

Rethinking the position of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator in supporting teachers in Flemish primary education through a diffractive methodology

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On the front page is an image inspired by the ‘Visitor’ sculpture of the Belgian artist Guido Deleu. It was a tradition of Elza, one of the SENCOS, to give herself a Visitor sculpture whenever she achieved something great. I like the idea of pausing to celebrate our success. I want to dedicate this image to the four SENCOS whom I was able to work with so intensively. Elza, Gratiennne, Lieve and Mimi – I am so grateful that I have been able to work with you for the past ten years. You gave me the immense trust of doing a collective biography, you helped me when students needed to have a place for their practical training, and also helped when the Dutch colleagues came and I had (again) put the wrong date in my diary. The four of you are a gift! I hope this work inspires a lot of others like you in making a difference in the world. I also want to thank the principals and colleagues of the SENCOS who provided space so that we could work together.

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It feels good

It feels round

It already opens, to something new...

Inge

Gent, 6 February 2018



This PhD is dedicated to Kobe; a wise boy with glasses, who looked diffractively at the world.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The job is not done...

In September 2017 I attended a meeting about the new support model¹ for children with special needs that had been introduced by the Flemish government. The new legislation was a continuation of the M-decree (Measures for students with educational needs) (Codex Vlaanderen 2014), whereby every child with special educational needs who is able to follow the general curriculum, if necessary with reasonable accommodation, can attend a regular school. In the long term, the purpose of the M-decree is to reduce referrals of children to segregated settings. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information about this major change, whereby support is no longer exclusively child centered, but will focus more on the school team, extending their competences to guide students with special educational needs. After the explanation one question and concern came after the other, it was clear that the evening was too short to address what was in the minds of the students, parents, teachers, support workers, principals etc. I will give a selection of some of the responses in this sometimes overheated debate:

“How do you manage this in a class with 30 students? I already have four children with dyslexia, one with autism, four non-native speakers. I need much more support. I’m not a wizard.” (Teacher).

“I’m fully convinced that inclusive education is not the right approach for my child. My son is 15 years old, he cannot walk independently and has an IQ of 47. You can imagine he has a lot of problems with mathematics and reading skills. I don’t want him to be the subject of bullies or constantly ignored by the teachers.” (Parent).

“Inclusion is a beautiful utopia, but is there scientific proof that we have to go this way?” (Principal).

“The M-decree is the decree of misery. The cases in regular education become more and more complex. We will need more experts and recourses to make sure that a child can learn.” (Student guidance counsellor).

¹ From September 2017, a new support model came into force which enclose the former Integration Educators (‘Geïntegreerd ONderwijs’ - GON), Inclusive Educators (‘Inclusief ONderwijs’ - ION) and support workers (‘waarborgcoaches’ - these were support workers who were paid from the budget that came available when more children made the transition from special to regular education).

“Our school receives less support because teachers already offer a lot of care in their everyday practice. Is this the reward of our years of commitment to work already on an inclusive pathway? Teachers feel abandoned and not supported by the government.” (Special Educational Needs Coordinator).

The comments above demonstrate that inclusive education is a topic that generates a lot of feelings and questions both at the micro level (Will the child be accepted by the class group? Will s/he learn and how this is accomplished?), at the meso level (Will the level of the class decrease? Who has what responsibility? What expertise is important?) and at the macro level (Will special education be abolished? Is it affordable or is it a savings measure?) (Mortier, De Schauwer, Van de Putte, & Van Hove 2010). The list of questions can be much longer and the questions do not seem to change over the years.

For me these questions contrast with my own experiences over the past fifteen years. I have worked alongside children who are categorized as different/disabled and their families and allies, who have already followed a path of inclusive education. Some of them I know very well through my position as a support worker in kindergarten, primary, secondary school and higher education. In my experience, the children were not just present but were actively involved in whatever was going on (Biklen 1992). For example, Anneleen who felt connected with her peers; Bastien, whose teachers helped him to explore his desires, through which his dream of opening an art gallery is coming closer; Sofie’s teachers challenged her and acknowledged her desire to learn and guided her on a creative way through university. But belonging and participation didn’t happen everywhere, at every moment and automatically. They all experienced exclusion, felt overprotected, were seen as a person with a nonviable life, with difficult and sometimes outrageous parents, etc. It was sometimes a real ‘battle’ to create opportunities so they could become more included, and often there were small victories. Through these experiences I’ve become aware of how inclusion/exclusion matter in the lives of those categorized or perceived as different/disabled. To position myself as someone who takes the side of those who are positioned as having less power does not mean that I’m immune to the processes of exclusion and abjection. We all struggle with the forces of normalization, as I came to understand through my research (De Schauwer, Van de Putte, Claes, Verstichele, Davies 2016b), where I questioned my own dogmatic ideological position as the ‘right-minded’ one, who could not always put herself outside the hegemony of normativity.

It is within this challenging context that inclusive education must be implemented. Different social and political forces are simultaneously at work; for many people the M-decree and the new support model is ‘too little, too late’, for others it’s going all ‘too fast and too abruptly’ (De Schauwer, Van de Putte, de Beco 2017a). Inclusion is an ongoing, unfinished process, which is continually marked by old and new struggles and which requires constant maneuvering (Naraian 2017).

In the next section I will give insights on how this PhD research evolved through using a poststructuralist/new materialist approach where collaborative work was fundamental.

Several assemblages of co(laborative) learners

Research does not take place in isolation, instead it's always entangled with practice, with theory, with concepts, with other/previous and future research, with authors, with multiple assemblages. I found it helpful to present my research using Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome to indicate that research is not linear: *'A rhizome has no beginning or end, it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo, ... the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance... the fabric of the rhizome is conjunction, and...and...and...'* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 27). It's difficult to say what is the beginning and what is the end of research; boundaries are blurred and merge into one another. This is also the case for my PhD. Does it begin with the work during the teacher training where I developed a support concept together with Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) or does it begin after discovering poststructuralism/new materialism and reading the ideas of Davies, Butler, Shildrick, Barad? And how does it intra-act with the other work that I'm doing: the teaching, the professional development of teachers and SENCOs, the support of inclusive teams, and especially the collaborative work with my colleagues in the Disability Studies (DSE) group and the collective biography group? In the beginning, it looked like different and separate projects: the collaboration with the DSE group, the collaboration in the collective biography, and the collaboration with the SENCOs. But they are intertwined and it is through a process of mutual entanglement that knowledge is constructed; each member of the group can be understood as a collaborative learner (Lenz-Taguchi 2011).

