt to understand and represent the “voices” of those studied (Tobin & Davidson, 1990; Tobin et al., 2009; Tobin, 2000; Valente, 2015; Valente, 2017). My dissertation work at Jubilee JumpStart contributes to *Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education and Disability Studies in Education* by providing a portrait of the promises and pitfalls of inclusive practices, as well as offers insights into the methodological and ethical dilemmas of conducting ethnographic research in historically marginalized and misunderstood communities (Valente, 2017).

### **Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education**

Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education scholars have long been interested in Head Start and public pre-kindergarten programs given their service to diverse children and families traditionally marginalized by classroom, teaching, curriculum and assessment practices (Henward et al., 2019; Wilgus, 2005; Wilgus, 2006; Spencer, 2014; Souto-Manning, 2014; Sherfinski, 2017; Sherfinski, 2018; Sherfinski, 2019; Sherfinski & Slocum, 2018; Sherfinski et al., 2015; Sherfinski et al., 2016; O'Brien, 1993; Lubeck, 1985; Lubeck, 1988; Lubeck et al., 2001; Lubeck & Kezar, 2002; Swadener, 2010; Jessup, 1999; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001). Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education (RECE) scholarship has traditionally challenged positivist research methods as well as policies, school, and classroom practices that proliferate deficit perspectives of diverse children and childhoods. In response to these concerns, RECE scholars have taken up critical, post-structural, feminist, postcolonial, and psychoanalytic theories to reimagine research and school and classroom practices (Bloch, 2013; Tobin, 1995). This work encourages us to consider children and other marginalized populations as experts and meaning makers in their own lives, and to consider the inequitable relationships between researcher and researched, adults and children, and between racial, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic groups. In the chapter ahead, I describe work in Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education as it relates to bilingual education and psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic practice at Jubilee JumpStart.

### **(Reconceptualizing) Bilingual Early Childhood Education**

General and special education for “English Language Learners” uses the child’s home language as a ‘stepping stool’ for learning English (Minow, 1985). While English-language education bridges the “dilemma of difference,” it requires children to discard their difference (Minow, 1985). As children’s participation in the group requires a shared language practice, non-native English speakers lose not only their native language practice but are also denied their multiple identities and cultural values at school. English language education is a long-misguided



special education program that is, in fact, restrictive, because it does not meet the needs of emergent bilinguals or facilitate the inclusion of those students in their singularity. “It is worse than cruel,” Minow (1985) argued, “in fact, it is devastating to a child’s self-respect, when a child is forced to give up a family language while attending school” (p. 166).

While, as Catherine explained, Jubilee JumpStart is not a true Spanish-English immersion program, Spanish-speaking students are implicitly regarded as emergent bilinguals because their development and use of both Spanish and English are valued (Garcia, 2009; Axelrod, 2014). There is an already immense and growing body of scholarship in *Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education* (Axelrod & Cole, 2018; Falchi et al., 2014; Genishi, 1981; Genishi et al., 2009; Genishi et al., 2001; Axelrod 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2016, 2017) on bilingual Head Start classrooms that support the flexible or “hybrid” language practices of non-native English speakers. In those settings, like Jubilee JumpStart, the seemingly slurred, jumbled speech of children like Manuel is respected as the natural and valuable practice of translinguaging. Translinguaging, borrowed from Garcia (2009), is the practice of “code-switching, but also translation, as well as the ways in which emergent bilinguals make sense of their language practices in their bilingual worlds” (Axelrod, 2017, p. 104).

Children’s translinguaging is respected at Jubilee JumpStart not as English language or intellectual deficiency, but rather, as a creative way of using language in which a child can make use of their entire, ever-changing language repertoire (Genesee, 2006). Genishi et al. (2009) argue that in bilingual education, “narrow visions need to be replaced with complex scenes that are spacious enough for children’s diverse ways of being, within a time frame and on curricular terrain that expands way beyond adult perceptions. That more welcoming terrain has space for the strengths and resources of children who are ‘different’” (p. 10). The practical classroom strategies that Erica, Catherine, Mary, and Ms. Michaela described for working with emergent bilinguals and children with speech-language differences were valuable models for those “complex scenes.”

These Reconceptualist ethnographic studies resonate with contemporary anthropology of minority children and families in schools. McDermott (1987) argued that traditional anthropological study on the (under)achievement of minority students was unproductive “to the extent that it has focused on the explanation of school failure in terms of the characteristics of different groups,” and made “so constant the attribution of failure to particular children or particular kinds of children” (p. 362). Those cultural analyses pathologized the cultures of minority students and allowed researchers and educators to place the blame for underachievement outside of the school (Erickson, 1987; Jordan & Jacob, 1987a, 1987b; Trueba, 1988). The contemporary work explores school experiences of minority children and families, providing alternative narratives and arguing that difference is not specific to an individual, nor are individuals or differences to blame for underachievement (Villenas, 2001; McDermott & Varenne, 1998).

### **Reconceptualists, Psychoanalysis, and Psychotherapeutic Approaches to Inclusion**

While have Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education scholars have been critical of psychoanalysis as a developmental paradigm, there is a growing body of work illustrating the potential of psychoanalytic/psychotherapeutic theories for understanding children and adults’ conscious and unconscious emotional experiences of the classroom, teaching, and learning (Boldt, 2002, 2006, 2009, 2019; Boldt & Salvio, 2006; Bibby, 2011; Stearns, 2018; Britzman, 1998, 2006, 2009; Taubman, 2012; O’Loughlin, 2013; O’Loughlin & Johnson, 2010).

Reconceptualists have taken up psychoanalytic theories and the clinical relationship to reimagine “best practices” and the goals of educating young children. O’ Loughlin (2013) also saw psychoanalysis useful in classroom management, which he understood “not as a problem of demanding compliance but rather as an opportunity for the construction of a communal commonplace... in which individual and group emotional and intellectual work is possible” (p. 38). In contrast to the “therapeutic project”, which values “demonstrable positive change in either

patient or student”, “the emancipatory project cherishes a kind of understanding for understanding’s sake, a suspension on the part of the teacher and analyst of immediate judgement to be replaced by curiosity, attunement, analysis, and a focus on creating conditions such that the patient or student can generate material for further elaboration or analysis” (Taubman, 2012, p. 7). Britzman (2003) argues for a critical examination of how emotional relationships in classrooms and around education might help or hinder how we come to understand learning.

This work is interesting in part because of the therapeutic psychoanalytic project of pro-bono therapy and Work Discussion groups at Jubilee JumpStart. This scholarship is more provocative because there are similar, more emancipatory, implicitly, and explicitly psychoanalytic ideas about children, teachers, and the classroom strewn throughout my interview transcripts with school staff. In the conclusion of this dissertation, I explore the difference between these “therapeutic” and “emancipatory” projects at Jubilee JumpStart that might inform our work as inclusive and culturally-sustaining early childhood education researchers, teacher educators, and practitioners.

Reconceptualists have also used psychoanalytic theory to understand children’s complicated emotional experiences of school and learning. For example, O’Loughlin (2013) proposes “recognizing behavioral manifestations and visible psychological dispositions such as anxiety, anger, oppositionality, defensiveness, clinginess, withdrawal, and so forth as mere signifiers of what lies beneath” (p. 38). Learning itself, Boldt (2006) argues, is a “potentially debilitating and potentially self-empowering subjective act” (p. 279). With reverence to “the utter difficulty of being in the classroom,” Bibby (2011) proposes the early childhood classroom as a space where children can push boundaries, struggle, resist learning, and feel things towards teachers and peers (p. 2).

“If being a certain way produces difficulty for the child,” O’ Loughlin (2013) argues, “it would seem that a space that values unconstrained being might prove advantageous in promoting the possibility of becoming” (2013, p. 33). Drawing from his experience in clinical practice,

O'Loughlin argues that "the provision of a facilitative space with minimal demand is most likely to prove useful in allowing the child the opportunity to articulate desire, or, at a minimum, voice the pressures of external parental or teacher demand" (2013, p. 33). This progressive attitude of listening and reverence to children's emotional experiences is implicit in Jubilee JumpStart's pursuit of "the why" behind challenging classroom behaviors.

Reconceptualists have also used psychoanalysis to consider teachers' emotional experiences of children, teaching, and learning. Boldt & Salvio's (2006) edited volume, 'Love's Return: Psychoanalytic Essays on Childhood Teaching and Learning' reflects on the contemporary landscape of education in the United States as depersonalized and de-emotionalized; given the demands of testing and accountability, teachers struggle "to make room for their own and their students' subjectivities, idiosyncrasies, creativities, and emotions" (p. 3). Michael O'Loughlin (2013) similarly raised widespread neglect of emotional discourse in teacher preparation programs, arguing that "too often pedagogy is presented as being instrumental teachers acting instrumentally on students" (p. 38). This work is interesting given the expectation at Jubilee JumpStart for teachers to have strong emotions surrounding their work, in stark contrast to an implicit expectation of teachers to love all children unconditionally and in the same way. This was a pressure that Ms. Michaela raised concerning work with children with disabilities and teacher burn-out.

### **Disability Studies in Education**

Disability Studies in Education (DSE) is an applied body of work that interrogates traditional assumptions around disability and difference embedded in the legal foundations of special education, school and classroom structures, curriculum, pedagogy, and relationships between teachers, students, and families. DSE necessarily departs from experimental, cognitive research and draws from qualitative, ethnographic, autobiographical, collaborative, and narrative methods that uncover school practices and more richly represent the lived experiences of students

with disabilities (Valente & Danforth, 2016; Connor et al., 2008; Connor et al., 2015; Danforth & Gabel, 2006).

### **Disability Studies in Education on Inclusion and Inclusion Education**

Valente & Danforth (2016) argue that to date, research in Disability Studies in Education has neglected “the many promising inclusive classroom pedagogies and practices being used in classrooms today. Stories from real classrooms are drowned out or undervalued by larger scholarly discussions. What seems to get lost are the multiple ways teachers and teacher-educators are already implementing innovative inclusion practices.” (p. 4). In Chapters Five and Six, I demonstrate my resistance to seeing inclusive pedagogy at Jubilee JumpStart because of my misguided overconcern with scholarly discussion around disability and oppression in schools.

Valente & Danforth (2016) argue too that simply mainstreaming, for many students, is exclusionary, given that the child identified as disabled is responsible individually for their success in that setting, rather than an approach to inclusion that involves a considerable reconsideration of classroom and community practices and policies that are, in fact, least restrictive, or that meet the needs of all students in that classroom or school. Disability Studies in Education scholars question whether “inclusion” into an already oppressive system and oppressive school and classroom practices could ever, in fact, be inclusive (Alim et al., 2017; Artiles & Kozleski, 2007). Connor & Ferri (2007) argue that “inclusion is a philosophy that challenges ableism” (p. 64). This work challenges ableism not only in the thoughts or actions of individuals but school and classroom practices that are individualizing and position difference within the individual.

### **Disability Studies in Education on Intersectionality**

Disability Studies in Education is unique in its attention to intersectionality, which recognizes that students with more than one marginalized identity (i.e., disability, low

socioeconomic status, race, religion, gender, sexuality) have particular experiences and understandings of the ways one identity might mediate another (Connor 2008). This work examines the construction of multiple markers of difference in tandem, and as divergent from an idealized, able, white body (Waitoller & King-Thorius, 2016; Annamma et al., 2013; Thorius & Tan, 2015; Watts & Erevelles, 2004). Deficit and failure in schools have effectively been assigned to non-white students, resulting in the racialization of ability (Artiles, 2011) and the racialization of intelligence (2016), similarly conflated with gender and class differences (Reid & Knight, 2006). Hernandez et al. (2018) take up “affective intersectionality” (Wetherell, 2012) to argue that “intersectional identities are not only embedded with the cognitive ways in which they influence our self-concepts, but how the role of affect and emotionality is structured by our experiences of oppression at the intersections” (p. 290).

### **Culturally Responsive and Culturally Sustaining Practices**

One of the major outcomes of research on the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education has been developing and offering solutions for school practice, as demonstrated in the shift from “culturally responsive” (Gay, 2000) to “culturally relevant” (Paris, 2012) pedagogy as a way for teachers and researchers to understand and deal with differences “productively and collectively” (Alim et al., 2017, p. 9). Waitoller & King-Thorius (2016) argue that culturally responsive pedagogies do not adequately promote reflexive, continuing dialogue with students on cultural and linguistic differences (p. 368). “Culturally responsive pedagogy” reflects children’s experiences outside of school in instruction, pedagogical materials, and in classroom expectations for language use and interaction with teachers and other children (Gay, 2000; Lubeck, 1988; Waitoller & King-Thorius, 2016). Some programs and features of Jubilee JumpStart are at the surface inclusive in that they provide accommodation allowing children to participate differently in everyday classroom activity physically and emotionally, such that children’s perspectives and identities are valued. Several of their practices further support the

potential for success of children and families in the community outside of school and long after their years at Jubilee JumpStart. While this work strives for socioeconomic, racial, linguistic, and cultural equity, all are targeted solutions for economic, language, cultural, and disability differences.

While both culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies are “asset pedagogies” that “resist and counter deficit views of students of color, particularly those who live in poverty”, rather than capitalizing on’ students’ cultural differences as pathways to classroom assimilation or academic achievement, many scholars now argue that inclusion requires a sustained discussion and practice where children are considered meaningful participants (Alim et al., 2017). The presence of children with disabilities in general education classrooms is a superficial version of inclusion, as opposed to a version of inclusion that imagines students with differences ought to be meaningful and mutually constitutive participants in classroom and school life.

At Jubilee JumpStart, bilingual education and the social engineering of disabled and non-disabled students are two examples of collective approaches to tackling the task of inclusion. Through following “The Dead Dog Story” and “The Purple Loop Story,” I argue that these practical approaches to inclusion are still solutions for the perceived problems of one or multiple children’s differences. In contrast, I argue that Jubilee JumpStart’s commitment to discussion about experiences of in/exclusion inadvertently places children and adults “on the same side of the problem, as part of the solution” (Minow, 1985, p. 207). I conceptualize inclusion as not just a collective approach to including difference or one that resists ableist ideas and structures of participation, but as a collective approach that challenges even the most progressive, even loving, school and classroom practices that continue to individualize difference.

### **Intersubjectivity and Collectivist Integration**

One theoretical and methodological approach taken up across Disability Studies in Education and Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education has been a relational psychoanalytic approach to intersubjectivity, that suggests a dialogical relationship between people, and therefore, inclusion as a dialogical process (Valente, 2017). In this approach, “difference” does not singularly reside in the individual, but that ‘difference’ is also shaped and given shape by the group” (Valente, 2019b, p. 101). The idea that experiences “cannot be understood apart from the intersubjective contexts in which they take form” follows that any of those feelings and responses supposedly ‘ours’ as experienced in the group (e.g., inclusion, exclusion, anxiety, anger, hurt) cannot be described or assigned meaning isolated to the observer, they might only be inferred about as they emerge in our current intersubjective experience (Atwood & Stolorow, 1984). I cannot come to understand the meaning of difference at Jubilee JumpStart, as difference is one thing experienced as it emerges through infinitely changing intersubjective relationships. I use this line of thinking to similarly consider resistance at the site as emerging from the entire group rather than the feeling or act of one person or subgroup, though I was, and still find myself, unintentionally resistant to this view of resistance.

In Chapter Six, I describe my realization of the difference between discussion and dialogue at Jubilee JumpStart. Discussion is one place that people might come into a different relationship, I surmise, and therefore, subjectivities come into new dialogue. I assume that dialogue between people is always already happening. Therefore, there is never a time that children or adults are not “mutually constitutive” or that inclusion isn’t happening. This does not mean that I deny children or adults’ real markers of difference or that exclusions also happen. Exclusions can creatively propel the group, as Goodley (2013) explains, “disabled bodies challenge normative ideas of able bodies. This can be productive. Indeed impaired embodiment demands new, inclusive and potentially exciting forms of response from others” (p.



635). In every classroom, “one’s singularity affects the character and actions of the group and is in turn re-formed by the group” (Boldt & Valente, 2016, p. 322).

Boldt & Valente’s (2014, 2016) ethnographic study of an inclusive, psychoanalytic preschool in Paris, France bridges scholarship in *Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education*, *Disability Studies in Education* and *Inclusion Education*. The “Collectivist Integration” approach at L’ecole Gulliver conceptualizes intersubjectivity as emerging in, produced by, and producing a group subjectivity (Boldt & Valente, 2016). This is “a way of life, a way of living together, based on a belief that each individual is valued” because difference too is considered a valuable vehicle for everyone continuing to relate to each other and change (Villa & Thousand, 1995, p. 11). I suggest it is not the failure to understand disability or to approach inclusion collectively, but the resistance or denial of inclusion a collective, intersubjective experience that results in “hardened pathologizing roles” (Boldt & Valente, 2016, p. 322). This realization during fieldwork directed my attention from finding in/exclusion among my informants, and dis/ability in school practices (that may in part have been to solve problems of inclusion and difference) to instead, practices that intentionally or unintentionally transformed the group.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Methods**

#### **Overview**

This chapter begins with a discussion of my processes and challenges to gaining entrée at Jubilee JumpStart and building rapport with adults and children, respectively. I describe methods of participant observation, jottings, and field notes, as well as ongoing formal and informal interviews. Finally, I discuss my sometimes successful, more often unsuccessful, approach to “empirically emotional” fieldwork and its implications for anxiety and resistance in the field (Valente, 2017). This chapter is constructed from expanded field notes, personal reflections, and later interview data that provides multiple voices and explanations of mine and my informants’ experience of this dissertation study.

#### **Gaining Entrée to Jubilee JumpStart**

Early on as a doctoral student at Penn State, I learned about Jubilee JumpStart from one of my mentors, Dr. Gail Boldt. Dr. Boldt is a Professor of Education at Penn State and practicing psychotherapist who provided play therapy to children at Jubilee JumpStart as part of her study in psychoanalysis. In Spring 2016, Dr. Boldt invited me to attend a session at the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies conference in Washington, D.C., where she presented a paper in a joint session with psychoanalysts from WBCP. There I met Annette and Andrea, whose presentation included video recordings and reflections from the Work Discussion Groups at Jubilee JumpStart. My interest in Jubilee JumpStart was further fueled through more recent relationships I’d built through my fellowship with the Washington Center for Psychoanalysis in 2017.

Annette and I had both communicated with Jubilee JumpStart’s director, Mary, about my interest in their partnership. We set up an appointment to meet with Mary in April 2018 so that I

could tour the school. On a Wednesday morning, I met Annette at her home office about a mile from Jubilee JumpStart. Annette ordered sandwiches for us from a popular local delicatessen. She was excited to welcome me back to D.C. after months of email exchanges about my interest in Jubilee JumpStart. As we ate, Annette explained the history of Work Discussion groups at the Tavistock Clinic, the Washington School of Psychiatry, and the unique model developed at Jubilee JumpStart. She also showed me videos of Wait, Watch and Wonder, a renowned dyadic parent-child approach to psychotherapy that informed the analysts' approach to infant and child observation.