In the next part I give an overview of those different collaborative groups and how they affect each other. I begin with the DSE group, a group of researchers united under the banner of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) at the University of Ghent (Van Hove et al. 2008), also known as the 'Jardin Bohemien group'. In the past five years this research group was worked with Professor Bronwyn Davies who brought in the work of Butler, Deleuze, Barad, and Bennet; and introduced poststructuralist concepts like difference/differentiation, normativity, intra-action; and she introduced the methodology of collective biography. A number of colleagues in the DSE group participated in collective biography workshops with Prof. Davies, and they are all part of the collective biography group. The last collaborative assemblage I will discuss is a group of four SENCOs with whom I have a long-term working relationship.

Disability Studies Group Ghent

My roots are grounded in disability studies, and I'm a member of the Disability Studies (DSE) group Ghent. This group has strong connections and works very closely with persons who are labelled as different/disabled and their advocates. As a result, I have dozens of stories that demonstrate the complexity and disorderliness of life and that show binaries (able/disabled, autonomous/dependent, etc.) can be disrupted (Van Hove and De Schauwer 2015). The lived experiences of children who are perceived as different/disabled and their families are a catalyst in my/our work and in my/our research (De Schauwer 2011). The DSE tried to build an environment in which disability studies was a theoretical framework, AND a way of being AND a network group (Van Hove and De Schauwer 2015). DSE also feels like my 'professional home' where I found *'compagnons de route'* to contest the dominance of categorization and discriminatory practices.

Initially, our encounters and research focused on insider-perspectives, barriers in the social and structural environment, and what works to break down those barriers. Under the influence of conceptual work, such as post-structuralism/new materialism, the focus expanded to include ethico-onto-epistemological questions about our cooperation with people who are categorized as different/disabled and their families, for example: 'How do we recognize the humanity of those with a disability when no one else does?' (Van Hove et al. 2017).

This opened up a new space in which to define *'what disability studies meant in our assemblage'*. Through our encounters, various concepts emerged based on our understanding of disability studies. We created the acronym; CORVINA, whereby every letter refers to a theoretical concept (Context, O (support), Relational (ethics),

Voice, Intersecting spaces/interdisciplinary, Normativity, Activism)². These concepts are neither idealized statements that prescribe what a disability scholar should do, nor are they hierarchical, and they can't be separated from one another. To examine Disability Studies in the context of this PHD, I want to highlight two of them, relational ethics and activism. Firstly, 'dialogical encounters are a crucial component in our research, education of students and our practice' (Claes 2014, 64). Disability Studies invites us to become careful and active listeners, where 'listening is about being open to being affected' (Davies 2014, 1). It's an ethical activity in each moment, to listen to people who are categorized as different/disabled and who want to participate, and to decide how we can support them in enhancing their chances of belonging (Van Hove et al. 2008). We cannot be bystanders who take up a neutral position; instead, relational ethics leads to activism in a way that expands our capacity for thought and action, and that enables the transgression of binaries.

We came to CORVINA due to the influence of the collective biography groups, the SENCO group, and the assemblages that the DSE group was involved in, which in turn led to a different way of doing research and collaboration in these practices.

The Collective biography group

As mentioned above, the DSE group got the opportunity to work closely with Prof. Bronwyn Davies. She introduced the Collective Biography methodology (Davies and Gannon 2009), in which we worked with our own memories. Looking at processes from inside helped us make 'visible and revisable the everyday discourses through which people and events emerge in all their multiplicity' (De Schauwer et al. 2017b). Together with various colleagues of the DSE group I participated in four collective biography workshops facilitated by Prof. Davies.

In our work, we were/are searching for possibilities to think differently about difference. Difference is often conceptualized in terms of categorical differences. Categorisation feeds into thinking of disability-as-a-deficit, which is referred to as the clinical/medical model (Gabel 2005), where the difference lies in the other who has been categorised. Deleuze offers another approach to difference in which difference comes about through a continuous process of becoming different, of differentiation (Davies and Gannon 2009, 17). It's a matter of how things become different how they evolve beyond the boundaries of the sets they have been distributed into (Davies and Gannon 2009, 17); in this way of thinking difference can become a productive force³.

The collective biography workshops were used to explore the ethico-onto-epistemological nature of our encounters with difference/disability, utilizing various authors and concepts. The first collective biography workshop was centered around 'difference and recognition' (Davies et al. 2013); the second workshop mobilised Shildrick's provocative concept of 'monster' (De Schauwer et al. 2016b; De Schauwer, Van de Putte, Davies 2017b); the third focused on the intersections between disability and gender (De Schauwer, Van de Putte, Blockmans, Davies 2016a); and in the last workshop we used the Foucauldian concept 'heterotopia' (De Schauwer, Van de Putte, Davies 2017b). The profound questions, the concepts, and the memories were several times connected with our daily, pedagogical and personal practices.

Working with Prof. Davies and the participation in the first collective biography workshop around 'difference and recognition' was at the beginning of my PhD. I was inspired early in the process by the poststructuralist/new materialist concepts and the methodology of collective biography. In this way, it became part of the PhD assemblage, and the collaboration with the SENCOs.

2 Every concept is entangled with other concepts, authors, researches and practices.

3 In this conceptualization of difference lies the motivation to choose the linguistic device of joining difference with disability because the term disability as a category is problematic in itself. However, the term cannot be ignored as it's needed for the political work to establish the rights of people with disabilities (De Schauwer et al. 2016b).

The SENCO group

The Flemish government is seeking to increase levels of inclusive education. For example, the ‘Equal Opportunities decree’ (Gelijke Onderwijs Kansen: GOK-decreet 2002) created the function of a ‘zorgcoördinator’ [Special Educational Needs Coordinator, SENCO]⁴, to support teachers in changing their practice. The SENCO is an internal support worker whose main priority is the creation of equal opportunities for all children in the context of regular preschools and primary schools. The SENCO is part of the educational assemblage and a key figure in the process of developing an integrated support system for children with special needs. This stakeholder will be the focus of my PhD to do research in the practice of inclusive education.