After we ate, Annette and I drove together to the school. My excitement mounted as we searched for an open parking spot in the busy neighborhood. When we finally reached the school, Annette led me through a metal gate, past a vibrant mural depicting a group of children and adults playing "Ring Around the Rosie" in front of what looked like the United States Capitol Building. Mary met us at the door of the school and warmly welcomed us into the lobby, where we sat together at a small cluster of furniture between staff desks and a narrow hallway. In the meeting, Mary told me about the classrooms, teachers, students, and families at the school. My observations in the lobby that morning were an equally important introduction to everyday life at Jubilee JumpStart.

The lobby walls, painted in alternating colors, a buttery yellow and bright, sharp orange, were covered with bulletin boards and families' mailboxes. There were boards with images and names of all school staff, families, and children, another with flyers describing upcoming events for parents, and one that remained mostly empty, with blank post-it notes waiting for parents to add to the wall. "Jubilee JumpStart: A Place where everyone grows" the board read, asking parents to share "how you or your child have grown during your journey here." One post-it note read "As a parent, it is hard for me to trust others, but JJS has proven to me that others can be trusted," another that one had grown "as a parent – patient, positive, focused on social, emotional growth." A few months later, a bulletin board would be added to the walls of the lobby with

images of recurrent visitors to the school, including outside providers, volunteers, and me, commonly referred to at the school as “the Ph.D. student.”

I frantically took notes on the environment while trying to keep up in conversation. I found it challenging to focus amid the colors and clutter of the lobby and the overflow of noise from an adjacent classroom of toddlers. The space felt somehow both jarring and joyful. I thought back to my experiences teaching and supervising students in preschools. Those environments ranged from natural, earthy tones to these bold colors; hyper-sanitary spaces that felt calm, quiet, and controlled, to spaces alive with the smells and sounds of children playing and learning. I could already tell that Jubilee JumpStart would be the latter.

As our meeting began, the “Hummingbirds,” Jubilee JumpStart’s infant classroom, rolled down the hallway toward us. There was just enough space beside the armchairs where we sat for the teachers to squeeze through three multi-seat strollers. Mary briefly interrupted our conversation to greet several of the children by name. One baby cried loudly, squirming against the straps of her stroller seat. Mary scrunched her face and whispered empathetically, “oh, that’s always tough getting in the stroller.” One teacher stopped the stroller by the school’s entrance and walked to stand in front of the child, dancing and singing joyfully in Spanish. The other teachers, with strollers behind her, joined in her song. The infant stopped crying, and the train of strollers proceeded outside for a walk around the neighborhood.

A moment later, A young woman entered the front door. She spoke in Spanish to Nell, the school’s Operation Manager, who was sitting at her desk a few feet from us. Nell turned to Mary and asked, “do we have any size six back there, now?” Mary nodded, and Nell walked past us, toward the back of the school. Nell returned quickly with a package of diapers for the woman, who smiled and left the building. Mary explained that Jubilee JumpStart provides free diapers to families at the school through a partnership with the Greater DC Diaper Bank. The diapers are just one of the many materials and financial resources organized by Jubilee JumpStart’s Resource Development Director. “Jubilee JumpStart is Jubilee JumpStart because of how welcoming we

are,” Mary tells me, “and how deeply we want to connect with everyone in the family: children and families, and how much we want to connect people with the external community.”

I planned to use this meeting to gauge the feasibility of Jubilee JumpStart as a potential dissertation research site. I was nervous about impressing Mary and worried about how I might convince her of my intentions and worthiness of studying at Jubilee JumpStart. I encountered previous challenges and had heard horror stories of other researchers’ failed attempts to make entrée at school sites. I was surprised, then, that Mary brought up the possibility of me spending time at the school before I did. Mary beamed with joy as tells me that a study would be “just cosmically timed” as the program is in the midst of a critical year. The staff and teachers were preparing for an upcoming NAEYC reaccreditation site visit, and the program was undergoing changes to teaching and school staff, school programming and services to fulfill changing requirements for high-quality early childcare programs. Mary also told me that in the fall the school anticipated enrolling, for the first time, a Pre-K student with a disability, so long as his family could secure the special education services they hoped for. Mary suggested that by focusing on the Pre-Kindergarten classroom, I would learn about the uniquely loving culture Jubilee JumpStart, and the school’s ongoing commitment to meeting the needs of every child and parent in the program. Mary ended our meeting with a tour through the school’s five classrooms.

### **Study Design and the Research Questions**

I began to conceptualize my dissertation research after this visit, as I was eager to study the Work Discussion Groups and how this affected (or didn’t affect) school and classroom practices. A few months later, after learning that the Work Discussion groups were canceled, my original plan for fieldwork fell through. However, this partnership was far from my only interest in the site. Jubilee JumpStart was doubly significant to contemporary scholarly work on inclusion given the racial, cultural, language, and socioeconomic demographics of children and families in the community. I hoped that I could produce a portrait of life in a diverse inclusion classroom

amid persistent institutional, political, and interpersonal barriers to the inclusion of those children with multiple markers of difference nationwide. This site was therefore ideally suited to address the central research questions of this dissertation research project:

- How do children, administrators, teachers, psychoanalysts, and other providers relate to each other at Jubilee JumpStart?
- How do children, administrators, teachers, psychoanalysts, and other providers relate to difference at Jubilee JumpStart?
- What are the children and adults' subjective experiences of inclusion and/or exclusion at Jubilee JumpStart?

My initial focus in fieldwork was guided by attention to how adults and children related to each other and to difference. I knew from informal conversations with Dr. Boldt, Annette, Andrea, and school staff that a foundation of Jubilee JumpStart's practice was understanding what Mary and Erica referred to as "the why" behind children's behavior. This seemed integral to how adults and children could or would relate to each other. My focus was also informed by early conversations with administrators Mary, Erica, and Catherine who repeatedly discussed changes happening at the school, as I wanted to attend to what my informants felt was significant in their day-to-day lives. Table 1 includes the names, roles, and identifying characteristics of those key informants featured in this dissertation.

**Table 1 – Key Informants**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Role at Jubilee JumpStart</b>	<b>Identifying characteristics</b>
Etta	Student in the Tigers Classroom	Monolingual, Black, four-year-old girl with perceived emotional and behavioral difference. Low-income family.
Manuel	Student in the Tigers Classroom	Emergent bilingual, Hispanic four-year-old boy in a low-income family
Jack	Student in the Tigers Classroom	Monolingual, White, three-year-old boy with an identified disability and IFSP
Adelle	Student in the Tigers Classroom	Monolingual, Black, three-year-old girl. Low-income family.
Tyler	Student in the Tigers Classroom	Monolingual, White, three-year-old boy
Mona	Student in the Tigers Classroom	Monolingual, Black, three-year-old girl. Low-income family
Elijah	Student in the Tigers Classroom	Monolingual, Black, four-year-old boy. Low-income family.
Julia	Student in the Tigers Classroom	Emergent Bilingual, Hispanic, three-year-old girl. Low-income family.
Ms. Michaela	Lead Teacher in the Tigers Classroom	Monolingual female POC
Ms. Bianca	Assistant Teacher in the Tigers Classroom	Bilingual female POC
Ms. Gabrielle	Assistant Teacher in the Tigers Classroom	Monolingual female POC
Catherine	Director of Program Operations, previous classroom teacher, parent of a two-year-old at the school	Monolingual white female
Erica	Director of Education Services, previous classroom teacher	Monolingual female POC
Bea	Pre-K Coach and Resource Development Associate, previous classroom teacher	Monolingual female POC
Mary	Executive Director	Monolingual white female
Jasmine	ABA Therapist	Monolingual female POC
Ms. Lidia	Social Worker	Monolingual female POC
Rachel	Jack's Mother	White female
Briana	Adelle's Mother	Female POC
Ashley	Infant classroom teacher, mother of a 2-year old child at the school	Female POC
Annette	Psychoanalyst from Washington-Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis	Monolingual white female
Nora, Alison, Michael, Lena	Psychoanalysts and therapists affiliated with the Washington Center for Psychoanalysis	Nora (Monolingual white female), Alison (Monolingual white female), Michael (Bilingual male POC), Lena (Bilingual white female)

## **Fieldwork**

During site visits in April 2018 and October 2018, I observed in each of the classrooms at Jubilee JumpStart and had conversations with children, school staff, therapists and parents as I gauged the feasibility and focus of my project. I then focused my observations on the Pre-K classroom, where, except for school breaks, from December through March, I spent three days a week as a participant-observer. I observed between four and eight hours per day in “The Tigers” classroom and shared school spaces. I participated and observed during weekly parent coffee hours held in the school lobby and school events such as tours, Quality Improvement Network meetings, a Pre-K information session, and the annual fundraiser. I attended those events to learn about the school and to build rapport with members of the school community.

Each morning during fieldwork, I arrived and greeted the teachers in the Pre-K, or “Tigers” classroom. I usually then sat on the carpet, observed families as they arrived, and waited for children to engage me. As I spent more time in the classroom, I was both more comfortable and more welcomed by children to play with them during this time. During group activities such as circle time, I sat among the teachers and children. On the carpet, children flocked to my sides or on my lap in the later months of my fieldwork. During choice time, lunch, and on the playground, I sat or stood a few feet away from children to observe until invited to participate further. This “nonverbal entry” is one of the ways Corsaro (1981, 2003) understood that children enter each other’s play (p. 42). Corsaro (1981, 2003) argued that “direct entry bids” like asking to play or join the group are not often used between children, and, when they are, are more often rejected (p. 42). Therefore, I made myself available to the children while observing, a more reactive than active role in their play (Corsaro, 1981, 2003). On walks, I followed behind or alongside the group unless a child requested that I hold his or her hand. Sometimes children explicitly asked me to join their current activity or to go to a different area of the classroom to play with them. Other times, children started a conversation with me as they continued their activity alone or with peers adjacent to me.



Each day, I wrote jottings of my observations in the Tigers classroom and other school spaces such as the entrance, lobby, offices, and playground. My jottings included basic information (i.e., time, date, location, classroom schedule or events, descriptions of informants, observations of the environment) as well as descriptions of interactions between children, adults, materials, and spaces. I also wrote down initial reactions, questions, or ideas I had about those interactions. Several of my notebooks also include drawings and writing of the children in “The Tigers” classroom, who by late January were more accustomed to my presence and would ask for or take my notebook and pencils to write. I allowed the children to do this as it seemed to make individual children more comfortable talking and playing with me.

### **Building Rapport with Children**

In contrast to previous experiences conducting fieldwork and working in schools, it took the children a few weeks longer to invite me into their play, or even to refer to me by name. During my first week of fieldwork, Manuel was the only child to acknowledge me at all. I was unsurprised by this after interviews with Mary, informal conversations with teachers, and continued observation in the Tigers Classroom. Manuel was known to be among the most outgoing of the pre-kindergarten students. I playfully refer to him as “the mayor of the Tigers.” Manuel was almost always the first to welcome visitors, without reservation. As adults appeared at the glass door of the Pre-K classroom, Manuel would immediately perk up. “Here, here! You, come on!” he’d shout and wave. Manuel would grab visitors’ hands and tour them around the room, or give them a picture book to read to him.

In my third week at the school, another child named Julia asked me directly, with an even tone: “Why are you here?” I fought the urge to laugh. Her question reminded me of unfiltered, but reasonable questions from children that I’d fielded in other classrooms as a teacher. “I want to learn about your school,” I told her. A girl named Mona sitting nearby overheard our conversation. “That’s silly,” she laughed decidedly. As weeks of fieldwork had passed and I

struggled to build rapport at the school, I started to wonder if Mona was right. While she may have meant that it was silly of me to sit in their classroom each day or to want to learn about the school, I left that afternoon feeling like a silly, inadequate researcher. I was relieved that more children took an interest in talking and playing with me, but felt panicked that I would not be able to gather sufficient data for my study.

I speculate whether one of the many reasons that children did not engage with me more quickly was that they did not yet understand my role in the classroom, or that I was willing to follow their lead. When I interviewed Bea, the school's Pre-K Coach and Resource Development Associate, she told me:

“Something that I think is maybe or maybe not unique, but different, about Jubilee JumpStart, is that because of our being a non-profit and ongoing efforts to build relationships with and around our community, there are always people in and out of the classroom. Those kids are our oldest kids, so Pre-K is the classroom that gets the most visitors. They get a lot of opportunity to be exposed to different things people bring into the classroom... their personalities, their behavior, their language, different things like that. I myself wonder what impact and influence that has on the children. How do the children experience that? Does that have an impact on them?... I don't know the answer to that, but that is something that I wonder about. I don't know. I see Manuel, how he is when people come in the classroom. He wants to give the tour and introduce everyone to the experience, but then he has that language barrier that can be a challenge at times. But how he responds when people come in is unique. Some of the children kind of get a little shy and other kids are outgoing and open and welcoming. Some children are just really observant and may ask questions.”

During my fieldwork, I met many weekly visitors to the Tigers classroom, including volunteers, ABA, occupational, physical, and speech therapists, social workers, employees from Kids Comprehensive Services, employees from AppleTree Institute, and therapists studying in the

Washington School of Psychiatry two-year observation program. I observed children to ignore some of these visitors as much as I observed the children to initiate conversation or play with them. I suspect that this had to do with not only children's or adults' personalities, as Bea suggested, but also how different adults related to the children and the classroom space. Children seemed to understand that those adults would participate to varying degrees in regular classroom activities.

I observed some of these visitors to be more authoritative toward the children than others. Lidia from Kids Comprehensive Services, for example, did not sit on the floor with children or join in their play, but rather, directed children from the periphery of their centers. I did not observe children initiate interactions with Lidia. Other visitors took specific children aside for assessments or therapy. It was evident early in my fieldwork that the children understood, for example, which therapists worked exclusively with Jack. Children talked with Jack's therapists and asked questions about Jack, but didn't ask the therapists to play with or help them. Classroom visitors to the Pre-K classroom were also inconsistent. Students from the Washington School of Psychiatry, for example, would observe one morning per week. AppleTree employees conducted assessments with the children in waves. They were in the classroom daily for a week near the beginning of my fieldwork but then did not return for two months. Volunteers from local businesses like PNC Bank came to visit the classroom for just one day. Occasionally, high school students who regularly volunteer at Jubilee JumpStart would visit the Tigers classroom for only a few minutes. Some of the Pre-K children seemed excited about these visitors while others were unphased.

For these reasons, I am not surprised that it took three weeks for the children to recognize me not only as a regular visitor but a potential playmate. After a few weeks, my presence in the classroom most closely resembled that of the community volunteers who did engage in children's play, spare for the three by five-inch notebook I carried at nearly all times. Mary also told me that the children often gauge how to interact with visitors by observing their teachers. Of the children

in the Tigers classroom, Mary said, “they are completely attuned to, how do my teachers feel about this?” The children’s reluctance to engage with me was further understandable, given that I didn’t have a strong rapport with their teachers.

### **Building Rapport with Adults**

Mary was immediately welcoming and expressed support for my research at the school, as did Erica and Catherine. While it was at first challenging to schedule interviews with these women, as well as Bea, Mary explained that everyone wears many hats at Jubilee JumpStart. She told me that it had been a particularly busy few months at the school and that reminders, by phone, email, or in person, would be helpful. Going forward, when I had questions, I emailed and left written notes for those administrators when I was unable to reach them. When I passed them in the hallways, and during interviews, they answered my questions or quickly connected me with school community members who could.

I found it much more challenging to build rapport with teachers throughout the school. After securing Mary’s approval, I completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process before discussing the possibility of research with teachers at Jubilee JumpStart. Mary, Catherine, and Erica announced and explained my forthcoming presence at the school during a staff meeting that I could not be present for. While I soon introduced myself and observed in their classrooms, I had little time to get to know them, or for them to get to know me before needing to narrow my study to one classroom. While the lead teacher and both assistant teachers in the Tigers classroom agreed to participate in my research, only one other teacher, Ashley, consented. I met Ashley when I first toured Jubilee JumpStart in April 2018. I suspect it helped that I had visited with Annette, who had a positive relationship with this teacher, who was also the parent of a toddler in the program.

Though I had introduced myself and already been observing in The Tigers Classroom, those teachers were also slow to complete consent forms. I asked in person and provided

additional copies before asking Mary about my dilemma. She offered to remind the teachers to return their consent forms. I was hesitant because I worried that the teachers would feel obligated to agree. I also did not want their participation, or relationship with me, to be guided by what might be experienced as a demand from their boss. Mary told me that these teachers receive a lot of paperwork and information throughout the week and might need a reminder. When I interviewed Annette, Nora, and Lena, they all told me that many of the teachers had expressed resentment toward administration at the school in previous years. Lena added that the teachers seemed to resent the Work Discussion groups as another demand placed on them by white administrators and psychoanalysts. Given that I had come to the school through a relationship with Annette, and that I had a visibly positive relationship with Mary, I wondered whether teachers would resent me or be suspicious of me too. Mary told me that the new Education Coach for the 0-3 classrooms was currently navigating her role in between administrators and teachers. She said,

“Our new education coach is experiencing this gap right now kind of painfully. She is very present, and she’s doing a great job building relationships with the teachers, but she’s having a hard time considering, ‘What do I pass on to administrators that’s valuable feedback and what do I need to keep between us?’ We need to keep her position kind of safe for teachers. She’s an African-American woman. Still, we can’t have her consistently being seen with administrators because she will be seen as one of the administrators when she’s here for the teachers, and I don’t want to interfere with that trust of her. We really know because with Liana and Nell, who are bilingual... there’s sometimes a cultural connection, but they’re not as trusted by teachers because they are so clearly perceived as part of the administration, as part of that power differential.”

Near the end of my fieldwork, I was pleased to be invited to the school fundraiser, where I was seated with Annette and Nora. In one speech, a teacher broke into tears talking about what her employment and participation in the Jubilee JumpStart community have meant to her. A previous

parent from the program spoke about how free childcare at the school allowed her to pursue work while her family was living in Jubilee Housing. It was a celebratory morning, but I was reminded again, as I sat at a table with wealthy white psychoanalysts, of the considerable socioeconomic and racial divide.

When the first of The Tigers teachers gave me her signed consent form, she told me that she wasn't told about the forms. I knew that Catherine had circulated consent forms in addition to those I brought to the classroom. I felt immediately panicked and wondered where my communication had failed. I asked Catherine if those teachers had known before I arrived, that I would be observing each week. Catherine assured me that they did know, but may have confused me with other planned visitors.

During my second week of fieldwork at the school, Ms. Michaela pulled me aside as the children were lying down to nap. She asked me about my schedule at Jubilee JumpStart. I explained that I would be observing three days a week, from Wednesday through Friday. "Okay, okay... but you're observing the other classrooms too, right? The whole school?" she asked. I assumed that she was anxious about being observed by this stranger with a notebook, especially given that it was her first year at the school. I told her that I was observing the other classrooms too, but had become focused on Pre-K because she had the only student with an identified disability. I also told her about the administrators and parents who had praised the teachers and children in this room. Still, she asked, "can you be here less?" explaining, "there are just so many people in the room, and I didn't know at the beginning of the year that all of these therapists and visitors would be here the whole year, and it just makes it difficult to do my job. It's hard for the kids because it's so crowded and I feel like I'm under a microscope". I told Ms. Michaela that I understood, and that I remembered feeling that way when I was observed during my years as a preschool teacher. I hoped this would ease her anxiety, and be something in me she could relate to. I also told her about what I'd observed and written down in my notebook that morning. I

assured her that I would be sharing my observations with her and was most interested in knowing what she thinks about the classroom. I wanted to be transparent, and I wanted her to trust me.

Even by the end of the school year, I'm not sure that any teachers at the school trusted me. They were friendly but tight-lipped. Teachers in the hallway or The Tigers Classroom smiled and greeted me every day. The women asked how I was doing or asked about my commute. From informal conversations, they knew that I drove to the city from Penn State each week, but that I was staying locally in Arlington, Virginia on the floor of my friend's house. Ms. Michaela lived not far from there, so our commute or knowledge of the surrounding area was often material for small talk. After a few weeks, Ms. Michaela and Ms. Gabrielle began asking me about how my research was going. In the beginning, those questions seemed anxious, but as I spent more time at the school, the women followed with questions about my goals for the coming year and my experiences as a teacher in ways that seemed more amicable than suspicious. These conversations were rare and understandably happened during quieter moments, on days where fewer children were present. These teachers may have been busy managing the classroom, and as they were aware of my note-taking, might have wanted to look especially engaged in their work. They may also, like the children, been unsure of permission or expectation to engage with me as an observer given the range of classroom visitors I described. It was easiest to strike up a conversation when a teacher was playing with a child on the rug beside me, as I often tucked away my notebook.

I asked Mary what she made of my difficulty gaining rapport with the teachers. She was unsurprised and explained,

“We have most folks in a suspicious state of mind, or whatever that is... they are immediately closed off from anyone entering the classroom who's not just a part of the team... even though you were regular, you did exactly what you said you were going to do and provided lots of verbal and written info. It didn't matter. I would bet money that they didn't really understand why you were there... that you weren't there to assess them.

There is an ongoing concern that they are being assessed... they don't want to be observed doing their work.”

It took five months to set a time with Ms. Michaela for a formal interview. I had asked her several times in the classroom and sent messages to her school email address. I told Mary that I was having difficulty setting up interviews, and she offered to tell or have the front desk staff let the teachers know that I wanted to speak with them. Again, I was hesitant to impose in that way. Finally, I drove back to Washington, D.C., and stopped by the classroom again. I kneeled by the lunch table where Ms. Michaela sat and told her how eager I was to hear her thoughts on my observations. I left my phone number on a scrap of paper, and she called me the same week. I was shocked when she talked to me about her experiences at Jubilee JumpStart and her ideas about my observations for a full two hours. She was friendly and answered all of my questions in great detail, recalling, for context, experiences from the classroom on days when I was not present. During that interview, she told me:

“It was intimidating because I was still trying to figure out who I was as a teacher at Jubilee JumpStart, I was still trying to identify my relationship with each child, and then there's everybody else in the room. I'm really sensitive, so it would throw off my energy. I would feel overwhelmed, like anxiety. I would start strategizing within myself, like, 'how am I going to get through this?' And, once the kids get riled up and the behaviors get going, I'm the one that has to control that. Then visitors want me to engage with them and give them attention, and I'm here for the kids, I'm like, 'I'm not here for you.' I never want to be rude, but now I'm having to be a host, and that's not what I signed up for”.

I do think that Ms. Michaela was incredibly busy and sometimes overwhelmed during my months of fieldwork and likely didn't purposely ignore me. I knew the length of our similar commute to the school each day, the time she spent planning outside of school hours, and knew that spending time talking to me was not a requirement of her job. I tried to contact Ms. Michaela



for follow-up interviews by email and on her cell phone but did not receive a reply. I called the school and learned that she had been on an extended vacation. Upon her return, I asked that the staff give Ms. Michaela my phone number so that she could contact me. She called me on my cell phone two weeks later and apologized, explaining that she had been gone for weeks. Again, she talked to me for two hours. I told Mary in an interview that Ms. Michaela had spoken with me for so long following my fieldwork. “Well yeah,” she said, “you’re removing the anxiety of, ‘You’re standing here in my classroom, and I feel seen, observed, assessed, whatever.’ There is something about that”.

It was equally challenging to get consent forms and build relationships with parents. When I first brought consent forms to the school, Catherine, Liana, and Nell all warned me that often parents don’t bring back things they’re asked to sign promptly, if at all. Because of their close relationship with the families, these women were incredibly helpful as I sought parents’ consent for their children’s participation in my study. Catherine circulated copies of the consent forms to classrooms and reminded teachers during meetings that the forms were sent home. Nell translated my consent form into Spanish. During weekly coffee hours, Nell and Liana stood with me and chatted with parents as I distributed forms and explained my study.

As few consent forms trickled in, I worried that I would not have enough from any given classroom to conduct an ethnographic study. Panicked, I stood in the hallway or entrance of the Tigers classroom at drop-off and pick-up times and tried to talk with the parents. Some parents who claimed not to have received forms, or apologized for forgetting, signed on the spot — some parents I needed to give three copies to before I acquired consent. On my behalf, Mary reminded Etta and Elijah’s mothers and Manuel’s father that I needed the consent forms completed, but that they were not obligated to consent. One parent never signed even though I gave him two consent forms, and Ms. Bianca spoke to him beside me in both English and Spanish. While all but one of the parents in the Pre-K classroom finally consented for their child’s participation in my study, only two parents consented to participate in interviews: Rachel and Briana. Rachel was a former

board member at the school. Briana had had a particularly close relationship with Mary as they attend church together.

Ms. Michaela told me in an interview at the end of the schoolyear that Rachel and Briana were two of the three parents she has the closest relationship with. Ms. Michaela also struggled to get paperwork back from the other parents. She told me, “I don’t know what it is... I do have good communication with the parents... everyone is cordial, but everyone goes on and does their thing. I don’t know what the disconnect is, but there’s a definite disconnect with the parents. Not just the ones who qualify for subsidies. It’s everyone.” In our interview, Ms. Michaela told me that she had been confused by parents’ low involvement in the Tigers classroom that year relative to her experiences as a teacher in Head Start classrooms.

#### **“This is between us”: Informal Interviews and Off-the-Record Conversations**

While I planned for frequent and return (Tobin & Hayashi, 2017) formal interviews with each of my adult informants at Jubilee JumpStart, what emerged more often were informal interviews, conversations, and off-the-record comments from administrators, teachers, therapists, and parents at the school. This might be attributed in part to my difficulty gaining rapport with those informants, but as my fieldwork went on, they were all inclined to exchange quick, informal conversations with me throughout the school hallways, meeting spaces, and classrooms, as well as on walks to and from Jubilee JumpStart or Potter’s House coffeeshop.

During interviews and informal conversations, Mary, Erica, Bea, Annette, Nora, and Ms. Michaela similarly suggested that teachers’ vulnerability to real or imagined scrutiny from administration and parents has limited teachers’ ability or willingness to ‘open up’ to outsiders. Traditionally, administrators and therapists explained to me, that teachers were more likely to talk “off the record” about their dissatisfaction with the school as well as any negative feelings or insecurity around their own professionalism or classroom management. It may have been particularly risky for both teachers and administrators to discuss negative feelings around dealing

with children with disabilities or challenging behaviors given their imagined roles as inclusive educators, their love for Jack and Etta, and their relationships with the parents of those children. While Ms. Michaela was remarkably forthcoming in formal interviews about her frustration with Etta and Jack, with inclusion and local special education policy, several other informants at the site expressed similar feelings. The formal interview transcripts excerpted in this dissertation are therefore deceiving, as Ms. Michaela and Lidia inaccurately appear to be the only people at Jubilee JumpStart with accumulative feelings around difference or disability. It seems that even at Jubilee JumpStart where all community members are expected to discuss their emotional experiences of life at the school together, administrators and teachers are not exempt from consequences of talking about difference in ways that might reflect to each other or to outsiders as ethical, professional (i.e. education, training, coaching), or interpersonal (i.e. empathetic) shortcomings.

Administrators and therapists at Jubilee JumpStart were equally vulnerable to each other as were the teachers. Their informal and off-the-record conversations with me often surrounded tensions between those administrators, teachers, therapists, and parents as they navigated and disagreed over school practices as well as the inclusion of children with disabilities in the Tigers classroom. Administrators, teachers, and parents were also vulnerable to broader audiences (i.e., national and local funding sources and district special education programs).

Throughout my fieldwork, I conducted informal interviews with both adults and children. Several contemporary ethnographers have explored the potential of conversational activity with and between informants, especially while walking or moving through a site or place of study (Pink, 2009; Ingold, 2007; Lee & Ingold, 2006; Meyers, 2010; Powell, 2017). Indeed, most of my informal interviews and conversations with informants happened intentionally or accidentally ‘on the fly,’ while moving through hallways at the school, through the Tigers classroom, or on sidewalks along the streets of Adams Morgan.

Though I communicated during the consent process that I would be writing about all of my observations at the school and sometimes took notes during informal interviews, these encounters had a more conversational tone, even as I asked most of the questions. Occasionally, an informant would say “This is between us,” or “Maybe if you could not write about this.” Other times, when it felt as if someone was confiding in me, talking about another informant, or their expression was yet uncharacteristically forthcoming, I asked, to be sure, “Is this something that I can write about?” There were also brief discussions during formal interviews in person and over the phone where informants asked that we speak “off-record” or that I do not publish a portion of our conversation. At those moments, informants typically offered personal feelings or anecdotes of life in or outside of Jubilee JumpStart or provided background information related to other informants. During those conversations, informants also alluded to other off-the-record conversations they were having with other school staff and parents, which helped me to understand how much of their discussion about inclusion and difference in the Tigers classroom was happening beyond the scope of my fieldwork, or in spaces where I was intentionally or unintentionally not included. These informal, off-the-record conversations were a key indicator to me that my informants were not just talking about their feelings around difference or in/exclusion in the Tigers classroom because I was asking them to.

Of those “on record” informal conversations, few direct quotes are included in this dissertation. However, these conversations guided my ongoing observations and informed future formal interviews. Beyond collecting data, these conversations were important because they newly and differently facilitated my participation in the field, at the site, and in the group (Geertz, 1973; Lee & Ingold, 2006). Though I was always and inescapably a participant given my presence in the field and in the classroom, those conversations were one way that I was brought into dialogue with informants at the site.

In the classroom and on the playground, as much as possible, I asked questions directly following an interaction between teacher and child or between children. Drawing from Graue &

Walsh (1998), I asked children questions that emphasize my naivete and invited explanations and elaboration in children's own words, like, "really?" and "is it always like that?" as well as third-person or hypothetical questions to allow children to speak more comfortably about experiences related to the school. This approach is meant to "get the children to talk about what they know" (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 112). A strategy that proved more helpful with children was to offer an observation rather than a question: for example, "She's crying," or "It looks like they're going outside."

As some of the children (especially Lucy, Manuel, and Etta) would ask what I had written on specific pages, I thought these were also opportunities for me to interview the children about my observations informally. When they asked about my notebook, I would read the children exactly what I'd written and allowed them to think and respond. I then asked questions, such as "Why did you do that?", "Why did she do that?" or "Does that always happen?". Sometimes, I offered a feeling or interpretation I'd written down, for example, "I was surprised!" or "It sounded like you were excited." I was disappointed that this strategy was more productive in building rapport than actually provoking explanations from the children, who at best confirmed my observation, but more often laughed or lost interest in our conversation.

I asked teachers questions like "Can you help me understand what happened there?" "Why did you/he/she/they do that?" "Was/is that typical for you/the class/him/her/them?" I also offered teachers immediate observations such as "They've been playing with those dolls more recently" or recalled experiences from interviews with administrators or parents relevant to what was happening in the classroom (i.e., "Adelle's mom told me that...") as an opening for the teachers to offer their ideas and feelings. I supposed I also thought that teachers might be more likely to talk to me knowing that parents and staff at the school already were. During moments when teachers were not interacting with children in the classroom or on the playground, I also took the opportunity to begin informal interviews by chatting with teachers about what was

happening at the school or in the community that week. I asked follow-up questions in response to the teachers' discussions to better understand their experiences at the school.

### **Formal Interviews**

I conducted a series of formal interviews with school staff and parents of children in the Tigers classroom between December 2018 and July 2019. I interviewed Mary, the Executive Director four times. I interviewed Catherine, the Director of Program Operations, Bea, the Pre-K Coach and Resource Development Associate, and Erica, the Director of Education Services, each once. I interviewed Rachel, the parent of Pre-K student Jack, twice, and Briana, the parent of Pre-K student Adelle, once. I interviewed Ms. Michaela twice.

I also had formal interviews with five of the therapists affiliated with the Washington Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis. In the Fall of 2018, Mary suggested that the psychoanalysts continue to serve the program as classroom consultants. When I interviewed the therapists, I learned that most of the women declined Mary's offer because the role of a classroom consultant would be distinctly different than a facilitator of infant observation discussions. Some of the women also declined because of their frustration with the school administration for abandoning Work Discussion with little notice. While I planned to "shadow" Annette following Wolcott's (1973) approach to school ethnography, she ultimately did not work at the school as I anticipated at the outset of my fieldwork. After our meeting at the school in April 2018, I did not see Annette at Jubilee JumpStart for the duration of my fieldwork. I therefore had ethical reservations about using Annette to understand the lived experiences of adults and children in the Tigers classroom that she does not know.

I was further hesitant to ask Annette, who is white and wealthy, to interpret my observations of informants that were in several ways "Other" to us both. Just as I am critical in Chapter 6 of those non-disabled adults who speak on behalf of children with disabilities, I did not want to speak for or use Annette to speak for, those with different lived experiences. I worried

that this research would only continue the history of racial tension at the site described by the analysts. However, I retained Annette as a key informant because of her decade of experience at Jubilee JumpStart, which contributed to my understanding of the school's history with psychoanalytic thinking. During interviews, Annette shared ideas about how administrators and teachers related to children's emotional lives in the stories I told her from my fieldwork. Her understanding of the theoretical foundations of school and classroom practices was invaluable.

I arranged interviews in person, by phone, and by email at my informants' convenience. Interviews were conducted by telephone or in-person depending on the informant's schedule and preference. I conducted interviews in the lobby or offices of Jubilee JumpStart, at Potter's House (a nearby coffee shop) or in therapists' offices. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours. When informants were comfortable with me audio-recording our conversation, I recorded and later transcribed the interviews. Audio recordings were used for transcription purposes only and afterward discarded. During interviews where informants requested not to be recorded, I took notes on their responses.

When I began formal interviews, I thanked the participants for their participation and provided a brief explanation of the purpose of the study. Some of the informants asked for more information about my early findings or what I thought about school practices. After describing my interest in how children and adults experience inclusion, I explained that I was most interested in hearing their perspective, ideas, and feelings about the observations I would share with them. I began each interview by asking my informant to describe their relationship with or experience at the school. For those staff members, I asked for clarification on their titles and roles. I asked follow-up questions about the experiences they described. I then asked school staff, depending on their position, to answer any new questions about the school system, Jubilee JumpStart, or adults and children at the school that had emerged.

In interviews with school staff, parents, and psychoanalysts, I then read stories from my field notes and asked, "Can you tell me what you think about that?" My final question in

interviews was to ask the informant, “Is there anything that I missed?” or “Is there anything else that you want to tell me about Jubilee JumpStart/ The Tigers Classroom?”. I also explicitly asked informants if there was anything they had experienced as unique to Jubilee JumpStart.

### **The Ethnographic Case Study**

What distinguishes this study as ethnographic is not the fieldwork or interviews I completed, but how I engaged with and represented my data in this dissertation, which involved ongoing reflexivity and attempted to privilege the meanings that my informants made of their experiences. Reflexivity in ethnographic work involves a critical engagement with the researchers’ relationship to fieldwork and informants as personal and subjective, questioning ethnographic authority and the possibility of representing the Other (Briggs, 1970; Briggs, 1998; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Crapanzano, 2003; Valente, 2015; Valente, 2017). Following in the steps of educational and psychoanalytic anthropologists, I include in this dissertation an understanding of my affective experience of fieldwork, as data (Briggs, 1970; Briggs, 1998; Crapanzano, 2003; Devereaux, 1967; Valente 2015, 2017).

To decenter my ethnographic authority, I attempted as Tobin & Davidson (1990) suggest, to replace traditional ethnographic authority with polyvocality, placing the informants as experts, as they are asked to provide their explanations of daily life at Jubilee JumpStart (Tobin & Davidson, 1990; Tobin, 1999). Briggs’ (1970) *Never in Anger* has been described as “an ethnography of experience” in its focus “on an individual’s experiences as well as the integration of multiple voices, including that of the ethnographer” (Walton, 1993, p. 381) Briggs argues that her reactions, especially in contrast to her informants, were “invaluable sources of data” (Briggs 1970, p. 6). Drawing from Devereaux (1967), Valente (2017) argues for “not only attending to the emotional affective dimensions of fieldwork but also attending to these dynamics in the writing up of descriptions” (p. 5). Attending to my affective experience dramatically shifted my analysis of interview transcripts and allowed me to write polyvocally, as Tobin & Davidson



(1990) had suggested. Following Briggs (1970, 1998), I account for my affective experience in two styles of writing: as a participant in the encounters I describe, juxtaposed by my later anthropological reflection.

### **“Empirically Emotional” Research (and My Failure as an Amateur Ethnographer)**

In this dissertation, I use Disability Studies in Education to argue that Jubilee JumpStart’s continued discussion of emotional experiences of difference is a collective response to inclusion, and culturally sustaining practice. I gravitated to Disability Studies in Education (DSE) as an undergraduate student because it provided an explanation for my experiences as a non-disabled student who resented my disabled peers in mainstream elementary school classrooms. In turn, I consistently used ableism as framework in future experiences as a student, teacher, and researcher to explain the marginalization of children with real or perceived differences, often when I had no idea how those children had experienced in/exclusion. Disability Studies in Education is not only a set of concepts such as “ableism,” or school and classroom practices; this scholarship requires a critical research practice that holds the researcher accountable to the same theoretical orientation.

Minow (1985) argued that “nonrecognition of difference leaves in place a faulty neutrality, constructed so as to advance the dominant group and hinder those who are different” (p. 160). Minow’s suggestion requires more than talking about difference as it emerges in the classroom; I necessarily needed to recognize difference in the field. I explain in Chapters Five and Six how, in my initial subjective analyses of both “The Dead Dog Story” and “The Purple Loop Story,” I neglected to acknowledge or use my feelings around difference. As I denied my feelings, I effectively denied the always-meaningful participation of my informants, advancing my authority as the ethnographer and hindering the ethnographic participation of my already-Other informants, simultaneously assigning difference to several minority groups as deviant from my norm.

Each of us brought unique intersectional, affective experiences into the field, in dialogue with each other's; I knew this. I was consciously aware and anxious every day about the ways I understood myself to be different from my informants. I wondered how my informants experienced me; I took note of my feelings about my informants. However, my feelings didn't emerge only between those identities, ideas, and experiences I had taken into the site and my informants'; my feelings emerged from an encounter in the field, where groups were continually transformed, where I had inevitably been transformed. Nissen (2013) explains psychoanalysis as "not only a process of revelation and discovery but also a creative one that takes place in the relationship" between analyst and analysand (p. 962). In anthropological work, the researcher-participant relationship is a similar human relationship through which knowledge is co-constructed, and data may be collected (Harvey, 2017).