Over the last ten years I collaborated with a group of four SENCOs; Elza De Smet⁵, Lieve Van Causenbroeck⁶, Gratiëne Van Landegem⁷ and Mimi Van Kerckvoorde⁸. The four SENCOs work at different preschool/primary schools, they all have a teaching degree, two of them have a full-time position as a SENCO, and the others combine SENCO responsibilities with a teaching job. We established a close working relationship through our collaboration in both professional development and research projects (Van de Putte et al. 2010).

Before I go deeper into the collaborative work, I will describe the SENCOs and bring their practice to life.

Narrative portraits of SENCOs

In the corner of her office sits Ryan. He’s reading a comic book. There is an agreement with his teacher, that when he feels frustrated and gets angry he can go to the SENCO, to Mimi — she has a good relationship with him. He has dyslexia and he finds dyslexia difficult to handle. Ryan can cool down and explain his frustrations to Mimi. Most of the time he goes back to his class after one hour. Meanwhile Mimi is teaching to a group of five children of the 5th grade who have individual goals for mathematics. (Observation of Mimi).

“I have a strong opinion about education. I do think about education, about the school and what that should look like, the future perspective, things in the long term. For example: Abdel doesn’t come to school on a regular basis and has very bad school results. The guidance counsellor directs an assessment to verify that he has cognitive impairment. From family services we got information that the mother has the Munchausen by proxy syndrome and feigns that father is ill. She involves the children in the care of him. So, it made me think about how fast we might have put a label of learning disability on him and to wonder whether we would do this if his name was Mike or Andreas? (Elza).

“This morning the new teacher Catherine arrives at my office. She tells me: ‘Mansoor has become crazy. He’s screaming and crying and I’m not able to calm him down’”. So I go with her to the classroom. In the meanwhile, almost all children are crying. Catherine is already the third teacher since the beginning of the school year. Mansoor is from Afghanistan and has been traumatized. He needs a lot of security. So, I stay with Mansoor and ask him if he would rather go to teacher Els, his teacher from last year. Mansoor stops crying and grabs my hand and together we walk to teacher Els. I say to teacher Els: “You have an assistant for the day”. Els welcomes him very warmly. I go back to Catherine and tell her that she shouldn’t take it personally but we have to think how she can build a relationship with Mansoor.” (Gratiëne)

4 I chose to use the term SENCO instead of the literal translation of care-coordinator because the term SENCO is recognizable in international context, and a care-coordinator is more used in the field of health care.

5 Stedelijke Freinetschool ‘Groen Drieske’, Sven Onghenae (Principal)

6 Onafhankelijke Freinetschool ‘De Klaproos’, Liesbeth De Dene (Principal)

7 Stedelijke Kleuterschool ‘Ter leie/ Bollekenskindertuin’, Marleen Cloetens (Principal)

8 Leefschool van het Gemeenschapsonderwijs ‘De Oogappel’, Hilde Struyvelt (Principal)

“The government gave every school a toolbox around ADHD, we decided to send it back, because it reduces children to their labels. The ‘dos and don’ts’ are not helping, it’s in the interaction between teachers, parents and me that we can find solutions. Like this morning I had a very good conversation with teacher An. She had the feeling that she had a class with very busy kids and sometimes aggressive behavior. Instead of giving her some advice I focused on how she looks at the situation. I listened and I was able to give her recognition for the difficulties, but also for the fact that she is a good teacher. Afterwards she (not me) formulated what kind of actions she would take to change the situation in the class.” (Lieve)

In these small narratives we see the dominance of diagnoses, labels and certain educational initiatives that are used for children who deviate from the ‘norm’, to correct, categorise, ‘fix’ them and normalise them (Masschelein and Verstraete 2012). As a result, the function of the SENCO, and the support they provide, is deeply embedded in deficit views of difference/disability, whereby the specialist has the knowledge of what is lacking and how this absence might be fixed through comprehension of additional requirements (Veck 2012).

In the last ten years a greater understanding of the limits of the medical model, or assessments that ignore context and put students in boxes, has been developed (Cosier and Ashby 2016). The practice-based assessment model, Assessment for Intervention (AFI) (Handelingsgericht diagnostiek/Handelingsgericht werken) has had a big impact on Flemish education (Pameijer 2017). It’s a widespread model that aims to bridge the gap between assessment and intervention (Van de Putte and De Schauwer 2015). It reconceptualises deficit thinking, so that ‘what’s wrong with this child?’ becomes ‘what are the needs of this child/teacher/parent?’, and it enables the labeling of the child to be transformed into the identification of the needs of an individual (Veck 2012). In the narratives of the four SENCOs we recognize that the SENCOs play an important role in identifying the category of children with special needs, *and* they work toward a more holistic understanding of the children that are perceived as different/disabled. Children are seen in their specific context and network. There is a greater tendency to focus on the barriers within social practice and the creation of equitable access. However, the problems are still individualised and the solutions tend to be as well. In the narratives we see a responsiveness to students, parents, colleagues, etc. above administrative assignments. Sometimes they are locked up in present crises and obstacles that need to be addressed. The narratives also reflect the discourse of professionalism where the SENCO is the ‘expert who knows everything’, master in behaviour management, provider of a cooling-off period for children who are upset, remedial teacher, collaborator, administrator, etc. (Cowne 2005). Over the years the role of the SENCO has evolved, from the ‘remedial teacher’ working with individual children or small groups, to more of a coordinator role (Agalotis and Kalyva 2011; Szwed 2007). Together with the principal they have a unique position in the regular school working as an internal supporter alongside colleagues. They work in the intersecting space of education, disability, welfare, etc., and work together with different actors (special educators, guidance counsellors, social workers, police, etc.). In all four of the schools, parents could be found in the hallways before and at the end of the day, and were present for various projects. The schools all work collaboratively with parents, who are not seen as passive actors of received services. They are all deeply aware of socially unjust practices that disadvantage many learners and they actively seek to push back. This is also due to the longitudinal training the SENCOs followed, where they had access to reflexive and critical practices that might enable them to see the contradictory discourses acting on and through them.