At first, I failed to acknowledge that co-construction. I was unable to use my feelings to explore my experience of exclusion as a product of difference in *our* group, that is, myself and Jubilee JumpStart, and the many smaller groups that temporarily assembled within. I conceptualize 'the group' as an ever-transforming "Third," that influences what and how things are experienced by all parties to the encounter. Emotions do not necessarily emerge only out of "self," or even out of self in interaction with other (intersubjectivity); they may also emerge out of the structures that surreptitiously shape these intersubjective interactions" (Davies & Spencer, 2010, p. 16).

### **Anxiety and Resistance to the Group**

Later on, it occurred to me that perhaps this failure was, in part, because I had resisted being part of the group, and I had resisted sharing difference. At Jubilee JumpStart, where nearly everyone was marked by visible difference, I was in the minority. Still, I had necessarily conceptualized my study of inclusion on the basis of their many markers of difference, that were all also differences *from me*. I felt unavoidably foreign to the group as a white, monolingual,

middle-class, able-bodied graduate student. While I experienced inclusion and exclusion in “The Dead Dog Story” and “The Purple Loop Story”, I wonder whether it was easier to deny ongoing dialogue between mine and my informants’ intersubjective experiences because I felt separate from the group as an outsider in so many ways, and moreover, I didn’t identify with the difference that I imagined was being excluded. I didn’t consciously feel excluded; instead, I felt feelings of exclusion for the children. Still, I displaced those feelings of exclusion onto only child/adult and disability difference, ideas to which I was already attuned. I realized in reflection that I so rarely have had to experience exclusion as difference specific to me. I wonder how this affected my experiences of in/exclusion at the site that might otherwise have allowed me to see difference. I wonder whether I might have been less resistant to being a part of the group.

Some of those experiences I had as a non-disabled student in mainstream classrooms also produced intense anxiety around proving my competence, which has long constrained my personal and professional lives. Valente (2017) suggests the use of anxiety in ethnographic research “as a signal and tool to productively explore and mediate between the intrapsychic and intersubjective dynamics that give shape to encounters in fieldwork” (p. 1). I tried to take note of my emotions and anxiety as they emerged throughout my year of fieldwork but had difficulty recognizing the role of my affective experience in observations that appeared objectively inclusive or, more often, exclusive. In my dissertation work, I worried that I was being given all the answers by my informants, and naively felt I needed to produce something new, to demonstrate my ability by reading critical or sophisticated theories that would reveal something about the site that hadn’t already been acknowledged. I habitually, though inadvertently, avoid my anxiety around competence in my writing by using existing critical work that reflects my ideas. I found myself reading theory onto my observations at Jubilee Jumpstart, constructing at least limited, if not wholly inaccurate analyses.

I found it challenging this year, as I have been plagued with anxiety around my work, to see anxiety or emotions as the product of one encounter, let alone a single day. I walked into

Jubilee JumpStart every morning heavy with emotion, frequently physically ill, and attributed any feeling that I had at the site to my preexisting anxiety and fear. My anxiety that emerged specifically to encounters with the field was also easily masked by the nature of my work as an amateur researcher. This was my first major ethnographic endeavor, and with little time left to collect data and write, the stakes were high. Sometimes when my anxiety heightened in the field, I was able to discount how my experience related to the unique encounter. To do reflexive ethnographic work well requires a capacity to *feel* before one can tolerate, scrutinize, or make use of their feelings. One of my failures was that I so badly wanted to not feeling anything.

I also later came to realize that I wasn't concerned with *really* joining the group; I was tasked with beginning a good enough relationship such that I could conduct ongoing and return fieldwork. As I struggled to make rapport with teachers, parents, and children, I was concerned with securing their consent so that I could collect and analyze data. Among those at Jubilee JumpStart who did consent, I was concerned with building a cordial relationship so that informants would trust me enough to tell me their thoughts and feelings in the classroom. When parents and teachers resisted my presence and mostly ignored me, it was easy for me to blame the real differences for which I had chosen to study the Tigers classroom. While it was necessary to consider all that made me an outsider to Jubilee JumpStart, this distinct insider-outsider relationship was also deceiving, as it limited my ability to see myself as part of the group and to see both mine and my informants' resistance as a product of the group.

My many (mis)interpretations proved necessary to understanding life at Jubilee JumpStart, as I used them to consider contradictions between my analyses of field notes and transcripts with my informants' interpretations. In Chapters Five and Six, I explore my affective experience of "The Dead Dog Story" and "The Purple Loop Story," attempting the "empirically emotional" fieldwork central to both psychoanalytic anthropology and Critical Disability Studies fieldwork (Valente, 2017, p. 5). These chapters are organized to reflect my unfolding experience in the field, in confrontation with my informants and with myself.

## Chapter Five

### Pursuing “The Why” through “The Dead Dog Story”

In countless conversations with school administrators leading up to and throughout my fieldwork, they told me that what makes Jubilee JumpStart special was their desire and commitment to figuring out “the why” behind, rather than controlling, a child’s behavior. Administrators, teachers, therapists, and parents expressed similar beliefs that children’s behaviors are indicators and expressions of their emotional experience. In this chapter, I trace how I came to better understand Jubilee JumpStart’s pursuit of “the why” as I followed “The Dead Dog Story” through ethnographic encounters with my informants and my data. In interviews about “The Dead Dog Story,” Mary, Erica, Bea, and Ms. Michaela explicitly and implicitly suggested several challenges to inclusion and figuring out “the why” and described practical strategies the team used in response to each challenge. Below, I include an excerpt of “The Dead Dog Story” from Chapter One, followed by several themes that emerged through interviews including teachers’ (sometimes troubling) emotions around their work with children and both implicit and explicit ideas about disability and special education.

#### **Excerpt: “The Dead Dog Story”**

As I stood next to Ms. Michaela watching the playground scene unfold, Etta ran over to us, dropping pieces of chalk from her hands. She looked up to us both, gushing, “I have something really serious to tell you.”

“Oh, what is it?” Michaela asked.

With wide-eyes, Etta told us, “I was at Gramma’s, and I was watchin’ this commercial where people leave their dogs outside and then they are DEAD! It was so.... so....,” she finished in a huff, “really sad.”

“Oh, wow... that’s not good,” Ms. Michaela said slowly. She looked concerned. “I’m gonna talk to Mommy about that, about you watching scary things... that’s scary. You shouldn’t watch that.”

**“That seems cut off, and kind of overly grown-up managed.”**

I observed “The Dead Dog Story” on the playground, re-wrote, and read the vignette countless times. In my initial analyses, I thought the encounter was significant not only because of my ideas about best practices for engaging with children, but because it appeared that Ms. Michaela had failed to pursue, true to Jubilee JumpStart, “the why.” When I interviewed staff members, their explanations for what Ms. Michaela said on the playground supported that interpretation. Mary’s first reaction was critical. She told me,

“What I don’t like about that is that it kind of labels something happening at home for the child instead of letting the child name it. It kind of stops with ‘I’ll just fix it’ rather than ‘Let’s talk more about it.’ That seems cut off and kind of overly grown-up managed. Did Etta even say that was scary? You know like, ‘I’m naming it scary, and I’m gonna fix it’ rather than just exploring it more and then finding out, ‘Well what should we do about this?’ Really asking that... asking the child, ‘Well, what can we do about that?’ and if they say it’s kind of scary, or I wish I could tell my mom, maybe then suggesting, ‘I wonder if talking to mom would help.’ That would be my favorite way to handle that. It just seems a little abrupt, cut off from further exploration”

In an interview with Bea, she expressed similar concerns that Ms. Michaela’s discussion with Etta was prematurely cut-off. She told me,

“...that is an example of maybe a missed opportunity to kind of be more available to Etta, and how she was feeling about what she saw, and being able to process that. That would be an example of being able to help teachers and support them like, ‘How do you respond to something like that?’ I probably myself would not have said the part about ‘This isn’t

something you should watch’... my question is, what does that say to the child about whoever allowed her to watch that program? The bigger point is that the child came and was sharing something that clearly affected her, she said it was something serious, she watched that dogs were left outside and they were dead, and that had some sort of impact of her, so much so that she remembered it, and came to her teacher to share it with her. I guess it would’ve been nice if there had been the opportunity for more conversation or interaction between the teacher and the child regarding what Etta was feeling then.”

Both Mary and Bea continued, in our respective conversations, to brainstorm reasons that Ms. Michaela might have shut down conversation in “The Dead Dog Story.” Mary told me,

“My own impression across many things, not really specific to this... it’s really in line with what I think all the time... that the capacity for the adults in any given moment to handle themselves and what all is happening really has a big effect on what’s possible in an interaction in a relationship. Maybe the environment of the playground felt stressful or concerning for the teacher. That kind of puts them in a less open, ‘Let’s see what happens here and what comes up.’ I think also when teachers are really denying children their feelings, and their process for working with their feelings, it has everything to do with the teacher’s discomfort and their capacity right in that moment or their capacity just as a person or a professional, to kind of handle and understand what the child brings... really, the emotional needs that any human brings”.

I was interested in this capacity – what affected an adults’ capacity to “handle themselves and what all is happening” and “handle and understand what the child brings”? I wondered about what might support or limit a teachers’ ability to “be more available” and further explore what children say or do in the classroom. What Mary seemed to be suggesting was teachers’ constant emotional labor of working and coming into relationships with children. While all children have varying needs, emotional and otherwise, Mary suggests that their needs are inextricable from teachers’ also variable affective experience of those needs. Etta’s needs might be more or less

challenging at times than her peers. Likewise, Ms. Michaela's needs might be more or less tolerable, more or less fulfilled, more or less inhibiting, in ways that affect her experience of Etta and ongoing work with Etta. I saw teachers' capacity, or ability to manage the emotional labor brought on by others' emotional needs, as directly related to pursuing "the why."

**"I knew it had to be causing feelings."**

While I initially experienced "The Dead Dog Story" encounter as emotionally dismissive, I knew that Ms. Michaela's "failure" to pursue "the why" wasn't because she didn't care about Etta. I had observed enough at Jubilee JumpStart to see that Ms. Michaela was not typically cold toward Etta. If Ms. Michaela didn't like or even resented Etta, she did a very good job of hiding it in the classroom. There were days I observed that Ms. Michaela's face looked tired, or she exhaled heavily in a way that indicated her possibly being frustrated, but I never heard her raise her voice or complain.

However, in our later interview, Ms. Michaela expressed ongoing frustration with how difficult it had been to manage the classroom when Etta's behaviors "spiraled out of control." Mary, Bea, and Erica told me during interviews that Ms. Michaela had already talked with them about feeling overwhelmed and wanting to find Etta more appropriate emotional support. I was surprised because I knew from interviews with Annette that teachers had in the past struggled or resisted expressing their feelings, especially when they felt anxious about being observed. In an interview, Ms. Michaela told me,

"When I first started out as a teacher, there were a lot of things I was just accepting... I remember getting really stressed out and really depressed, to the point where I was like, 'I gotta get out of here, I'm leaving.' When I started talking eventually to coworkers and administrators, to *whoever*, about what I was feeling, I kept hearing over and over again, 'Why didn't you say anything before? You know, we can't make any changes if you don't say anything.' I learned that I have to advocate for myself. I talk to Gabrielle now; I



talk to Bianca... I've had lots of long talks with Erica, and she's been able to come in and help with Etta."

I asked Mary if it was common practice that year for teachers to talk about their feelings in the way that Ms. Michaela did following "The Dead Dog Story." She told me that Ms. Michaela was one of the only teachers who did that, and that was one of the many reasons she was glad that Ms. Michaela had come to work at Jubilee JumpStart. Mary explained,

"We have found over the years it is exquisitely difficult and painful for our staff to tell anyone at all, let alone, and even worse, someone in any authority over them, how they're actually feeling. We do not hear very often 'I'm feeling overwhelmed' or 'I'm feeling challenged by this child'.... Teachers more often pull out from their feelings and experience, problems with the child, the parent, or their coworker, not a lot of 'I'm feeling this, and I need to say it.' It tends to not come out until it's affecting the work."

In a previous year in the Tigers classroom, Mary told me,

"There were four really energetic, physical boys... and there wasn't someone who could take charge of that kind of energy. So, they weren't getting their needs met very well, and it was affecting other children. It was just causing constant upheaval in the classroom. One was a real climber and moved about on all the raised surfaces like Spiderman. During all of that, all I really remember is the team talking a lot about others... not themselves and their own feelings. I knew that it had to be causing feelings. They were interested in getting help and support: 'What can we do that's better for these children? What can we do to support our classroom better?' ... they were just trying to manage it and weren't naming it early, like, 'Hey, this is hard in here.' By the time they were sharing it, it was really very focused on: 'That child and that parent need to get some things taken care of so that he can be more on task in the classroom.'"

Considering interviews with Ms. Michaela, Mary, Bea, and Erica, I wondered whether Ms.

Michaela wasn't pursuing "the why" because she didn't have the emotional "capacity" to separate

Etta from her emotional experience of the classroom, prior experiences, and ideas about difference.

During interviews about “The Dead Dog Story,” Erica, Bea, Mary, and Ms. Michaela all brought up that Ms. Michaela was new to Jubilee JumpStart and how her previous experiences as a teacher may have affected her experience in the classroom and of Etta. Michaela told me, “at the beginning it felt like I was in somebody else’s house, so I didn’t feel comfortable. Everyone had to get used to each other, build relationships, you know, and this is just teacher-teacher, on top of the children!” Erica told me of Ms. Michaela,

“It’s still a work in progress. She came from a Head Start background. Their level of scrutiny on teaching and what makes her a good teacher has influenced how she operates in the classroom. I’m constantly like, ‘It’s not that way here, you’re not gonna get penalized for Etta’s behavior.’ It’s a habit that you have to get out of when you’ve been in that situation for a long time, so I’m constantly just reminding her like, ‘Nope, you’re good over here! We see you engage and building relationships, children are learning, and it’s all good here’... that shows up differently, very specific to Jubilee JumpStart. Of course, we don’t want children hurting each other, but our calm atmosphere is slightly different, I think. It’s not a zero-behavior atmosphere; it’s just like yes, things are happening! It’s a classroom. Children are working, people are learning. I think Michaela spent some time trying to balance those feelings, versus what we’re doing here.”

At the forefront of discussions between teachers and staff was the expectation for, and handling of emotional labor, but also confounding ideas about the labor itself.

**“I’m acting like I’m a special education teacher, and I’m not.”**

I also wondered whether Ms. Michaela’s interaction with Etta in “The Dead Dog Story” encounter was influenced by implicit assumptions about child development, behavior, and disability difference I read in transcripts from interviews with her. When I first shared “The Dead

Dog Story” with Ms. Michaela, she said, “I’m always amazed by her IQ. The fact that she was able to recall what she saw in a movie, something so vivid. Wow, I know that I’m dealing with a child that you can have a conversation with because she’s going to understand.” She continued to say that, “sometimes due to her maturity, parents can treat their child a lot older than they are, due to the fact that they are cognitively smarter and developmentally smarter than their age.”

Michaela also said, “I felt as if she needs to be protected... I was worried just how much she was taking in because she’s so young”.

I was worried that Ms. Michaela’s ideas about Etta as different contributed to her frustration around Etta’s behavior. There were other implicit and explicit assumptions I recognized in her speech alluding to typical and atypical child development, special education, and inclusion. She told me,

“I’m acting like I’m a special education teacher, and I’m not. An inclusion classroom needs a special education teacher. It’s not technically inclusion when there’s not a special education teacher... there has to be somebody accredited to tell you if something is developmentally appropriate or not and give you strategies from their expertise on what to do. I don’t have that. I’m not a special ed teacher. That’s what people are forgetting. I’m general ed... there are children whose behaviors have progressed, like an Etta, like a Manuel, like a Lucy, and I feel like they need something more that I can’t give. My expertise doesn’t go that far. This is where I would need a special education teacher.”

While scholars have problematized the ideology of “special” kids and “special” education, Ms. Michaela’s distinction between herself and special education teachers who are equipped and meant to teach specific kinds of children is a common discourse in schools and contemporary inclusion research (Lalvani, 2013; Rutherford, 2016). The 2015 federal Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs cites similar attitudes and beliefs as a common barrier to inclusion. Implicit in Ms. Michaela’s comment is the belief that

Etta, Manuel, and Lucy are inherently different and that strategies from a special education teacher may remediate behaviors as result of their difference, or remediate their difference.

In the same interview, Ms. Michaela told me that having inadequate support to help children with challenging behaviors led to teacher burn-out. “That’s how the emotional stress is put on the staff,” she said, “because you’re dealing with a child that you really shouldn’t be dealing with because you’re not trained, you don’t have the tools.” I understood Ms. Michaela’s desire for more support in the classroom, but I winced at her comment that Etta was “a child that you shouldn’t be dealing with.” To me, this *wasn’t* “the same pancakes for everyone.” Connor (2017) suggests that rather than pointing to “different” children who don’t belong in the classroom or should not be the burden of general educators, inclusive teachers might ask, “How can I conceive of my classroom so that all students can fit?” (p. 231).

I was surprised Ms. Michaela spoke so heatedly given our limited rapport and my expressed interest in inclusion; this sounded, to me, so ableist and exclusionary. I could tell that ongoing work with children like Etta, Manuel, and Lucy, who were frequently aggressive in the classroom, had been stressful for her. I wondered then whether Ms. Michaela wasn’t pursuing “the why” because of the accumulative effects of difference. Alperovitz (2018) had written of Work Discussion groups that “in the process, members discover how much of what they actually see in a child is filtered through preconceived notions or intense feelings and fears” (p. 99). I had a working hypothesis that it was challenging for teachers to make sense of children’s behaviors when their interactions were repeatedly stressful, as were those between Ms. Michaela and Etta.

Jubilee JumpStart had practical approaches to alleviate the accumulative effects of difference on both the adult and child. Ms. Michaela told me in informal conversations that there were times on days I wasn’t there that Erica had needed to come into the Tigers classroom in order to help out when Etta had meltdowns. In an interview, I asked Erica to tell me about how she was working with Ms. Michaela and Etta. She told me,

“Because I’m not constantly on-duty, I feel like I can go into a classroom sort of with fresh eyes, and a little bit of a lighter load. Sometimes when teachers are in the moment, they sometimes get overwhelmed, especially with challenging behaviors, so it’s hard to go back to your compassion and all of your good teacher skills that you normally have, but that sometimes get tested. I think me coming in sometimes gives students the attention that they’re seeking or the relationship and connection that they’re seeking, while also giving teachers just a break so that they can reset themselves to be able to then return to dealing with students who are more challenging. I’ve always wanted teachers to know that it’s okay to use me in that way, it’s not a judgment against you if you are not able to sort of, handle the child in that moment. I know that being in the classroom for eight or nine hours a day is completely different than me popping in for twenty minutes or taking a child for a walk. I’ve been able to offer a reprieve I guess... other times, it can be letting the teacher who’s working with Etta remain with her, and me helping the other students. Sometimes the connection is there, and it just needs a little more time to kind of finish out the process.”

What Erica was suggesting was not just giving teachers’ a relief from the emotional labor of dealing with children, or children relief from the emotional labor of classroom demands, but rather, an opportunity to experience and work through moments challenging to both parties, together. This approach is less one-sided than to assume that the challenging child alone is the problem. Instead, “the connection” and “the process” suggest that the problem emerged between teacher and child or within the entire classroom, and therefore, was best handled between teacher and child in the classroom.

**“She’s still trying to control the behavior.”**

Finally, I wondered whether Ms. Michaela had not apparently pursued “the why” in “The Dead Dog Story” encounter because that practice really wasn’t happening at the school in the

way that administrators idealized. In interviews about “The Dead Dog Story,” however, Ms. Michaela talked about her desire to figure out Etta’s behavior. She told me that her frustration with Lidia throughout the year was that she had not been helpful in the teachers’ pursuit of “the why.” Ms. Michaela said,

“With Lidia being so hands-off, it makes it challenging, because you’re relying on the experts to do their job.... Lidia interacts with her as if that’s her grandchild.... if Etta is crying about something, instead of her talking to her in a way that will help calm her and redirect her, she’ll have a tone. She’ll say, ‘It’s not that serious Etta. Why are you doing that?’ She’s talking to her as if that’s her kid, instead of a professional relationship, as an expert... she’s still trying to control the behavior. It seems to me, this was her way of solving it, but she would attack the challenging behavior instead of trying to find out the root of it and how we can prevent it. Over, and over, and over again. Attack, attack, attack. Instead of, ‘How can we prevent this behavior from happening? How can we prevent the escalation? How can we prevent the meltdown?’ and we still haven’t gotten that. Myself or Gabrielle has to step in, take Etta to another space and get her to calm down and then we can start talking about what happened.”

Not only had Ms. Michaela been talking to administrators about what was happening, she said that she and Ms. Gabrielle were also talking with Etta about what was happening. I thought that this continued ideological and emotional tension in the Tigers Classroom was further interesting because of Erica’s explanation that Lidia had been contracted at the school in order to fulfill requirements for Universal Pre-Kindergarten funding. I wondered about the consequences of these mandated service providers, especially for children with multiple markers of difference perceived as distinctly “special ed” like Etta.

### **My Misguided Search for In/exclusion**

I thought my initial analysis of “the why” behind Ms. Michaela’s talk and behavior was productive, even generous because I had brainstormed multiple possibilities that didn’t limit “failure” to her. I read her “failure” as the result of social, cultural, and historical, influences on interpersonal processes. However, through each of my ‘theories,’ I found the same conclusion: Ms. Michaela had failed to relate to Etta. Ms. Michaela was having ongoing discussions with administrators, her assistant teachers, Etta, and Etta’s mom to better meet Etta’s needs. Still, I wondered whether those discussions mattered when, in interview transcripts, they didn’t seem to change what Ms. Michaela thought or felt about Etta.

On a walk one morning on the streets surrounding Jubilee JumpStart, Annette was telling me about the challenges that the psychoanalysts encountered in recent years of Work Discussion groups. She told me that the analysts had a realization: “We might have been asking the teachers to do something that was not in line with their experience... if the teachers had not been taken care of in that way if adults weren’t relating to them in that way when they were children.” I realized that this wasn’t just about a connection between preconceived ideas and resulting emotional experiences, but ways of relating to children that are shaped by experiences in other relationships. I wondered whether the discussions about Etta were not important in that Ms. Michaela could challenge her preconceived notions, but that what she was being asked to do was important; that the capacity was to *relate* and not to *think* about. I realized that there was a process of relating already implicit in the interview transcripts with Ms. Michaela, Mary, Erica, and Bea. In the same transcripts I explored above, my informants were not just telling me what they thought about Ms. Michaela’s and Etta’s feelings, but what they were doing with them, and with their own feelings that came up when I shared with them “The Dead Dog Story.”

Figuring out “The Why” was not just a teacher’s responsibility to explore the many factors that might be affecting a child — figuring out “the why” also wasn’t the teacher’s responsibility to consider their own emotional experience of the child that might affect how they

understand the child. When Mary talked about the “capacity,” she wasn’t just talking about things that limit a teacher’s ability to understand a child. The “capacity” to tolerate being with a child was also important, as Ms. Michaela and Erica discussed, but not necessarily indicative of the success or failure to be inclusive. My obsession with finding out why Ms. Michaela had “failed” interfered with the ability to see that at Jubilee JumpStart, “the why” was never limited to the analysis of one child, as mine had been limited to Ms. Michaela. When I instead tried to pursue “the why” as the teachers, children, parents, and staff were, I realized what really made pursuing “the why” inclusion. When Mary talked about the “capacity, she was really talking about a capacity to remain in discussion about emotional experiences.

#### **“The PNC Visitors”**

I saw those discussions happening following a particularly hectic morning in the Tigers classroom when sixteen volunteers from PNC bank joined administrators and the usual children, teachers, and service providers in the Tigers classroom. When I asked Mary if about teachers sharing their feelings, she told me,

“This morning, Michaela came to me and said, ‘I feel really uncomfortable with something I said to Bea yesterday, and I wanted to clarify it with you.’... We had 16 volunteers from PNC Bank in our center yesterday morning... we were getting started, and all of a sudden, their leader said, ‘I’d like for everyone to be in one classroom so we can take a picture.’ I was like, ‘Umm... I do not know if we can fit all of you. But if it is any room, it’s Pre-K... let’s go see.’ The Tigers came in from the playground to find 16 people around the blue carpet and on the benches. Michaela apparently said to Bea yesterday, ‘You know, that was tough. That really didn’t feel good.’ Michaela then said to me, ‘I was thinking about it last night, and it sounds like I don’t like having visitors.’ I was like, ‘Well, it doesn’t sound like that to me! It sounds like sixteen people was not what you were expecting. It was a little messed up for 15 minutes, and that didn’t feel



good to any of us'. I realized I had said 'I'm sorry about this' when it happened, but I had not come around to say, 'Hey how was that? I'm sorry that wasn't what we planned.' She was able to tell both Bea and I that she was feeling overwhelmed. Not about the children, but with the adults... with all of it".

Michaela had already talked to me in informal conversations about the challenges of having frequent and unpredictable classroom visitors. I was therefore unsurprised that she too brought up the PNC visitors, unprompted. She talked to me about how it was stressful for her but also how the crowd had affected the children, especially Etta. Ms. Michaela said,

"Why is nobody even considering how it's affecting the children? All these people are in and out of the classroom, and the children's behaviors will literally shift because of anxiety. When PNC was there, there were so many people, Etta couldn't even walk in the room. She said, "there's too many people; there's too many people!" She started shutting down. Erica had to come and take her into the back room. She came back like 30, 40 minutes later. If Erica wasn't there, we would've had to calm Etta down on top of taking care of all the other kids. Gabrielle was out of town. It was only me and Bianca... we couldn't leave each other because of the ratio. We know that when one kid spins out of control, the whole class is out of control and it becomes a bigger issue, and a bigger issue, and a bigger issue. I know there are things that you can't control, but there are things that are in our control that will help with the children's emotional needs, and that will help with the staff's emotional needs."

**"If you're not crying at some point, you're probably not at Jubilee JumpStart."**

Ms. Michaela, Mary, Erica, and Bea talked about Ms. Michaela's feelings together not just because they were expected and allowed to emerge while working with children, in a truly chaotic classroom, but because her feelings started discussion around the many challenges to inclusion that came up in the Tigers Classroom. Discussion between teachers and administrators

were to be a similarly non-punishing, therapeutic space, as they encourage teachers to have with the children. Implicit in Mary, Erica, and Bea's talk was also knowledge of how teachers' feelings might relate or contribute to "the why," therefore, they couldn't get to "the why" without teachers' feelings.

In an interview, Mary told me, "We say that if you're not crying at some point, you're probably not at Jubilee JumpStart. We cry from joy, frustration, from fear... the kids and the grown-ups. We had an orientation, and a parent started crying, we were like, 'You're officially in!'. That's how we know we're getting somewhere real". Necessary conversations about Etta's emotional needs and ongoing stressors like classroom visitors happened because Ms. Michaela admitted feeling something about it. In an interview, Mary said that she was glad Ms. Michaela brought up the PNC visitors. She told me, "Everybody doesn't believe that it's like that here. It's funny. Everybody thinks it's such a hard work environment, like you can't express feelings, you can't say what's really going on. Yet when they do, it's very clear that they can."

I also saw as they discussed with me their resulting practical approaches to inclusion, administrators weren't concerned with educating Ms. Michaela; teaching her to think or feel differently about Etta, while many other practical challenges and approaches to inclusion came up in their talk. They were not concerned with fixing Etta through Ms. Michaela, as I had assumed from their talk about "capacity." Though identifying feelings and challenges allowed administrators and teachers to make changes, like having Erica come into the Tigers, supporting teachers was not just about supporting their capacity to tolerate the accumulative effects of difference, though it was part. They had these easily observable school practices surrounding inclusion, but behind each was their practice of inclusion, pursuing "the why" through dialogue.

Ms. Michaela, Bea, Mary, and Erica talked about "the why" behind Etta's behavior as things that were specific to Etta, such as her home life, cognitive and emotional development, but they also talked about how the classroom affected Etta. Therefore, their solution was not just about relieving the teacher; it was about relieving the child. My informants were less concerned

with Ms. Michaela's thoughts about whether Etta did or didn't have a disability, though they were working with Etta's mother to get Etta more support. Informants didn't make a direct connection that I had, between the child's perceived difference and the feelings it brought up, or perhaps that wasn't useful to them. They recognized that "what the child is bringing" was more than just developmental, disability, and socioeconomic difference. Mary pointed out that human needs (real and experienced) are inevitably challenging. A consideration of children and adults' emotional needs was an everyday practice of inclusion.

When I considered teachers' emotional experience alone, I read teachers' emotions to interfere with coming to understand the child as anything other than different, and a burden. In "The Dead Dog" story, I could read that Ms. Michaela didn't have the capacity to "handle and understand what the child is bringing." However, I realized that when Mary said "capacity," she meant more than ways that a teacher had available to *know* the child. At the site, they understood that teachers and children's emotional experiences were guided by more than their ideas about each other. Everyone I interviewed seemed to realize not only that Ms. Michaela's feelings of stress and frustration were understandable but also not just about Etta or that moment, but of Ms. Michaela's emotional experience of the entire classroom in the context of her past experiences. Figuring out "the why" therefore resulted from an engagement with all kinds of teachers' feelings that did and did not seem related to difference. They recognized that as coming into a relationship with a child is guided by and brings up many emotional experiences, teachers did not just come to know but continued to experience children. When Mary, Bea, and Erica provided explanations for Ms. Michaela's cut-off discussion in "The Dead Dog Story" encounter, they weren't just excusing Ms. Michaela. When Erica pointed out Ms. Michaela's Head Start background, she wasn't saying that Ms. Michaela's ideas about being a good teacher interfered; rather, she was attentive to how prior experiences materialized in the Tigers, in "somebody else's house," and in relationships with new children.

I also saw across interviews that Ms. Michaela and the administrators had new feelings around and throughout discussions with each other. It was not only easier for one person to decide one reason “why” separately, but they had emotional experiences when they discussed the many reasons “why” together. The discussion about PNC brought together how staff affected each other when they worked together but also when they talked about those classroom experiences. Michaela, Mary, and Bea also told me about how it made them feel to talk with each other.

**“She needed it from everyone in the classroom, not just her teachers.”**

I brought up “The Dead Dog Story” again with Ms. Michaela in an interview in July. She brought up the PNC visitors, but her story this time was a bit different. This time, Ms. Michaela told me that she thought Etta had a meltdown not only because of the large crowd but because Ms. Gabrielle wasn’t there. She explained that in the final months of the school year, both she and Ms. Gabrielle had closer relationships with Etta and were able to help her transition throughout the day by allowing Etta to walk with whichever of the two teachers she chose. Ms. Michaela told me it wasn’t just that the teachers were short-staffed, but she realized that it was difficult for Etta when Ms. Gabrielle was unexpectedly absent.

Ms. Michaela also seemed less frustrated now talking about the PNC visitor day. I shared with Ms. Michaela my observation that she sounded less overwhelmed by working with Etta. She told me, “Etta has come a long way, and her behavior has improved, and I know it’s because of the love and support she receives in the classroom. Her feeling safe, her feeling the love here.” She continued to tell me,

“I knew that in order to realize what her triggers were, and to help her, I needed to build a better relationship with her... As the year gone on, we started getting adjusted to each other. Etta came to Jubilee JumpStart the week before I did in September. She had never been at the school before. She didn’t know anybody. She came in feeling left out, on top

of all the other things going on with her... Finally, late in the year, she realized The Tigers classroom was her classroom, and The Tigers were her friends. No one regularly wanted to play with her until the end of the year. We were trying to help her have someone when Elijah was someone she latched onto. He helped her every day in the last month because she listened to him. Getting ready to transition outside, we needed to line up, Etta didn't want to line up. But during the limited choice time, Elijah would tell her, 'Etta, go line up. I'll help you put the toys away. Let's get your water bottle together. Let's get in line'. That was emotional support. She needed it from everyone in the classroom, not just her teachers. It took all year to get there."

In that interview, Ms. Michaela told me that after her discussions with Etta at naptime about "The Dead Dog Story," she continued to use that time to build their relationship because Etta already needed a teacher's support at that time.

"At nap time, she'll talk about missing her mom, missing Easter Seals, her old school, or her friends there, we'll talk with her at that time about what she's feeling... in the beginning, she didn't want to hear it. Toward the end of the year, she started being comfortable. It started to be a comfort for her to have those conversations with us."

Ms. Michaela had told me in our first interview following "The Dead Dog Story" that she hoped Etta would be able to talk to her when there were more serious things bothering her. Naptime proved to be a place for that, as Ms. Michaela described,

"Someone was telling me that she wasn't living in her own place anymore, she's been going through it. Etta was telling me that she was staying in a bed with her mother. Etta told me a lot of things. She said she sees mice when she's going to sleep. There's mice in her home. It worried her. Etta worried about the mice at nap time, so that's when it came up: 'I sleep in the bunk bed with my mom.' She just finally told me this in May."

Ms. Michaela also described relief from their improved relationship. She explained that Etta hadn't stopped acting out in the classroom, but that it was important that Etta was able to talk to

her, so that Michaela wasn't just having to talk to other teachers, administrators, therapists, or Etta's mom, about Etta. "We finally got past that hump that she trusted me enough, was comforted by me enough, that it didn't frustrate me anymore," she said. She continued,

"She gets upset about her shoes. I'm like, 'If you need to take your shoes off, it's fine,' and when she's finished, we can talk. Lidia goes, 'Don't let her take her shoe off, she's gonna throw it at you.' That's exactly what she did. That's when we asked her why she did it, and she started crying. Etta said, 'My grandma's being mean to me, my grandma's mad at me.' I gave her a hug. I'm still concerned, there are definitely some things going on there. But now, she was able to calm down and go back to interacting with other kids."

I saw several practical approaches to the challenges of inclusion in Ms. Michaela's discussion of the PNC visitors and her work with Etta. I saw Ms. Michaela's attempt to build a relationship with Etta, where their relationship and specifically naptime became a space where Etta could explore her emotional experiences inside and outside of school. Naptime also seemed to be a space where Etta could be experienced and experience Ms. Michaela differently, separate from the group and from the chaos and frequent transitions of the school day. I saw Ms. Michaela's commitment to meeting Etta's needs so much so that she became the target of Etta's flying sneakers. At that moment, Ms. Michaela again resisted advice from Lidia, in line with Erica's explanation of incorporating but working around consultants to maintain the Jubilee JumpStart approach.

A particularly interesting new development was Elijah's apparent shared responsibility for Etta. Ms. Michaela and her assistant teachers' support for Etta's friendship might be considered a "peer-mediated strategy" (Lawrence et al., 2016) or "social learning opportunity" (United States, 2015) where children share the burden of difference in an inclusive classroom (Minow, 1985). Naraian (2008) argued that students with and without disabilities benefit from new opportunities to engage with each other in the classroom as those encounters have the potential to generate new narratives about children, disability, and difference. Ms. Michaela and

Elijah also enacted an “ethic of caring” where they demonstrated inclusion as emotional support (Danforth & Naraian, 2015).

I saw Ms. Michaela’s overwhelming empathy for the Etta’s daily struggles in the classroom, and for Etta and her mother’s fraught circumstances. During our first interview Ms. Michaela recognized and openly discussed her own emotional labor of inclusion, and suggested an emotional labor of Etta’s peers. In later interview, Ms. Michaela illustrated the potential of shared emotional labor between teachers and peers, but more significantly, in “The PNC Visitors” story and in her reflection across the schoolyear with Etta, she was now also recognizing Etta’s emotional labor of being in the classroom. Ms. Michaela and Ms. Gabrielle recognized Etta’s emotional labor and were willing to discuss and modify classroom practices by ‘listening’ to how individuals and the classroom affected Etta. In the next chapter, I describe “The Purple Loop Story,” an encounter I observed where children similarly support teachers in the practical day-to-day work of inclusion and sharing of emotional labor.

## Chapter Six

### “The Purple Loop Story”

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I continue to trace my ongoing process of coming to understand the collective practice at Jubilee JumpStart by following “The Purple Loop Story,” an encounter that first appeared, similarly to “The Dead Dog Story,” riddled with in/exclusion. Again, I was at first overconcerned with individuals’ classroom experiences and ideas alone, rather than how children and adults engaged with both in discussion. As I had come to see inclusion as a process of relating, I wanted to be able to characterize those ways of relating. In moments of in/exclusion, I wondered, how were children and adults relating to each other? In those moments of in/exclusion, how were children and adults relating to difference? When my informants discussed one child’s empathy in interviews about “The Purple Loop Story,” I was quick to look for instances when children and adults were or were not empathetic to each other, especially to those children with perceived disability and language differences. In “The Purple Loop Story,” I saw children in discussion with each other and with difference in ways that adults had failed.

I later realized that everyone at Jubilee JumpStart was in dialogue with each other; beyond the practical approaches to inclusion that came out of their discussion around emotional experiences, the ever-present and, crucially, ever-changing dialogue between people and difference made the discussions truly a collective response to inclusion. While empathy was one mechanism for discussion around difference, I realized that similar to teachers’ and administrators’ discussions following “The Dead Dog Story,” negative feelings were also used productively. Discussion was not predicated on the capacity to be empathetic; rather, the practice of discussion was empathetic to everyone and thing emerging in the community. In what follows, I first provide a quick snapshot of three of the focal children described in “The Purple Loop



Story,” which is a series of discontinuous yet connected encounters over several days, and then close by returning to a discussion of emotional labor in the Tigers classroom.

### **Meet Jack**

Jack is a quick-witted and silly three-year-old boy who enjoys building and demolishing Magna-tile towers. Often, Jack will notice a peer that looks sad or is shying away from the group. “Happy! Happy!” he’ll exclaim, and blow them kisses from across the room. He is known across the school as a jokester. I often observed Jack intentionally call adults by the wrong name and delight in their playful, feigned anger. While administrators frequently talked about Jack as the child with an IEP, I learned through interviews with Rachel and Erica that Jack’s family was still going through the process of evaluations and IEP meetings. Jack’s IEP did not begin until after the 2018-2019 school year when Jack turned four. Rachel explained that Jack received services during the 2018-2019 school year through an extended ISFP that allowed him to continue working with the same therapists provided by DC Strong Start, the program that serves children younger than Early Stages.