The narratives make clear that the SENCOs work in challenging contexts with different, sometimes conflicting, discursive practices. I think it’s significant to mention that the four SENCOs have all been in these positions since the function was created by the government in 2003. In many cases, the function of a SENCO is not stable and continuous (Nauwelaerts 2007; Struyf et al. 2012). The motivation to work with this group of SENCOs is not based on a dogmatic set of beliefs, or because the SENCO’s are exceptional and extraordinary persons, but because there was movement in their practice, movement that troubled the borders and practices of categorisation. Over the years my position in relation to the SENCOs has changed. Initially I was their teacher and supervisor in a long-term professionalisation process; and this has evolved towards a position of someone who no longer has fixed answers (Laws 2011, 8). Practices at their schools have also changed, for example another principal, another school, ensuring that we always had to rethink how this research remained meaningful in

these dynamic contexts. During the six years of the research we worked closely together and did exciting new things like the collective biography workshop and the writing of the script play. At some points in the research the SENCOs became more distant because they had a lot on their plates. In other moments, I was further away from the SENCOs, for example, when I was struggling with the literature, with my position as a researcher, with doing things differently; but in the end we always found space where we intra-acted, and where every member became different from herself (Davies 2014).

In the previous paragraphs the three different groups of co(laborative) learners are presented. It's impossible to reflect on the influence that each collaborative group had on how the research evolved. That would present the collaborative groups as distinct and separated from each other and the research process as an observable process, or as having a preconceived plan rather than an entanglement of intra-acting encounters. Those encounters produced movement in the research. In the following part I will delve into four of those movements; the ethico-onto-epistemology, thinking in terms of entanglement, thinking with theory and the movement to gradually incorporate the non-human in the research assemblage.

Ethico-onto-epistemology

The work to transform, destabilise and deterritorialise the ideas and thoughts about children who are categorised as different/disabled runs as a thread through the different co(laborative) learner groups. So the question then is: how can this research on the practices of the SENCO be put to work to challenge the exclusion and the abjection of children who are perceived as different/disabled? How can this research contribute to the creation of a world of ongoing differentiation? How can it help make the inclusion assemblage more powerful? We take up these questions in the PhD research following Barad's (2007) notion of research as 'an ethical encounter'. The participants in the study, including myself, are not outside observers of the world but are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity. This means that each action we are engaged in is an ethical matter (Davies 2014), where we all have responsibility to act. So, if we are interested in social justice how then shall we 'understand our role in helping constitute who and what comes to matter' (Barad 2007, x). The aim of this research is to look for a positive way out, to rethink current practices so we can reconfigure the world such that children who are perceived as different/disabled have a legitimate place. Ethics then is no longer 'a form to fill in', or a procedural step in a linear chain of the research, rather it's entangled with the onto-epistemological conditions of the research and connects 'with practicing and acting with-in-this world' (Haraway 1988, 576).

Thinking in terms of entanglement

Through the encounters in the collaborative learning groups, we experienced being caught in the webs of social practice and we learned to participate in new discursive practices (Davies 2014). The SENCOs, who are the focus of this PhD, navigate their way through a complicated system of education, with various discursive practices that are working on and through them. This insight shifts the research from seeing the SENCO as an individual, separate identity, who exists independently of their context, to thinking in terms of entanglements. Entanglement suggests that the very ontology of entities emerges through relationality (Titchkosky 2011). This relational ontology has consequences for the PhD research, moving it away from the individualised liberal humanist subject toward a post-structural/new materialist conception of the subject – a subject-in-relation (Davies and Gannon 2009). The primary focus of the research is not about the experience, competence or tasks of the SENCO, rather it focuses 'on generating *savoir*' (Foucault as cited in Davies and Gannon 2006) about the discursive practices that the SENCO is constituted by. The ethico-onto-epistemological knowledge emerges throughout the research encounter and disrupts our thinking-as-usual. So the research is not about finding linear cause-effect relations but rather a more profound understanding and rethinking of concepts and practices, and of making new connections. The concepts that came up through working collaboratively were agency and responsibility (see chapter 2 The context of the SENCO in Flemish education).

These became the two key concepts used in this PhD:

- How might we rethink the concept of agency?
- How might we rethink the concept of responsibility?

In order to think differently, Barad (2007) inspired us to think diffractively, ‘reading insights through one another in order to build new insights’. This means that the methodologies we use in the PhD research — collective biographies and a diffractive script — do not produce reflections of an imagined real and stable world (sameness), instead this research tries to explore the complex movements where difference is made (diffraction) (De Schauwer et al. 2017b), and those interference and unpredictable patterns produce different knowledge (Mazzei 2014). In this way, the diffractive methodology becomes a tool to destabilize dominant ways of thinking and move beyond the binary of categorization and abjection of children who are perceived as different/disabled.

Thinking with theory

However, it’s not a simple task to see, think and do differently. Allan (2007) suggests that it is necessary to use theory and theoretical concepts in order to develop new orientations towards knowledge and to transform normative ideas and practices. Throughout the PhD research we put different philosophical concepts to work in order to produce difference, to get into the new. Ideas, concepts and practice affect each other, and interfere with each other (Davies 2014). This entanglement disrupts the binary between theory/practice and thus, impacts on the structure of the PhD research. This research does not follow the conventional, traditional order of ‘theory, methodology, data, analysis and representation’, in which all elements are isolated, distinct and appear in a pre-determined sequence (St. Pierre, Jackson, Mazzei 2016, 105), instead theory is integrated and entangled throughout the research. The following section outlines the structure of this thesis, I give an (visual) overview of the different concepts used during the PhD research and their entanglements.