Throughout my fieldwork, Jack worked with an ABA therapist named Jasmine for 20 hours a week in the classroom. Each morning, I observed Jasmine supporting Jack to sit up and to walk through the classroom. Rachel told me that Jasmine was also there to help when Jack was “headbanging, hair pulling, breaking down, or just not wanting to do anything because he doesn’t want to be doing it.” When Jasmine left at noon each day, teachers took over that role on alternating days. Jack was also learning to use an alternative communication device with the support of a speech therapist and her intern in the classroom. In addition, Jack works with a physical therapist and an occupational therapist throughout the week at Jubilee JumpStart. Rachel told me that Jack had further, weekly therapy outside of school following the Musgatova Neurosensorimotor Reflex Integration (MNRI) method.

**Meet Adelle**

During my fieldwork, I most often observed Adelle, a three-year-old girl, in the drama area, twirling around in a puffy yellow ball gown and well-worn tap shoes. She was quick to remind me, “I am not Adelle, I am Belle. Look at my dress”. Adelle was sensitive to her peers’ emotions and often interpreted aloud a child’s tears or frustration for teachers and other children nearby. During my fieldwork, I overheard her say things to other children like, “I understand that you’re crying. What’s going on?”

This was Adelle’s first year at Jubilee JumpStart, but Mary had already known Adelle for several years through church, where Mary leads the children’s group. In interviews, Mary talked about how she and the other church members really got a “front-row seat” to Adelle’s development. Mary explained that Adelle was once too shy to stand in front of the parish and had difficulty sharing with her peers. In interviews with both Mary and Adelle’s mother, they suggested that being in the Tigers classroom this year had helped Adelle develop socially and emotionally. Mary explained, “One thing that happened for a long time at church is that everyone was just trying to get her to be quiet, so there was a lot of not letting her go ahead and have feelings,” as they could at school. This attitude of allowing and valuing child’s feelings was similar to the practical inclusion that Mary and Bea discussed in interviews about “The Dead Dog Story” and reminiscent of Ms. Michaela’s approach to Etta during transitions and naptime.

**Meet Manuel**

Manuel is one of four Emergent Bilingual children in Prekindergarten at Jubilee JumpStart. Manuel acted like the mayor of the Tigers classroom and was almost always the first child to greet and tour visitors. He was, in fact, the first to welcome me without reservation as a playmate during my fieldwork. When I sat distanced from the group or lagged behind children to observe, Manuel would shout “Hey, come on!” or pull on my hand. While I understood little of his speech, I spent many mornings under his direction, looking at picture books or pretending to

eat the play food he'd prepared in the drama area. Several times, Manuel patiently coached me through drawing an (always disappointing) smiley-faced firetruck in my field notebooks.

One morning on the playground, a child named Lucy drew with chalk on my face. When Manuel noticed, he immediately scolded Lucy and used a wet paper towel to clean the blue color from my cheeks. Manuel was caring and goofy, but his enthusiasm often escalated beyond an "inside voice" or "walking feet." During my fieldwork, I frequently observed Manuel running throughout the classroom, disrupting teachers and children. He was often frustrated over shared space or materials during play and became physically aggressive with peers. As Ms. Michaela had said, "a Manuel" or "a Lucy" was similar to "an Etta," who she felt needed the support of a special education teacher.

### **Episode One: "He just has trouble with where to put his hands"**

On a Friday morning in December, it was lunchtime in the Tigers classroom. I sat on a raised platform a few feet away from the lunch tables, watching the entire class, and taking notes. I watched as Jasmine, with her hands over his, helped Jack spoon beans onto his plate. Suddenly, Jack released the spoon, and beans dribbled across the table. In a flash, Jack reached his right arm up to touch Jasmine's face, behind him.

Jasmine gently pushed his arm back to the spoon and asked Jack, near over excitedly, "Did you want some beans? Let's get some beans!"

Jack immediately reached back toward Jasmine's face, striking her cheek twice, more forcefully.

"Oh, let's get the beans," Jasmine cooed, her voice this time an octave higher.

I watched as Adelle, seated catty-corner from Jack and Jasmine, stopped chewing, and dropped her spoon on the table. Wide-eyed, Adelle stammered, "He hit you!"

"Oh no," Jasmine answered hurriedly, "He didn't hit me. He just has trouble with where to put his hands." Adelle's eyes shifted down to her plate, and she continued eating silently.

**Episode Two: “Does he want the purple one?”**

A few weeks later, I was back in the Tigers classroom, observing after we returned from their winter break. Following the class’ morning meeting on the blue carpet, Ms. Michaela released the children to get their coats and ready themselves for a walk around the neighborhood. As the children rushed about the room, Ms. Michaela pulled out a rope lined with colored loop handles. She began calling children’s names to line up.

Tyler took hold of the first loop on the rope. “I will go first. I will be first, Ms. Michaela?” he asked with a broad smile.

“Yes sure, Tyler, you can be the first here,” Ms. Michaela responded nonchalantly.

“Adelle? You can line up, on the rope,” Ms. Michaela announced.

Adelle reached for the purple loop, and stood patiently, facing the classroom door.

Jasmine guided Jack to stand in the line behind Adelle. Jack bent over and reached to pick up the green loop from the floor but quickly dropped the loop. Jack reached for the loop again and held it in his left hand.

A moment later, Jack reached in front of him and brushed Adelle’s face with his right hand. Jasmine quickly pushed Jack’s hand down to his side, but he immediately reached for Adelle’s face again. He struck Adelle’s cheek twice more before Jasmine could reach forward to push his arm down.

Adelle turned slowly toward them and looked up at Jasmine. “Does he want the purple one?” she asked quietly.

“Oh, he has green, maybe blue or green? He’s still deciding, I think. Oh, he doesn’t know what he wants,” Jasmine rambled, almost laughing.

“I thought he wanted it...” Adelle said, turning back to face Ms. Michaela. “I will have it. I will have purple,” she finished.

These early observations were some of the more emotionally challenging experiences during my fieldwork as I was filled with anger and resentment toward Jasmine. I felt that her descriptions of Jack as “not knowing where to put his hands” or “not knowing what he wants” were cruel and humiliating. In denying Jack’s intent, Jasmine had implicitly denied the possibility that Jack might be expressing a thought or feeling. I felt as if Jasmine’s explanations of Jack to Adelle were a betrayal to Jack, particularly as Jasmine was not only Jack’s daily classroom support but also because Jasmine had known Jack for years longer than the rest of the Tigers classroom.

There were many other instances I observed throughout my fieldwork where, in the ABA approach, Jasmine ignored Jack’s “challenging behaviors” that could otherwise be read as attempts to communicate. As I watched Jack repeatedly ‘hit’ teachers and peers, he seemed increasingly upset by Jasmine and other adults’ willful ignorance. I thought Jack *must have* wanted something, as his behaviors and often, subsequent tears, were not unlike those I observed among children without disabilities as a former preschool teacher and nanny. I worried that if Jack’s behaviors were an expression or communication of desire, frustration, or sadness, that ignoring or limiting the behaviors would not only aggravate his feelings but demonstrate that children too should ignore Jack.

Countless days throughout my fieldwork, I left Jubilee JumpStart at naptime and again later in the afternoon with my head spinning, unsure how to respond (or not) to those instances as a non-intervening researcher and how possibly to write about inclusion where I read such egregious, and frankly, hateful, exclusion. When I interviewed administrators, teachers, and Jack’s mother, I came to understand that each of these informants was thinking and talking together about Jack’s behaviors and communication as well as the ABA therapy in more pragmatic, empathetic, and nuanced ways.

**Episode Three: “I know, I’m not angry with him.”**

A few weeks later, I was sitting on the carpet beside Ms. Gabrielle and Adelle as they played together with Magna-tiles.

“You have a scratch on your nose, Adelle,” Ms. Gabrielle noticed suddenly.

Without looking up from her tile building, Adelle quipped, “I know, Jack did it.”

“Oh, he didn’t do it on purpose,” Ms. Gabrielle said in her usual cheery, soothing tone.

“I know,” Adelle replied softly, “I’m not angry with him.”

Gabrielle raised her eyebrows as her mouth formed a slow smile. She watched Adelle silently before adding another tile to the top of their tower.

When I shared “The Purple Loop Story” in an interview with Mary, she said of Adelle, “my instinct is that she is learning about his way of being in the world and is making room for it. She’s thinking about what he might be saying with his actions, knowing that that’s a way he’s communicating. It also is exciting empathy to hear about in her, to see that she’s thinking, ‘what does he want?’ that he might be communicating.” I thought this empathy was interesting; Adelle still may have wanted Jack to stop hitting her, but she didn’t just ignore him or tell him to stop. Adelle did something more when she spoke to Jasmine, she took responsibility for Jack, for how she was affected by Jack, and how she imagined that she (with the purple loop) might have affected Jack.

Yet while Adelle’s question to Jasmine, “does he want the purple one?” and her comment “I’m not angry with him” seemed empathetic and inclusive, her comments were also contradictory. I wondered why, at lunchtime and in line, it seemed that Adelle thought Jack *had intentionally* hit others, but she suddenly accepted his behavior as “an accident.” I wondered whether this at all had to do with the ways that adults around her interacted with or modeled ways of relating to Jack. It was clear during my observations in “The Purple Loop Story” and following interviews that adults were surprised by Adelle’s responses as different than teachers’ and

therapists'. I wondered if this had to do with adults' and Adelle's (and other children's') differing ideas about Jack, Jack as different, and Jack as disabled. In the following weeks, I was attentive to how adults and children related to Jack's 'hitting' and to similar behavior in other children.

**Episode Four: "He is totally different. It's because of his disability."**

I was sitting on the blue carpet one morning observing Adelle and Elijah play in the adjacent sand table when Manuel walked over to join me, sitting close against my right side.

"Sit with you? Sit with you," he said cheerily, without waiting for my response. I was always excited when Manuel approached me. He made me feel more welcome in the Tigers classroom, and our play broke up the mundanity of daily observation.

We sat together quietly for a moment, both watching Adelle and Elijah. Manuel started to say more, but I couldn't understand him. His words were so slurred together that I couldn't tell if they were Spanish. His tone was directive, and I guessed, given our previous interactions, that he was telling me something he wanted me to do.

Manuel stopped mid-sentence. His eyes and mouth grew wide. He looked surprised, as though he noticed and was confused that I wasn't following his directions.

Manuel stood abruptly and gently pulled my chin to look toward his face as he continued to speak. I watched him silently. I still couldn't understand. My anxiety grew as I worried both about the thoughts of onlooking teachers and about my limited capacity to understand so many informants at Jubilee JumpStart as a monolingual researcher.

Manuel began waving his arms, pointing toward the drama area.

"Drama?" I asked.

Manuel seemed increasingly frustrated. He raised his voice, thrust his arms more forcefully, and moved his face closer to mine. I didn't know how to respond. He began patting me on the back with his left hand while pointing with his right.

"That hurts, Manuel," I said cautiously. "Can you show me what you want?"

He stopped trying to tell me but continued to hit my back.

“That hurts me, Manuel,” I repeated, more steadily this time.

Ms. Michaela saw us on the carpet and came over to help. “Wow, Manuel! No me gusta. No me gusta. Why are you hitting our friend Alex? Are you angry with her? Why are you hitting?” she rapidly fired off questions to Manuel.

I knew from informal conversations that the teachers had been struggling with Manuel’s aggressive behavior all year. I wondered how Ms. Michaela was thinking about his behavior, and whether her intervention also had to do with her feelings around visitors and being observed in her work with children.

Manuel, annoyed, shouted back to Ms. Michaela, but I couldn’t understand what he said.

“Go help your friends clean up,” Ms. Michaela told him. “In drama. Help them clean up.”

Manuel huffed and stomped one foot. He bolted to the drama area and began speedily pulling dress-up clothes from the floor. Ms. Michaela shrugged her shoulders, exhaled slowly, and retreated to the teachers’ desk along the wall by the classroom door.

While the children cleaned, I approached Ms. Michaela to ask about the exchange. “I didn’t understand what he was telling me,” I told her, “Do you understand what he’s saying?” Ms. Michaela told me that he does use both English and Spanish words and that from her experience, she knows that simultaneous use of English and Spanish is common among bilingual students. She told me that sometimes Manuel speaks sentences entirely in English, and sometimes entirely in Spanish sentences that Ms. Bianca can understand. Other times, Ms. Michaela said, no one in the room knows what he means to say.

“Do you know why he was hitting me?” I asked.

Ms. Michaela explained that Manuel was frustrated that I didn’t understand him. She mentioned that Manuel might need a referral for speech evaluation and therapy, but that in her experience, most young English-language learners “work through it.” Ms. Michaela explained



that while it's natural for children to use both languages, their frustration can lead to an increase in "behaviors."

"Is that why Jack hits people?" I asked Michaela.

Ms. Michaela looked blankly at me before turning her gaze to Jack, who was sitting with Jasmine and two speech therapists at a table across the room. She thought quietly for a moment before responding, "No, that's a totally different thing. I don't know a lot about Jack's... he is totally different. It's because of his disability," she explained.

### **Assuming Competence and Meaningful Communication**

Together with and in contrast to Adelle and Jack's encounters in "The Purple Loop Story," I was interested in how Ms. Michaela made sense of behavioral, communicative, and disability difference. Michaela had asked Manuel why he was hitting but didn't ask Jack. Michaela assumed that Manuel's was meaningful communication, and Jack's was not. Michaela attributed Jack's behavior to his disability, but Manuel's to multiple "why's," just as Etta's behavior merited multiple "why's." Ms. Michaela acknowledged potential conflation of Manuel's aggressive behaviors and emotions in a natural process of language acquisition in a bilingual classroom. To me, it seemed Ms. Michaela hadn't extended the same empathy to Jack *because he* was "totally different." Across "The Dead Dog Story" and "The Purple Loop Story", it seemed that Ms. Michaela had separated Etta and Manuel's behavioral differences from impairment and disability, and Manuel's language difference from impairment and disability, but not separated Jack's behavioral, physical, and cognitive differences from impairment or disability.

A core tenet of Disability Studies in Education is assuming competence in communication, rather than assigning inability or deficit to individuals with disabilities (Connor et al., 2008; Danforth & Naraian, 2015). I cringed similarly hearing both Jasmine and Ms. Michaela's accounts of Jack's behavior as meaningless, which seemed to deny that Jack, as a human being with human desires, was actually there, or that his impairments made him not there,

or less human (Danforth & Naraian, 2015). In those moments, Jasmine and Ms. Michaela reproduced already pervasive values of typical communication and able-bodiedness. I worried about the dominant narratives of both Jack and disability difference made available to Jack and to his peers, and wondered whether their ideas about Jack's (non)communication would limit other children from speaking with Jack or understanding him as something other than different.

In interviews following "The Purple Loop Story," I was surprised to learn that all of the administrators, and more surprisingly, Jack's mother, did assume his behavior was meaningful communication. I wondered why she would not only choose, but financially and legally advocate for Jack's right to an ABA therapist in the classroom, if she thought that Jack's behavior was meaningful. In interviews, Rachel explained that she and her husband, as well as the therapists, just wanted to keep Jack and his peers safe. While they speculated together that Jack's challenging behaviors were sometimes out of frustration and other times for a different kind of attention, Rachel explained that they didn't want Jack to continue to communicate in that way. "sometimes I think it's because he wants to engage people," she told me, "but he doesn't know how, because he doesn't necessarily have the words or he just wants to say hi".

**"The ABA is like a firefighter. I've got water!"**

I understood parents', therapists', and teachers' desire to keep Jack and his peers physically safe, but their intervention still didn't sit well with me. I found it equally problematic if they assumed competence in Jack's behavior as communication, to want that behavior to stop. The ABA approach seemed completely contrary to Jubilee JumpStart's pursuit of "the why." While Erica had said that administrators and teachers work to navigate around those therapists, the ABA approach and understanding of Jack seemed to dominate the Tigers classroom.

When I interviewed Annette following "The Purple Loop Story," she told me, "One thing that you want to bring into the room is curiosity, something that really gets turned off if you just try to control the behaviors. I would do something similar to what

this little girl was trying to do, to ask, did you want this? Did ‘such and such; make you unhappy? I would try to see if I could help the child put some words to the behavior and not just try to shut the behavior down.”

I was reminded of a conversation I had with Jubilee JumpStart administrators in Fall of 2018 during my second visit to the school. During my meeting with Mary, Erica, and Catherine, their critique of ABA and suggested tension in the Tigers classroom emerged.

**Mary:** “We’re truly very interested this year in figuring out how best to support the teachers to better understand and work with the children in their classrooms, and as always, we’re interested in the behavior versus why this shows up.”

**Erica:** “Right...one place where you’ll see this is in the pre-k classroom, where the teachers are already rubbing up against an ABA approach.”

**Mary:** “Yes, there’s a child with an IEP in that classroom who came with a lot of resources, but supports come with challenges too.”

**Erica:** “We can seek a solution to a behavior or problem, but we’re interested in processing more, why? What’s happening for the child? It can be hard for teachers, especially when a child is misbehaving. Teachers can feel guilty or embarrassed like they aren’t being a good teacher, and their response is guided by that.”

**Mary:** “Yes! The, ‘I wonder what...’, ‘Show me more.’ Be patient with the child. The ABA is like a firefighter. I’ve got water! I have a fix. Whereas we are, ‘I wonder where this fire is coming from?’”

Mary, Erica, and Annette’s critique of ABA therapy resonates with that of many Disability Studies in Education scholars doing inclusion research, who argue that behavior modification, even for the purpose of facilitating participation, is not politically neutral nor a valuable framework for inclusion because of its foundation in special education (Danforth & Naraian, 2015). Teachers, therapists, and Rachel’s desire to stop Jack’s behavior that they all expressed as a result of his impairment made me think that they wanted to remediate Jack’s

impairment, such that he would communicate normally. Shyman (2016) argued that ABA therapy is means for “either rehabilitating such difficulties that are caused by the disability or curing the individual of that disabling condition in order to attain or approach, normality” (p. 368).

Naraian (2013) cautions us that behavioral modification, rather than “a fundamental reconceptualizing of difference,” is “a strategic cover for traditional, deficit-based practices” (p. 361). As challenging or unwanted behaviors are positioned as Jack’s individual deficit, his ability or willingness to comply becomes central to therapeutic success, rather than understanding and facilitating Jack’s participation *as Jack* (Orsati, 2015; Danforth, 2007; Danforth, 2009).

Therefore, Jack’s already-happening meaningful participation becomes a privilege, as he is not acknowledged as participating unless he displays participation in a particular way (Shyman, 2016).

Rachel told me that she didn’t want Jack to hurt himself or others and that she hoped ABA therapy would help Jack to communicate with his peers. In interviews, Rachel also explored several different reasons that Jack might be hitting. She did not think, as I’d assumed from watching the ABA therapy, that his behavior was meaningless. His hitting to her didn’t always mean the same thing. Rachel said, “Sometimes I think his frustration is that he has all these thoughts and he can’t get them out, and we thought that that was part of the behavior.” My initial fixation on critiquing ABA turned out to not be accurate or important to understanding how inclusion was happening.