Material – discursive turn

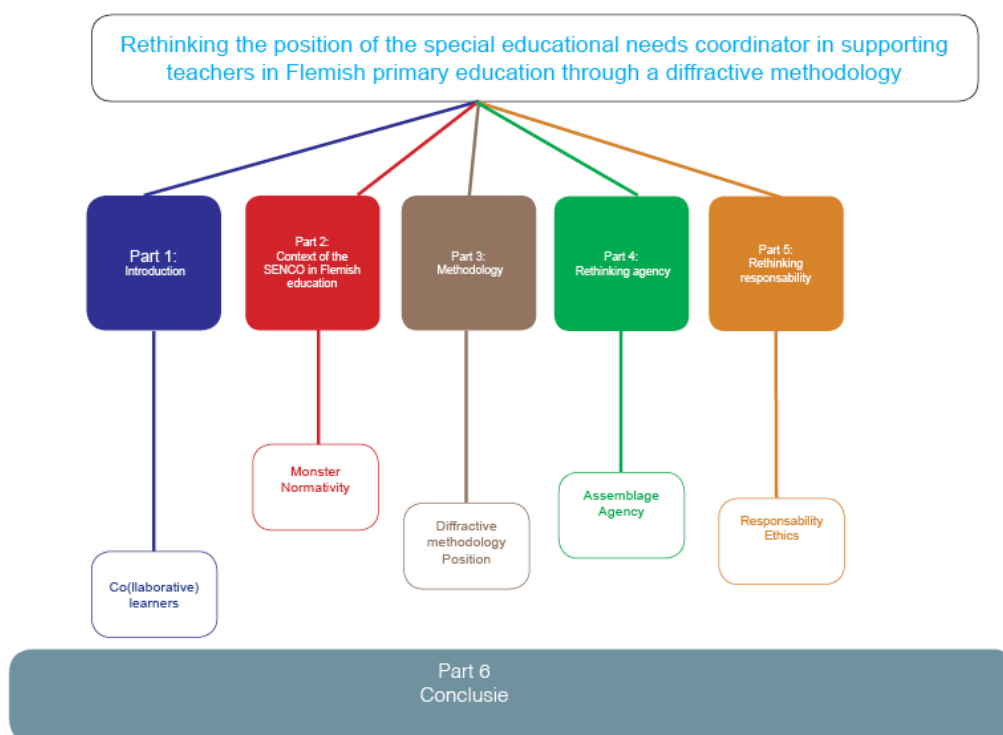
In line with the post-structuralist/new materialist perspective we shifted our attention in the co(laborative) learning groups towards an intra-active relationship between all living organisms and the material environment such as things, artefacts, discourses, values, space and place, etc. (Lenz-Taguchi 2010). We came to the understanding that non-human elements are always present (Ulmer 2017), and can be ‘understood as being part of a performative production of power and change in intra-action with other matter or humans’ (Lenz-Taguchi 2010, 4). The material turn became gradually incorporated in the PhD research in which we have used images of a SENCO’s workplace and worked out a diffractive script where we paid attention to the relational, material entanglement. We took up the challenge of experimenting with our methodologies in order to make the discursive and material practices visible, to expand the dominance of language, to integrate multiple perspectives, and to engage in thinking differently.

This introduction gives an insight into how the PhD research evolved through the research in the DSE group and collective biography groups: ‘the point is to become different from ourselves, to evolve creatively in the spaces that open up, where new modes of thinking and practices can evolve/become’ (Davies 2014). It will need more time, and research that enters this space of poststructuralism/new materialism and collaborative ways of working together, to see what more it is possible to move differently and to reconfigure. (PhD) research is not a solo project for one person but an assemblage of co(laborative) learners. This is another attempt to prevent myself from being the same, doing the same over and over again.

Outline of the PhD⁹

In the previous part I gave an overview of how the work in the co(laborative) learner groups are intertwined. This collaborative work resulted in several different papers. The papers that came out of the work with the collective biography group are linked with this PhD, and they make significant contributions in opening up new ways of thinking and doing research. To respect the collective process and authorship, they are not included in the different chapters but can be found at the end.

A diffractive research project does not have the linear and the traditional structure with consecutive and clearly distinct, separate chapters. It does not start with an exploration of the literature, methodology, data, analysis and then representation. Instead, theory is integrated and entangled throughout the research. In our research encounters we picked up different concepts from Deleuze and Guattari, Shildrick, Davies, Bennet, Barad, etc. to put them to work in order to produce difference, to produce something new. In the following visual I highlight the main concepts that are used in the different parts of the PhD:



In chapter one, I give an insight into how the PhD research evolved using a poststructuralist/ new materialist approach where collaborative work was fundamental. In this part I introduce the three co(laborative) learner groups, Disability Studies Group Ghent, the collective biography group and the SENCO group.

In chapter two I examine the current educational landscape with all the different discourses at work. The SENCO is part of an educational assemblage where the ambivalent processes of abjecting, and reclaiming the monstrous Other, and the process of normalisation are all at work. In this chapter I give an overview of the work, the different responsibilities and various positions of the SENCO and see how the SENCO (like every other actor in the educational assemblage) is positioned as the individual who is responsible for the transformations they need to accomplish. Out of this chapter the two major concepts arise, agency and responsibility, which we collectively rethink.

⁹ The chapters of the PhD consist of papers that have been submitted or published. Because they were originally stand-alone documents, some of the content may be repeated.

Linked paper De Schauwer, E., Van de Putte, I., Claes, L., Verstichele, M. and Davies, B.(2016). ‘Shil-drick’s Monster: Exploring a New Approach to Difference/disability Through Collective Biography.’ *Disability & Society*, 31(8), 1098-1111.

Linked paper De Schauwer, E., Van de Putte, I., Blockmans, I., Davies, B. (2016). Intra-active production of normativity and difference. *Gender and Education*, 1-16, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1259463>

In chapter three the methodology is presented as an assemblage, and an overview is given of the intertwined project of the co(IIaborative) learner groups. In poststructuralism/new materialism the subject and the object of the research are brought much closer together. The researcher is no longer invisible in the work of the research. In this chapter I look at my own position throughout this process and outline the diffractive methodologies - collective biography and diffractive script writing.

Linked article: De Schauwer, E., Van de Putte, I., Davies, B.(2017). Collective biography: using memory work to explore the space-in-between normativity and difference/disability. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 24(1), 8-19.

Linked article: De Schauwer, E. , Van de Putte, I., Van Goidsenhoven, L., Blockmans, I., Vandecasteele, M. and Davies, B. (2017). Animating disability differently : mobilizing a heterotopian imagination. *Qualitative Inquiry*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077800416684871>

Boek chapter: Van de Putte,I. and De Schauwer, E. (2016). Ik breng mezelf in als onderzoeker: van participatief naar participierend onderzoek. Translated: Participative research: Being personally involved as a researcher. In G. Van Hove, A. Schippers, M. Cardol, E. De Schauwer (red.) *Disability studies in de Lage Landen*. (pp.277-295). Garant: Antwerpen-Appeldoorn.

The aim of chapter four is to rethink agency. I do not theorize agency as the work of separate entities, but as mutual entanglements of multiple forces. I use the concept of assemblage to make visible how agency emerges from the relationships and becomes distributed and rearranges the world. An assemblage like the movement to inclusion has agency to deterritorialise and open up the possibility of transformations.

Van de Putte,I., De Schauwer, E, Van Hove, G. Davies, B. (2017). Rethinking agency as an assemblage. From change management to collaborative work. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1412514>

In chapter five I went further in our creative and experimental way of doing research in order to rethink current practice. Together with others I developed and worked with a script in order to depart from thinking in terms of individual accountability and responsibility, moralism and judgement. We moved instead toward an intra-active understanding of the relational work in a classroom, and an exploration of the ethics of such encounters.