**“Inclusion is their job... even if they don’t necessarily want to.”**

In one of our interviews following “The Purple Loop Story,” Rachel went on to say, “I think that the way the adults in his life interact with him is different than the way that some of the kids interact with him... it’s interesting to see that (Adelle) said that and she understood that he’s not doing something on purpose... he might be doing it to get a reaction, but I don’t think he’s doing it to intentionally be harmful. (Adelle) seemed to

think he was doing it because he wanted something, but at the same time... it's not okay for him to behave in such a way... Sometimes he just doesn't know how to be gentle..."

Erica made similar comments about children approaching Jack differently than did adults. In an interview, Erica told me, "I definitely think the children approach him differently than they would a student that doesn't present with challenges, with special needs.... so I think the children... they just learn to almost be additional caretakers." Erica told me that for the children, "inclusion is their job... even if they don't necessarily want to... like it's a duty, almost. Because I think the natural instinct of a four-year-old when they feel slighted is not, like, 'Oh, it's okay!'" Children and adults demonstrated not just a responsibility to talk or play with or to help control behaviors, but a responsibility for how they affected each other. Still, the duty of inclusion was caring for Etta or caring for Jack. Etta and Jack became "jobs" for other students rather than equally meaningful participants.

I wondered why adults regularly interacted with Jack differently than his peers. I hypothesized, similarly to my initial reactions to "The Purple Loop Story," children might be less guided by adults' fixed ideas about and relationships with children, disability, and difference. Though Jack is not segregated from the classroom, he is often throughout the day socially segregated, either by physical distance or by the bodily and social mediation of adults. I recalled during my informal conversation with Ms. Michaela about Manuel and Jack's "hitting" that Jack was sitting across the room with his therapists, which often happened during "choice time" as speech therapists trained Jack to use his AAC device or when his physical or occupational therapists provided therapy. On those occasions, Jack seemed to be their student and not the teachers', even when he was with the group. In our interviews, Ms. Michaela said that all of the teachers felt challenged in the afternoon hours after Jasmine left for the day. Ms. Michaela explained that Jack required one-on-one attention that was not their duty and interfered with the teachers' ability to manage the group or meet other children's needs. Eventually, Ms. Michaela

explained, the teachers worked out a schedule where they cared for Jack in the afternoons on alternating days so that they were not individually overwhelmed or burnt out.

Jack had come to Jubilee JumpStart with this team of therapists, who together with Rachel, explained to teachers and administrators their understanding of Jack's impairment and their ways of working with Jack. I wondered whether their explanations and interactions with Jack guided the teachers' interactions with Jack and the experience of Jack as special and outside of the general education group. In an interview following "The Purple Loop Story", Bea explained, "I kind of think that some of what Jack does is his way of trying to communicate, but the way that his challenges have been described to me by his team and his family is that some of those behaviors are just impulsive, which maybe is why Jasmine said he doesn't know what to do with his hands."

Rachel explained that it was necessary for Jasmine to respond in that way, reasoning, "If every time Jack hit me I said, 'oh Jack that hurt,' it's acknowledging the behavior, which is what we're not supposed to do because then he's getting the attention. But I think from a kid's perspective they're not trained to respond the way we are." It was clear that the therapists, and seemingly, in turn, Jack's parents, had been trained to think about Jack from a special education paradigm. When I shared "The Purple Loop Story" with Erica in an interview, she said, "I think people come in with these positions, like ABA therapists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and that's just the lens they look through. We can look in a much broader range". Collins (2003, 2011) argued that teachers' relationships and interactions with students with disabilities are guided by the teachers' understanding of the child's disability label.

As Ms. Michaela had repeatedly insisted to me following "The Dead Dog Story" that she was "not special ed," I wondered if the apparent expertise of Jasmine and Jack's other therapists not only guided her ideas about Jack but fueled her expressed inadequacy in serving "special ed" students. In our interview, Ms. Michaela said she wasn't a special education teacher. Rather, she was a general education teacher acting as a special education teacher. I thought it was peculiar

that Ms. Michaela said the classroom couldn't be inclusion without a special education teacher. Ms. Michaela didn't see herself as the inclusion educator; rather, inclusion was predicated on special education, as if inclusion did not exist or was an unnecessary accommodation without disability difference.

In contrast, Ms. Michaela quickly cited what she knew about bilingual students to explain Manuel's hitting, even though I knew from our informal conversations in the classroom and on the playground that Ms. Michaela had also worked with many students with disabilities in her previous classrooms. While Ms. Michaela didn't speak Spanish, she didn't say that she was a monolingual or English-only teacher acting like a bilingual teacher. This disparity suggested differences not only in the ways Ms. Michaela and others related to disability and difference, but the ways that the adults in the classroom were positioned by special education services, policy, and ideology.

### **“But who is the child?”**

Administrators and teachers at Jubilee JumpStart may have been critical of ABA, but Mary explained that in order to build an inclusive program, they needed to bring Jasmine into discussion too. In an interview, Mary told me,

“We had a big team meeting of all his therapists and folks here and had a discussion about how to blend ABA and how we work with kids. Because we're not gonna go full ABA, we're not really trained to do it, and it's not our approach, but, each group needed to learn more about how the other was working... it was handled very well in our very normal way of whoever is present, is gonna be in relationship with us. We're gonna be a team. We are a partnership with parents for their child, and we are in partnership with everyone they bring. Whether it's grandparents, therapists, whatever.”

When I interviewed Erica, she told me about recent conversations she had with Ms. Michaela and Jack's team of therapists following their concerns in the classroom. She told me, “Jack's behavior

was different, and his therapists were kind of baffled. I asked Michaela, have they thought about regular four-year-old stuff? He has special needs, but last *week* he just turned four. Have they thought about *Jack*? Just think about a four-year-old..." I asked Erica how it might be productive for her to consider Jack's behavior as that of any four-year-old. She explained, "we know that four-year-olds communicate with their bodies when they can't communicate with their words." Erica then communicated to Ms. Michaela and to Jack's therapists that "we need to step back and take the labels away to really figure out who Jack is. Jack is a jokester. That has nothing to do with his special needs. I don't even interact a whole bunch with Jack, but I know that much. Jack is also a person, not just 'this kind of person' or a 'child with special needs'".

Erica's question, "who is this child?" reminded me of how both Erica and Ms. Michaela talked about Etta when we discussed "The Dead Dog Story." Connor (2017) argued that "a shift from what is wrong with students to looking at why they behave in certain ways allows educators to interact with them more meaningful ways to problem solve, rather than adhere to zero-tolerance policies that flush students out unquestioningly" (p. 230). I realized that there was a productiveness and potential for inclusion in the *not-knowing* why that allowed Adelle, Rachel, Erica, and Mary to consider the many possibilities of why Jack was hitting, many possibilities for what Jack was experiencing. Discussion was shut down when the reason for Jack's behavior was decided in "The Purple Loop Story," whether it was understood as intentional, challenging behavior, or "not on purpose."

### **"Speaking for" and "Speaking with"**

When I shared "The Purple Loop" story with Mary, one of her first reactions was that "It's interesting that she really talks to Jasmine, not Jack." It seemed that Jasmine's and Ms. Gabrielle's "speaking for" only provided one explanation for Jack's behavior, no matter whether their explanation was more or less empathetic. I imagined that "speaking for" limited the ways that children like Adelle could relate to or understand Jack, difference, and disability (Naraian



2008, 2011b). Rutherford (2016) similarly argued that interpretations of students' differences are affected by "the ways in which schools responded to those beyond the norm" (p. 131). As Danforth & Naraian (2015) argued, "the work of teachers is a complex art of ethical interaction, a way of relating to children and teaching them to relate to one another" (p. 73). However, even though Jasmine and the teachers didn't seem to display an "ethic of caring" by way of empathy or curiosity toward Jack, Adelle did it anyway. Adelle continued to pursue "the why." She didn't need to learn that from her teachers.

Several of my informants also implied that "speaking for" Jack was necessary for his participation in the group. At the lunch table and on the rope line, Jasmine responded to Adelle verbally when Jack may not have, and explained his behavior. In an interview, Bea told me, "I kind of feel like maybe what Jasmine explained to Adelle kind of helped her to have some peace with it, to say 'Oh he's not trying to hurt me,' or 'He's not trying to hurt someone.' In that sense, okay, maybe that was an effective approach. But in terms of Jack being able to express what he's dealing with, what he's feeling and what he's trying to communicate, it is kind of a balancing act, trying to not be dismissive of what he's doing with his hands, saying it's something he just doesn't have control over, rather than he's trying to communicate what he wants." Jasmine's "speaking for" Jack seemed to disrupt and soothe Adelle's shock but did not counter the normative believe or change the narrative around Jack's competence or dis/ability.

I recalled other times that teachers and children spoke to Jasmine to ask about Jack, as Adelle had in "The Purple Loop Story." One morning as I was sitting at circle time with the Tigers, Michaela announced that she would be calling on kids who are sitting nicely. Tyler quickly adjusted to sit up straighter, cross-legged on the rug. "I'm sitting nicely!" he insisted. Ms. Michaela nodded in agreement and asked Tyler to go point to the triangle on a piece of paper posted on the wall.

Tyler confidently found the triangle. Ms. Michaela, Ms. Gabrielle, and Ms. Bianca commended him in unison, "good job, triangle!".

Michaela turned to Jasmine and asked of Jack, “Will he be able to point?”

Jasmine scrunched her face as if to consider the question, before responding, “Um, give him like, the circle or the heart.”

“Jack, can you point to the heart?” Michaela asked as Jasmine lifted Jack to stand. Jasmine held the back of each of Jack’s hands, and she supported his arm to point to the heart on the page.

“Good job, Jack! The heart,” the Tigers teachers cheered.

**“If they’re in the room, they should be able to interact with him”**

Other times, I observed children speaking with or asking Jack questions directly. One morning, I watched from across the classroom as Adele approached Jack, who was sitting with Jasmine in the reading corner.

“Someone has to play with me. I have no one to play with. Jack, will you play in the sand table with me?” Adelle asked.

Jack looked up from his picture book but said nothing.

“Would you like to go to the sand table?” Jasmine asked Jack.

Jack turned his head to look at Jasmine and back to Adelle. He sat quietly.

“Sand, or book?” Jasmine asked Jack. After a moment of silence, she asked again, “Sand, or book? Do you want sand or book?”

“Book,” Jack decided, pointing to the page in front of him.

“We’re going to finish reading this book,” Jasmine said to Adelle, adding “Maybe Jack will want to come to the sand table after.”

Similar to Ms. Michaela’s support of Elijah and Etta in Chapter Five, this speaking for seemed to facilitate new encounters between Jack and his peers such that they could all experience themselves, each other, and difference in new ways (Naraian, 2008). Naraian (2008) suggests that adults model and encourage students’ interpretations of the behaviors and intention

of peers with disabilities in order to sustain relationships with those peers. In an interview, Rachel argued, “I think having the therapist with him allows him to participate in the mainstream setting because he has the right support ...making him feel like he is a part of the classroom.” In that sense, in both the ‘sand table’ exchange and “The Purple Loop Story,” Jasmine facilitated Jack’s participation in the group, or at least with Adelle.

During interviews, Ms. Michaela brought up other times that children had asked adults about Jack’s behavior, and told me that the teachers usually direct children to ask Jack. Ms. Michaela felt that adults’ facilitation of discussion between Jack and his peers was necessary for children to understand that difference was okay, and that Jack was okay. That acceptance, Ms. Michaela argued, is inclusion. She explained,

“It’s all a learning experience... You can see if they don’t understand what something means and intervene as an adult and talk to them. They’re kids, and they’re still learning. But for the most part they’ll work it out, or they’ll ask questions. They’re always open to figuring out, wanting to have conversations and understand things. They might say, “why does Jack hit?” or “what’s wrong why doesn’t Jack want to come outside?” Sometimes he’ll go into a tantrum or kind of fall to the ground, so they’ll ask questions about his behavior, and we’ll tell them to talk to him... if they’re in the room, they should be able to interact with him and have conversations with him. That’s part of the inclusion.”

I can’t say whether children in fact “accepted” Jack or difference as they asked him questions, however, their questions, whether directed to adults or Jack, allowed everyone to talk about their experiences of each other and of difference. Teachers often redirected Jack’s behaviors in ways that relieved adults but allowed his peers to continue playing or speaking with him. One morning when Jack’s ABA therapist was absent, Ms. Michaela was playing with Jack in the plastic toy house on the playground at Jubilee JumpStart. In a later interview, Michaela recalled,

“We were playing outside in the kitchen area, and Julia came right over there and played with him. He shut her hands in things multiple times intentionally, so I redirected him,

and he kept playing with Julia. I took advantage of her wanting to come over to play. We played with pretend food, and I encouraged them to share, and we played like that.”

In the toy house, Ms. Michaela wasn't just ignoring or reprimanding Jack. Instead, she had him come into play with his peers. Rachel thought these interactions benefited Jack. In an interview, she told me, “The therapists don't want to acknowledge some of the behavior because we're not trying to draw attention to it, but it's important for him to understand that his actions sometimes make people sad, whether it was intentionally or unintentionally.” She added, “perhaps because it's a little person, like him, he might think about it differently and take it differently, and the way he responds might be different. He might be more likely to stop, or even just take a pause like, ‘oh I don't want to hurt my friend.’”

#### **“To paint an honest portrait of inclusion”**

In an interview in July 2019, Ms. Michaela told me, “We love Etta. We love Jack. That's what's allowed us to stay in this relationship with children whose challenging behaviors we weren't equipped for. But to paint an honest portrait of inclusion, usually in a general ed classroom, teachers can't feel anything. They aren't supposed to... can't feel anything negative. That leads to turmoil”. I was inclined to think that dialogue wasn't possible without empathy, but I realized that their emotional experiences were productive even when the feelings adults or children shared were negative. Erica explained how discussion began when the therapists were “baffled.” discussion was able to continue *because* there was disagreement over why. Moreover, if the ABA therapist, Michaela, children were “empathetic” or thought differently about the meaning of Jack or Manuel's hitting, it wouldn't make it hurt any less. Ms. Michaela explained, “he's hitting you, headbanging, pulling your hair... The ABA therapists deal with those, they're trained, but it's challenging for them too. His therapists say he's their hardest kid. But for what it's worth I think Jasmine just loves him. I think he loves Jasmine.” Likewise, feeling empathy or imagining that we understand Etta wouldn't quiet her shouting or make the

classroom less chaotic. Feelings would still emerge around the accumulative effects of difference. What mattered and what propelled inclusion was whether or not the group engaged with how they were affected by Etta, Jack, and Manuel, their behaviors, difference, and each other.

## Chapter Seven

### Implications for Inclusion Research, Practice, and Policy

#### Discussion vs. Dialogue

Discussion around shared emotional experiences was how teachers and children at Jubilee JumpStart made sense of encounters like those described in “The Dead Dog Story” and “The Purple Loop Story.” By following those stories in fieldwork and interviews, I came to learn something of the many ways that adults and children at Jubilee JumpStart similarly made use, not just sense of, of their feelings together. The classroom practices that administrators and teachers came up with were both discussed collectively and included a consideration of the collective experiences of adults and children: “the why” was not just the many “why’s” of a child or the many “why’s” of a teacher. Those classroom practices that the group brainstormed were also then implemented collectively between administrators, teachers, and children. Everyone continued to discuss how those solutions played out in the classroom. These are not the only reasons that their practice was collective.

One of the many reasons I struggled to understand inclusion at Jubilee JumpStart was because I had at different times in my fieldwork both confused and conflated “discussion” and “dialogue.” I thought that without discussion, people’s subjective experiences could not come into dialogue with each other’s. That wasn’t true. Dialogue always already happening as children and adults experienced each other in The Tigers classroom. The feelings that everyone was having were, in fact, produced in dialogue with each other. Similarly, when Mary discussed how teachers typically didn’t bring up feelings until they escalated such that the child or adult were blamed, it wasn’t that the teacher wasn’t in dialogue with them. It also wasn’t that discussion would have allowed dialogue; it was that without discussion, it was easier to deny the ongoing dialogue.

At Jubilee JumpStart, when discussion was cut off, it was also easy to continue experiencing dialogue the same way. When dialogue was denied, it masked the fact that everyone was stuck in certain ways of relating to themselves, to others, and to difference. With this consideration of dialogue, Etta and Jack were always participants in dialogue, but how? The teacher and adult/child in Mary's story were similarly stuck. Inclusion was a collective practice at Jubilee JumpStart because their ongoing discussions arranged dialogue between individuals that relocated difference from individual children or adults to a product of their relationships. Discussion was one thing that got them unstuck.

The ongoing talk between administrators, teachers, Etta, her mom, and Lidia was a practical and necessary response to inclusion. The PNC visitors was an illustration of dialogue not just because they discussed Etta or how they had been affected by each other in the classroom. When Ms. Michaela discussed her frustration with the PNC Visitors Day with Bea and then with Mary, they engaged with the story within a "new house." Ms. Michaela, Mary, and Bea, with their complex and changing relationships, inevitably affected each other during those discussions. The PNC visitors and surrounding concerns that emerged for each individual were reproduced for discussion and 'picked up' not by the listener alone but through the listener's affective experience of the story *and* the storyteller in a new group. Each individual participated insofar as their emotional experiences were discussed and acknowledged, but also because they were newly experienced together.

Likewise, the ongoing talk between administrators, teachers, Jack, his mom, his therapists, and Adelle was discussion, a practical and necessary response to inclusion. Discussions following "The Purple Loop Story" illustrate dialogue because each person's affective experience of behavior, hitting, was the product of unique relationships. What was inclusive about Adelle in "The Purple Loop Story" wasn't what she felt or thought about Jack. She wasn't in dialogue with Jack any more than Jasmine was in dialogue with Jack. How Adelle was affected by Jack was an impetus for discussion that drew her into different dialogue with

Jasmine, Ms. Michaela, and Ms. Gabrielle, who each had affective experiences of the hitting, and Jack, but also of Adelle, all together in the group.

I argue that this is critical because it is the difference between culturally responsive and culturally sustaining practice. In a culturally responsive practice, they might have stopped at considering the many factors behind what a child is doing and how “all that a child brings” affects the child and teacher together. They might have stopped after finding that “why” and producing appropriate solutions for those perceived challenges.

Their discussion “all that a child brings” and all that the teacher brings were used not to better understand those differences but to use those differences a vehicle for continuing to relate to each other and to difference. This culturally sustaining practice was not an analysis of what had emerged, but rather continually attends to how people and difference are still emerging. Their discussions and solutions were effectively not *about or for* Etta, *about or for* Jack, *about or for* difference, *about or for* disability. Their discussion and solutions were *about and for* the collective experience of everyone at the school. Etta, Jack, difference, and disability are continuing to emerge in dialogue, together in the group, rather than between one person and perceived difference.