Van de Putte,I., De Schauwer, E, Van Hove, G. Davies, B. (2017). Violent Life in an Inclusive Classroom. Come on read Peter! Moving from moral judgment to an onto-epistemological ethics. *Qualitative Inquiry*. (submitted)

The final chapter brings everything together and comes to some main conclusions. I’m not looking for ‘consensus’ and ‘truth’; rather I want to rethink the concepts of agency and responsibility in order to rethink the position of the SENCO and reconfigure the world we live in where difference get a place.

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CHAPTER 2

The context of the Special Educational Needs Educator in Flemish education: Discourses at work

This chapter reveals the complexity of the role and position of the SENCO in an evolving educational system. The SENCO is part of an educational assemblage where the ambivalent processes of abjecting and reclaiming the monstrous Other and the process of normalisation are at work. In the collective biography group we have worked with our memories and the philosophical concepts of monstrosity and the process of normalisation, to develop new ways of thinking about and being intra-actively engaged with difference/disability. The work of conceptualising can be found in the following papers: '*Schildrick's Monster: Exploring a new approach to difference/disability through collective biography*'¹⁰ and '*Intra-active production of normativity and difference*'¹¹. In this chapter, the ambivalent processes of abjecting and reclaiming the monstrous Other and the process of normalisation is plugged into the Flemish educational assemblage. Or in other words, the two concepts of 'monster' and 'normalisation' help us to explore and understand the context in which the SENCO works and the modes of enunciation she is constituted by. Further on, we explore the legislation and regulations and the epistemology of the 'Care coordinator'. We outline the different roles, tasks, responsibilities and various position of the SENCO and examine how the SENCO works together with different actors. In the exploration of their everyday practice and lived experience we see how the SENCO (like every other actor in the educational assemblage) is positioned as the individual responsible for the transformations they need to accomplish.

10 De Schauwer, E., Van de Putte, I., Claes, L., Verstichele, M. and Davies, B. (2016). 'Schildrick's Monster: Exploring a New Approach to Difference/disability Through Collective Biography.' *Disability & Society*, 31(8), 1098-1111.

11 De Schauwer, E., Van de Putte, I., Blockmans, I., Davies, B. (2016). Intra-active production of normativity and difference. *Gender and Education*, 1-16 .doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1259463

Discourses at work

One way of understanding the educational arena today is that there are two strong contradictory movements at work, marked by a dichotomisation between regular and special education (Done, Murphy, Knowler 2015). The paradigm of regular education is about facilitating the learning processes of all children and a responsibility to teach children so that they meet the educational outcomes and end up with qualifications and certifications (Morgan 2014). Throughout history, children have been placed in special education, based on cultural and linguistic differences deemed deviant from the norms in 'regular' education (Annamma, Boelé, Moore, Klingner 2013). The paradigm of special education is a wild profusion of entangled ideas, including charity, medicalisation and psychologisation (Armstrong, Armstrong, Spandagou 2011). It is grounded in the medical model through which difference/disability is seen as an individual problem that needs specialist knowledge and services and individualised (mostly segregated) education (Kitchin 1998). Special education enacts institutionalised, paternalistic notions of separating and rehabilitating individuals who are not able to conform to the desired standards achieved by those who can conform (Erevelles 2000). These discursive practices are manifested in Flanders in a history of two separate and well-equipped systems, with special education becoming an increasingly separate institution, with its own practices, regulations, resources, certifications and staff.

In Flanders, over the last decade, however, there has been 'a growing consensus around rights of all children to get education in their locality, regardless of their background, attainment or disability' (Goodley 2017, 174). As a result, inclusion became educationally and socially desirable (Abbot, 2007), and was internationally embedded in supranational documents such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (2006). This led to the release in 2014 of a new policy in Flanders, the M-decree (Measures for students with educational needs)¹², that was seen as a first step in achieving inclusive education for all children with special educational needs. Despite the simplicity of this message, inclusion is highly contestable and its implementation is problematic (Armstrong et al. 2011). It's still a reality that children who are read as non-educable, unmanageable and/or too violent largely remain in special schools and find entering regular settings challenging (Unia 2016). Peter's parents describe the following experience: "*About a month after Peter started in kindergarten and he had a place among the children from the classroom, we received the decision of the class council to undo his enrolment. The following reason was cited: "We come to the conclusion that Peter does not learn anything and the safety of the other children cannot be guaranteed. We refer him to another (special) school."* (Steunpunt voor inclusie 2016). This experience and the fact that Flanders has the highest percentage of children (5.2% of the total student population) in special schools and classes in Europe (NESSE 2012) with an overrepresentation of students with low socio-economic or ethnic minority backgrounds and boys with emotional and behavior problems (De Schauwer, Van de Putte, de Beco 2017a), demonstrates that we cannot speak of a significant shift from special to regular education.

It's not our intention to criticize special education; all discourses can be critiqued and questioned (Laws 2011); but as disability studies scholars, we criticize the established binaries (normal/abnormal; able/disable, etc.) that imply that these categories are opposite and mutually exclusive (Meekosha and Shuttleworth 2009). Students become different/disabled when they fail to meet the standards and boundaries in which some students fit and by which others are stigmatized, marginalized and segregated based solely on issues of race, language, and perceived ability (Annamma et al. 2013). The onto-epistemological construction of the regular 'normal' school involves abjecting difference/disability (De Schauwer et al. 2016b). The difference is constituted as being in the bodies of the children and they are seen as 'the problem' within educational settings (Slee 2001), they are assigned the position of the monstrous Other (Shildrick 2002):

12 With the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (2006) Belgium agreed to develop a more inclusive educational system. Every Child has the right to go to a regular school (article 24).