While Ms. Michaela suggested that Etta had an emotional experience of the PNC visitors, and Adelle suggested Jack had an emotional experience of the hitting encounters, I can't say whether Etta and Jack were meaningful participants in the *discussion* going on around them. I don't think I need to be able to say that in order to say that inclusion is happening. This is not to suggest that it doesn't matter who can participate in discussions. While being able to participate in discussion and other classroom activity fulfills democratic pursuit of inclusion (Danforth & Naraian, 2015), Naraian (2011b) questions whether speaking necessarily indicates an individual's agency or participation in the classroom. Still, I saw the ways that their classroom practices *did* allow Etta and Jack to participate in new dialogue the way that discussions did for everyone around them. I realized what was necessary was that the group had changed. Therefore,



discussion was not an accommodation, a practical strategy, or a means to an end (inclusion) but a process. Danforth & Narayan (2015) defined inclusion education not as “an *outcome* that must be achieved,” but rather, “a *process* that is always ongoing, continual, and by extension, unfinished” (p. 72).

Therefore, what I initially read as powerful about some of their practical approaches to inclusion were even more promising. I thought about Erica’s practical solution to the accumulative effects of difference, where she came into the classroom to give teachers and children a chance to take a breath. Her “fresh eyes” were not just important because she wasn’t frustrated by the child or more patient such that Etta could calm down. Etta was not a meaningful participant just because she was allowed to have feelings, but because in those moments, Etta’s could be brought into a different relationship. Likewise, when Elijah supported Etta or when teachers directed children to Jack, it was more than facilitating play amongst peers. It allowed for new.

It also didn’t mean that they denied that Jack or Etta had real needs. Etta was still living in poverty. Teachers and administrators still had concerns about Etta’s behaviors and emotional needs. Likewise, Jack still needed physical support in the classroom. But Etta and Jack were not the only people who needed an accommodation to meaningfully participate. But everyone at the school needed a certain kind of support, that is, continually new encounters with each other, in order to be there together.

### **Implications for Early Childhood Education Inclusion Policy**

Beyond accommodating special education services, Jubilee JumpStart, and specifically, the Tigers classroom fulfilled many federal guidelines for high-quality inclusive early childhood education programs (United States, 2015). Evident in Erica and Ms. Michaela’s talk about Etta was Jubilee JumpStart’s ongoing development of instructional strategies for the unique developmental needs of each child. Evident in Erica’s talk about the flexibility of a CBO is their

integration of children's IFSP goals throughout the regular school day alongside non-disabled peers. Evident in administrators and teachers' talk about "the why," especially in their ongoing work with Etta, is Jubilee JumpStart's value of social-emotional development and "appropriately" addressing challenging behavior. The Tigers classroom teachers also facilitated learning opportunities between children with disabilities and their peers. Evident in interview transcripts with both staff and parents was Jubilee JumpStart's commitment to forming strong relationships with parents and children. Evident in their bilingual approach was Jubilee JumpStart's value of cultural diversity and commitment to culturally responsive practice.

However, as illustrated in this dissertation, inclusion at Jubilee Jumpstart was still defined and constrained by federal and local policy and special education service providers. While the Universal Pre-Kindergarten Enhancement and Expansion Act requires schools to "develop a plan that meets OSSE's requirements to ensure inclusion of children with disabilities, in accordance with federal law," Etta and Jack's stories at Jubilee JumpStart show that inclusion isn't always up to the school. Limited accessibility of services through the DCPS-affiliated Early Stages program posed a potential interference to Jubilee JumpStart's compliance with both OSSE requirements the LRE clause of IDEA. While the 2015 federal policy report on inclusion suggests that other jurisdictions similarly misinterpret LRE such that special education services must be provided in public school settings, it also suggests that states should "ensure that after children are identified with a disability, families do not have to choose between early intervention or special education services and remaining in their existing early childhood program" (United States, 2015, p. 9).

This paradoxical policy implementation, as well as disagreement over the goals of inclusion as described in Chapter Three, point to a need to conceptualize and implicate the participation of students with identified differences as part of the process of inclusion, but not the end of inclusion. Solving both would require not placing students on the specificity of their difference, based on cost, or logistics, but rather, serving the needs of everyone who chooses to enroll in that pre-kindergarten classroom.

My work at Jubilee JumpStart also has implications for the definition of general education, special education, and inclusion teachers in policy and practice. In Chapter Six, I discussed how the presence of special education services might have reinforced Ms. Michaela's ideas about herself as a general education teacher. The presence of Jack's therapists and other consultants meant to serve all children in the Tigers classroom not only brought up ideological tensions but reminded teachers of their roles to teach and serve the 'normal kids' not the different kids, who required different professional expertise.

Given that Ms. Michaela did not consider the Tigers classroom inclusive without a *special* education teacher (though this was understandable given popularized and often successful co-teaching models), I explained in Chapter Six that Ms. Michaela also did not see herself as an *inclusion* educator. In addition to reconceptualizing inclusion in federal and local early childhood education policy, we must reconceptualize inclusion education teachers in policy and practice. Beyond changes to pre-service teacher education that disconnects "inclusion" from special education, a step in this direction might be to provide enough funding for adult-child ratios that would support the community's capacity to continually reorganize their classroom encounters, such that special education-trained teachers and general education-trained teachers work to meet the needs of all children similarly.

Policy around funding that effects school staffing, special education service provision, and the placement of children with disabilities must also consider the emotional labor of adults and children in increasingly diverse inclusion classrooms where feelings of in/exclusion related to difference are more likely to emerge. Shared roles among administrators, special and general education teachers, therapists, and children might disrupt 'teachers as a mechanism' for the progress or normalization of children with disabilities or otherwise "at-risk" and reflect Mary's consideration of emotional "capacity" as more than a task of educating and dealing with those children.

### **Lessons on Inclusion Research**

My fixation on what was or wasn't inclusive, whether Etta and Jack were or were not, as Rachel described, "really there," and subsequent exploration of what was or wasn't empathetic, could never have answered how children and adults in The Tigers classroom related to each other. Inclusion was happening at Jubilee JumpStart, but it was difficult for me to see in some of my observations because inclusion could not be one instance; inclusion was predicated on continual change. Empathy was a part of inclusion in the Tigers, but as a process rather than an individual's capacity. I realized that I had long been thinking about capacity as fixed/ in/exclusion as fixed in this way and that the difference in my dissertation study was the ethnographic methods.

I thought that "meaningful participation" was dictated by capacity and willingness to understand others' emotional experiences, no matter how foreign, difficult, or problematic, otherwise resulting in their exclusion from the group. I thought that inclusion required discussion of the emotional experiences of inclusion such that we could understand exactly how ableism happens in classroom practice and make practical changes to the group. Following my shallow 'epiphany' that inclusion at Jubilee JumpStart was more than an epistemology of difference, I thought that I was productively using my feelings in research because I had recognized how they had interfered with understanding the site. I attributed my feelings around "The Dead Dog Story" and "The Purple Loop Story" to my preconceived ideas about inclusion and difference.

Still, I pointed to difference where I assumed a shared experience of individual difference between my informants and me. When I had discussions with my informants about "The Dead Dog Story" and "The Purple Loop Story," a new group was formed. Still, we could point to a difference or differences in "The Dead Dog Story," "The Purple Loop Story," as the property of individuals. I realize now that I was treating "The Dead Dog Story" and "The Purple Loop Story" as narratives to be made sense of, rather than ethnographic data.

I couldn't see anything redeeming about "The Dead Dog Story" at first. At first, I thought the inclusive thing about "The Purple Loop Story" was only Adelle. It wasn't that they weren't

inclusive or progressive; it's that it wasn't as pretty as I wanted it to be. I learned from their practice of dialogue that without the messiness, without the dialogue, we deny the real emotional experiences of difference that we're feeling which is far more troublesome than those first inevitable experiences. To see inclusion at Jubilee JumpStart required looking, as my informants did, beyond what one person (teachers or children) feels or thinks as just one thing that we could possibly interpret, one thing that needs to be overcome. The process of discussion at Jubilee JumpStart helped me to realize that scholars are distracted when we try to understand disability by focusing on the problematic ways adults and peers come to understand children, an epistemology of difference. Inclusion is unreachable if we limit our research and practice to this larger scholarly discussion of bias because, as they recognized at Jubilee JumpStart, those feelings and conflicts are inevitable. Inclusion isn't always perfect the first time, as the administrators reminded me.

Likewise, imagining my fieldwork as a neat analysis of inclusion at Jubilee JumpStart denied my complicated experience of the field. I had somehow forgotten that I wasn't just observing "The Dead Dog Story" or "The Purple Loop Story" encounters in the classroom or in my data. My 'following' "The Dead Dog Story" through interviews and informal conversations likewise was not just a collection of my informants' ideas about Ms. Michaela and Etta or their exchange. I was not only an active participant; I was the research tool. I remembered that I was not only making sense of "The Dead Dog Story" through an affective experience of disability but also other differences, including those between myself and my informants. It wasn't Ms. Michaela who didn't have the capacity; it was me. While ableism may be a violence to children and difference, my understanding school and classroom practices, especially of minority groups, through a conceptual framework of ableism, was equally "epistemological violence" (Teo, 2010).

### **Lessons in Teacher Education: Towards “A Relational Ethos”**

One of the reasons I believe I felt compelled to illustrate ableism in the Tigers Classroom was because of my constant worry about widespread practices that oppress children with multiple differences. I thought that as an instructor of early childhood education, I was obligated to give pre-service teachers a toolbox of critical ideas that might somehow, through their practice, disrupt discourses of special education and emancipate children with disabilities. In class, I often share provocative anecdotes from preschools that illustrate troublesome politics in mundane classroom events. I often feel helpless, *useless*, while doing this work, because I don't think I'm actually affecting pre-service teachers in ways that will carry onto their practice. “*Who would stop these things from happening to the children?*” I worried. I thought that by fixing problematic ideologies in my students, as I naively imagined I had in myself, I was preparing teachers that could combat ableism in schools.

My reliance on ableism, in both research and teacher education, as the only tool to make sense of in/exclusions in classrooms was “epistemological violence,” produced a much more disabling relationship than ableism itself. With this realization, I wondered whether I'd been preparing mostly white, female, middle-class teachers to read oppression onto practices that were or were not oppressive, and therefore limited their ability to relate to children and other teachers, as well as to themselves. Connor (2015) argued that “while it is fundamentally important to change the way most educators have been enculturated to think about disability, this is only half of the job. The other half is giving them the tools to envision, plan for, teach, assess, and reflect upon their inclusive classes” (p. 126).

I realize now that my focus needs to be on adequately preparing students to engage in discussion about the messiness and emotional labor of inclusion. Valente (2019b) argues that “a distinct feature of a relational praxis that it makes it especially *inclusive* is how relationality works purposefully to keep front and center individual and group practices of relating (or not) to one another” (p. 101). Those anecdotes had been productive in our group because of the feelings

they brought up, the disagreement that emerged about the stories, and how we affected and related to each other and to difference during those discussions. Those anecdotes were not productive as a vehicle for progressivism. Practice in emotional dialogue is better preparation than a roadmap for inclusion.

Each semester in my Introduction to Early Childhood Education classes, students write in their pre-service teacher reflection journals about how their past experiences and new emerging experiences in our course will affect their future classrooms. While these students reflect on their experience of our course material and group work, they usually do not discuss experiences of difference that emerge during group work. When feelings of in/exclusion around difference *have* emerged during group work, my practical approaches to inclusion have been misguided by an unshakable individualized understanding of difference.

In the Spring of 2019, I had a student that identified as having Asperger's Syndrome. He openly discussed his related experience in schools with me and with his groupmates. Early in the semester, some of the written requirements of the course proved challenging for him, and we met so that I could help him revise assignments. We continued to meet biweekly, and he shared with me strategies that his past teachers used to support his success in the classroom. I was glad that he could articulate so well what was challenging to him and what pedagogical changes I could make. During our meetings, he also shared with me that he didn't think his groupmates liked him. I made myself a sounding board for his concerns; I asked him to tell me more, and I asked him what I could do to help. There had been considerable visible tension within his group and across our class at times when he interrupted instruction or discussion to argue with me. In those moments, I tried to be patient. Most of the time, I stopped the discussion and allowed him to speak. Other times, I said things like, "I think we should talk about that. Can you wait until they are finished talking?" I didn't want him to feel excluded on the basis of his behavior in class. As I watched the other students' eye rolls and whispers, I also worried about demonstrating a capacity to be inclusive. The physical distance between him and his groupmates steadily grew as the

semester wore on. His groupmates were sweet but noticeably awkward in their conversations with him. None of us talked about the emotional labor of inclusion we were each experiencing.

After the semester ended, I ran into one of his groupmates at a local coffee shop. She told me that she loved the course content, but that working in *that* group was hard. She said that while I'd repeatedly talked about the course as an exercise in inclusion, she finally understood. I had identified with her frustration, given my experience in mainstream classrooms. In the university classroom as in fieldwork, I have been able to deny difference as a product of ongoing dialogue because I have easily and forcefully resisted association with difference. It is no surprise to me that we were *still* talking about including the student with difference.

A few days later, I received my Student Reviews of Teacher Effectiveness (SRTEs) for the class. Students wrote that I listened to their needs and was flexible with deadlines when they needed help. Other students wrote that I facilitated a classroom environment that made them feel calm but challenged and engaged in the work. I saw these comments as indicators that I had succeeded in meeting their practical and emotional needs. They were not indicators of inclusion. As I reached the end of the document, I read a particularly horrifying criticism of my classroom management. One student wrote, anonymously, that:

“Disruptive, rude, disrespectful students were not dealt with. I understand that Alex wants to be inclusive of all students in the class, but there were students whose actions were impacting other students negatively, and they were not addressed. It seems unfair that the learning environment should be impacted negatively for all because one student wants to fight with the teacher during class time. I think a review of proper classroom behavior is in order at the beginning of the semester in order to avoid this in the future, as it really left me with a negative taste on an otherwise very positive experience.”

At that moment, I realized that I had both effectively positioned myself and been positioned as the “normal” students’ savior from difference. The threat of negative student reviews had admittedly fueled my already overwhelming anxiety as a novice teacher around classroom



management and meeting individuals' needs. I was concerned with keeping inclusion "pretty," and denying the messiness really there. My responsibility as an instructor was not only the emotional experience or academic success of my students. I had failed in my ethical responsibility for a "relational ethos," to put everyone on the same side of the problem (Minow, 1985; Valente, 2015).

### **Lessons on Psychoanalysis in Early Childhood Education**

I finally understood then, why Nora told me that teachers' feelings in Work Discussion groups were used as a vehicle. In an interview, Annette suggested to me that in the groups, teachers could talk about experiences in and outside of school that related to what they observed in the classroom. For the analysts, teaching infant observation skills and working with teachers to separate their feelings, or how to "behold," was just one part of the work (Alperovitz, 2018). Then, Annette said, the group could collectively use what they thought and felt about the videos and stories to think about how they each relate to children. Nora said that the Work Discussion groups were never therapy, but in a way were like being in therapy or analysis, because everyone was changing and evolving. In Work Discussion Groups, teachers didn't just "behold" or "scrutinize" their observations; they had shared emotional experiences (Alperovitz, 2018).

Still, both the psychoanalysts and administrators emphasized during interviews that the groups were about infant observation; the therapists and teachers were there to talk about the children. While the psychoanalysts empathized with and valued teachers' emotional experiences, they were not engaged in a collective practice. Psychoanalysts and administrators alike intentionally and unintentionally neglected their own feelings, denying their role in dialogue with teachers and children. After my fieldwork at Jubilee JumpStart, I see promise for inclusion in the psychoanalysts' practice of Work Discussion groups in the coming school year, but different, and perhaps more potential than I imagined in the proposal for my study. There may have been a lasting legacy of psychoanalytic thinking at Jubilee JumpStart, but the school continued a

sophisticated practice of their own; one that the administrators and psychoanalysts ought to make use of.

In Chapter Two, Alperovitz's (2018) example from Work Discussion groups was not just significant because the teacher could see their student differently; though this was initially what I was really excited about. I remembered from interviews that both Annette and Nora said the analysts were not as interested in training teachers how to think about children, but instead facilitating change. I confused this potential for an internal change within the teacher. Teachers' "complaining" about the emotional labor of their work didn't mean that the groups were not productive; they also were not just a necessary space for teachers to 'chimney sweep' such that they were emotionally relieved and could return to do "better" work with children. One of the most productive things that came up in the groups might, in fact, have been that resentment they described emerging. As in teachers and administrators' discussion around emotional experiences I found by following "The Dead Dog Story" and "The Purple Loop Story" this year, the groups also weren't just important for understanding individuals or enhancing powerful interactions between adults and children. Like Erica helping Ms. Michaela and Etta, Elijah's work with Etta, and Adelle's engagement with Jack, Work Discussion groups were inevitably already facilitating dialogue within new relationships.

When I visited Jubilee JumpStart in April and October 2018, and in phone conversations with Mary, it was clear that administrators were contemplating whether the Work Discussion groups were supporting teachers' professional development given their apparent expressed disappointment. The teachers weren't receiving practical strategies for working with children or managing the classroom, so they didn't see the value, while Catherine explained that the administrators did. I wonder whether their consideration of the Work Discussion groups as professional development interfered with the ability of psychoanalysts, administrators, and teachers to use the groups as a collective response to inclusion; as an "emancipatory" project, rather than a "therapeutic" project for the teachers.

Administrators and therapists defined their roles and acted based on their ideas of the teachers' role, which was to develop professionally and personally such that they could better facilitate children's emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Similar to the "progress" discourses around teachers' inclusion of children with disabilities, this work was a therapeutic project on teachers where they are a mechanism for inclusion and for overcoming inequality. This therapeutic project of teachers was in turn to alleviate the effects of institutional, racial and socioeconomic inequality, language and disability difference, and exclusion on children.

While administrators' and analysts' pursuit of "the why" and commitment to discussion produced new dialogue, lifting the problem of difference away from the child, they did *not* put children or themselves on the same side of the problem. Teachers were still the solution. Read in this way, what led to tension with Etta's mother following "The Dead Dog Story," like the tension between Pre-K teachers and parents of the "energetic boys" in the past, was a volley of the solution between teachers and parents, school and home, public and private. While it might appear more progressive to put the solution on teachers than to blame parents in traditionally marginalized communities, difference was no less individualized, internal to specific children and groups. Moreover, teachers' emotional labor was simultaneously individualized and multiplied. While at Jubilee JumpStart, perhaps unlike many schools, teachers' emotional labor was recognized, it was not always shared.

The "emancipatory" potential of Work Discussion groups, I believe, is the group itself. The potential I see now is not what the analysts can bring to offer the teachers (e.g., their experience, or their brains). The analysts' potential is not their imagined ability to incite change in teachers or in relationships between teachers and children. The analysts' potential, I surmise, is the introduction of more difference, more singularities, in an already meaningful group, where much new is bound to emerge. To discount resentment between administrators, teachers, and psychoanalysts as interfering with professional development, inclusion, or emotional experiences wasn't true to Jubilee JumpStart's pursuit of "the why" or their already demonstrated capacity for

inclusion. While exploring those tensions distracts from their goal of infant observation, these discussions might allow everyone to share the emotional labor and responsibility of inclusion, and to take on new positions that would inevitably change their lives with the children.

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