Monsters are (...) deeply disturbing; neither good nor evil, inside nor outside, not self or other. (...) They are always liminal, refusing to stay in place, transgressive and transformative. They disrupt both internal and external order, and overturn the distinctions that set out the limits of the human subject. (Shildrick 2002, 4)

Children who are perceived as different are regarded as less than human and thus are not entitled to belong in regular schools (Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2014, De Schauwer, Van de Putte, Claes, Verstichele, Davies 2016b). As the teacher of the 3rd grade of Luca said: “*You cannot expect that I adapt my teaching to the level of a two-year-old child. I’m not trained for such cases. But this doesn’t mean I don’t like her.*” These distinction-making processes create a binary of (dominant) insiders and (subordinate) outsiders” (Brantlinger 2006). At the same time, it’s a multilayered and ambivalent process; monstrosity, Shildrick says, “always arouses the contradictory responses of denial *and* recognition, disgust *and* empathy, exclusion *and* identification” (Shildrick 2002, 17). The maintenance of the teacher’s normalcy is achieved at the expense of abjecting difference from herself and this evokes fear that some children, such as Luca, are free not to attain the same leaky perfection as those deemed to be normal (De Schauwer et al. 2016b).

The normalisation/abjecting process requires a constant defence of the leaky boundaries of regular education (Shildrick 2002), as the reaction of one principal demonstrates: “*We want to welcome Younes, but you have to understand that the other parents expect from us to achieve high standards. Children with those labels go better to other schools. He will be much happier among the same people*” (Steunpunt voor inclusie 2016). Younes undermines the stable identity of the regular school, and he is seen as a threat to the progress of the ‘other’ children; because of him the outcomes and reputation of the whole school will decrease. Through locking out children such as Younes, the school supports a sense of its own normality and it can re-establish and maintain normalised schooling. Spatial separation facilitates the maintenance of the boundaries (Kristeva 1982), and is seen as central to the well being of the regular teacher, classmates, etc., but also for Younes’s own well-being who will benefit from being together with other ‘monsters’. The characteristics of different places require students to possess certain competencies (Naraian 2017, 38). Specialized support tries to correct the monstrous Other, and bring them back into the norm (to rehabilitate, cure and educate). The underlying thought is that, with the right support, this self-sufficient learner will progress, or otherwise be singled out and put aside (Goodley 2017).

The normal child, the healthy body, and the stable mind are reproduced and legitimated through the practices of teachers (Thomas and Loxley 2007, 3). It’s the ‘normal-curve’ that continues to be used to create the normal subject (white, middle class, monolingual, average (intellectual) ability and properly behaving) and to position the others as abnormal, different/disabled and monstrous. In this way, schools became increasingly ableist places, which conform to the demands of marketization, inspection regimes and the requirement to move different/disabled children as close as possible to a mythical ableist norm (Runswick-Cole 2011; Goodley 2014). Younes is not the independent, competent, autonomous, normative, responsabilised child who will become the ‘entrepreneurial pupil’ desired by the market (Simons and Masschelein 2008), and therefore he cannot become a member of the regular school. Through ever-increasing neoliberal micro-management practices schools are governed and assessed, teachers are pressured to produce normative subjects, and students undergo endless testing and measuring. During the last decade, there has been a diagnostic explosion where answers are mainly sought via diagnoses (Nilsson Sjöberg 2017). Identification of categories keeps the boundaries between the so-called normal subject and the monstrous Other in place, but are also politically useful in getting access to the regular school and for generating specialist services and resources of an educational, therapeutic and medical kind (De Schauwer et al. 2017c). Sometimes the changes take place at the level of the categorization, as with the M-decree, children who are identified as having special needs but who are capable of reaching the standard goals, now have a legitimate place in the regular schools. On one hand, the categorical distinctions have been challenged and questioned by the M-decree and the boundaries become more porous. On the other hand, more children become ‘at risk’ of being labelled, marked and categorized. Specialized services are delivered in regular school and flexible learning trajectories are created within the classroom in various configurations. Schools are seeking to establish the ‘new’ normal in the encounters with difference (Danforth 2015). They are reclaiming

the monster, and that opens up possibilities (De Schauwer et al. 2016b), as it did with the principal of Nathalie, who did not see her as a fixed entity: *“In the first year she didn’t talk, not to me, not to other students. Every time I saw her, I greeted her as I do with the other students. The second year I stopped and waited, then she said a very silent ‘hello’. Now she comes to my office, knocks on the door, greets me and gives the message of the teacher. Sometimes she even tells me something about her classroom or her internship. So, it’s important to believe she can learn. And it made me think how we intra-act in our school, how much time do we take to listen or to have a conversation.”* (Van Hove and De Schauwer 2015). Nathalie disrupts the conventions of schooling, which requires students to answer questions, to communicate, to take messages from teachers, to recognize the authority of the principal, etc. She extends and expands what it means to be human beyond the narrow, normative and rigid view of the neoliberal capitalist self (Kittay 2002). It is about rejecting fixed narratives and facilitating ongoing ‘becomings’ rather than fixed ‘beings’. Nathalie can become different from the multiple categorisations she has been assigned to. In the small micro-events that fill everyday life in school there is an openness to difference, to seeing Nathalie in a process of continuous change, and as an emergent ‘multiple intra-active being always becoming’ (De Schauwer, Van de Putte, Blockmans, Davies 2016a). In those moments ableism is challenged in Nathalie’s school in small and temporary ways.

But as Roger Slee (1997, 411) observes, “simply cleaning up exclusionary context does not make them inclusionary spaces if the values of regular abled schooling remain intact”. Despite the M-decree there are still children who are sitting quietly in the back with their support worker, while the ‘real’ work of educating the ‘normal’ children happens around them. The teachers’ own conception of whose learning matters impacts on her teachings practices. It’s not something the teacher consciously and rationally chooses to do (De Schauwer, Van de Putte, Davies 2017b); it arises, rather, from a normative, dominant and paternalistic notion that segregation and special education is a more suitable context in which to meet the special needs of the children who are different (Ware 2002). These assumptions continue to influence educational provision and practices because normalisation works on and through us (De Schauwer and Davies 2015). Sometimes the rejection is less subtle, and is oppressive and violent, as it was with Tina who attended a secondary school with an individualized, adapted curriculum. The new principal made a decision that Tina could not sit next to other students, could not ask for notes, had to be quiet in class, etc. The principal’s terror goes back to the image of the monstrous child; for him her difference was a threat to the requirements of an ordered normal classroom/school and he could not see Tina as potentially economically productive. Tina is liberated from the standard educational outcomes, she can develop with her own goals as a unique person but the question is no longer ‘Am I normal?’ but ‘Am I employable’ (Simons and Masschelein 2017). Inclusion is closely related to managing students to minimise difference in order to maintain the existing structural and cultural relations of schooling (Slee 1997; Allan 2007), rather than reshaping the ‘grammar of school’¹³. This is how schools ‘organize time and space, sort and divide students or break up knowledge domains into subjects’ (Naraian 2017, 37). This is the level of transformation required in order to make schools think and act more inclusively.

Transformation and innovation in educational practices encounter a lot of resistance from both inside and outside education. We can understand this by taking into account that there are always two lines of forces working at the same time. One to keep everything in place and everyone the same (object/exclude in order to maintain the sense of order), so maintaining the status quo which feels very safe; and another where everything is open to change, with the possibility of being open to difference/disability, opening up the potential to ‘trouble, re-shape and re-fashion’ the conventions of schooling (Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2015). These two movements/forces depend on each other and are constantly at play; we need regularity and repetition to make the world/school a secure and predictable place, but we also need the creative force that opens up the new, the emergent possibility of becoming different (Davies 2014).

¹³ Grammar of school describe the practices that structure schools in a manner analogous to the way grammar organizes meaning in verbal communication (Tyack and Cuban in Naraian 2017, 38).

It is in and through these various material-discursive practices that children, parents, teachers, principals, support workers and SENCO's are operating. They are constituted within this context. The SENCO cannot be separated from the wider social, political, economic and cultural spaces, it's in those intersecting spaces that he/she is working. The practice of the SENCO is entangled and in complex tension with the forces of normalization and the ambivalent process of abjection/reclaiming the monstrous Other. SENCOs are currently struggling to make their way through these contradictory multiple discourses and practices.

In the next part, I explore the development of the function of the SENCO in Flemish education and the different roles and positions they take up in the regular neoliberal-abled school.

Legislation

Through this collaborative work it becomes clear that normalisation and abjection are strong forces, and that it's in this complex and challenging context that the Flemish government is implementing the current policies and practices for inclusive education. Measures have been taken that could be seen as a step in the direction of more inclusive education, for example, the 'Equal Opportunities decree' (Gelijke Onderwijs Kansen GOK-decree 2002). The GOK-decree established an integrated framework of support to provide equal educational opportunities for all children.

The decree consists of various components: 1) measures relating to enrolment; 2) provision of additional support and special attention for students from low socio-economic backgrounds and ethnic minority backgrounds; and 3) development of an integrated care policy. In this legislation, there is more focus on working preventively, so that exclusion, social separation and discrimination can be prevented. These initiatives aim to increase the integration and educational success of disadvantaged and underprivileged students. In the early years of the GOK decree, schools were strongly guided and supported by the government. Schools had to map their initial situation and set objectives¹⁴ for students, school teams and at the school level. Partly due to the GOK decree, support became based on thoughtful planning - setting up, evaluating and adjusting objectives. Since 2008, the GOK policy has been incorporated into the regular policy of schools. Because of this, care has become a task for the entire school team, where the teacher is seen as a key figure and is responsible for the basic support for all students.

Together with this decree a new layer of individual agents have been created to support teachers in their changing practices; in preschools and primary schools this new function was 'zorgcoördinator' [Special Educational Needs Coordinator, SENCO]¹⁵. Depending on the school population, every preschool and primary school gets hours to develop a support policy and schools have a large degree of autonomy in its implementation. They can make a choice to invest in the appointment of a SENCO or invest in other support (smaller classes, support teachers, etc.) (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training 2002). The legislation says that the SENCO needs to fulfil tasks on three levels;

- 1) developing a policy and strategy related to children with special needs, and increasing 'quality' education for all children,
- 2) supporting and coaching teachers, and
- 3) providing individual support for students.

14 These objectives had to be drawn up within six themes: 1) prevention and remediation of developmental and learning disadvantages; 2) language training; 3) intercultural education; 4) orientation; 5) socio-emotional development; and 6) student and parent participation.

15 I chose to use the term SENCO instead of the literal translation of care-coordinator because the term SENCO is recognizable in international context, and a care-coordinator is more often used in the field of health care.

It's an open job description and the variety of tasks that can come together that the SENCO feels responsible for can lead to high work-pressure and stress (Van Dessel 2013). Some support services developed job descriptions, where they specified the tasks on each level. It's noticeable that it is a long list with tasks, competences and responsibilities. In other countries, we see that their mission is more defined by the government, for example, in the UK there is the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (Pearson 2008; Nettleton and Friel 2015; Cowne 2017).

From an historical perspective, educational support is mostly connected with a specific/target group and is child centred. This changed with the implementation of the function of the SENCO. The SENCO needs to be the driving force in the school who sets up and implements an integrated support-structure for all children (Schouws and Sinke 2007). The desired profile of the SENCO has changed over the years, from the early days of the 'remedial teacher' working with individual children or small groups, to now more of a coordination role (Agalotis and Kalyva 2011; Szwed 2007). In other words, the responsibility for the support for special needs should no longer be the task of one person but should become a "whole-school approach", rooted in a shared vision and with internal school collaboration (Jacobs and Struyf 2015; Struyf et al. 2012). Struyf (2012) concluded that in primary schools most SENCOs work with different partners (students, teachers, parents and external partners), although they also spend a considerable amount of time working with individual students. This same research also came to the conclusion that teachers now feel more capable of providing support in their classrooms but have not yet developed the skills required to collaborate with others (parents, internal and external support workers).

Care coordinator: what's in a name?

Although I made the choice to use the term SENCO in this PhD, to be recognizable in international contexts, I found it important to explore the epistemology of the Dutch word 'Zorgcoördinator' (Care Coordinator). The care that is given can be understood as a phenomenon that is socially constructed through a variety of cultural, professional, services and institutional practices (Goodley and Tregaskis 2006). The in-depth investigation of the history of care, where there is space for multiple voices and polyphony, is not part of this research but I will highlight some aspects that make visible the repetitive and habituated practices through which the SENCO is constituted. This helps me to understand the role and the position of the SENCO because history is working through past, present and future (Davies 2017). Different discourses are simultaneously at play and (de)(re)territorialize the school assemblage for children who are perceived as different/disabled. Change doesn't happen rapidly and can continually fold back into the existing social order (Davies 2015), when there is access to another discourse it doesn't overrule the previous one. Taking this into account I highlight some points in history that still have impact on how different agents engage difference in our schools¹⁶.

Discourses of care have historically relied on charity models, where the deficits of children and their families tend to be looked on as a personal tragedy and assumes they are in need of help (Goodley and Tregaskis 2006). Care is connected with kindness, goodwill, and dedication to those children who require practical help to become members of the society. In this I notice the Catholic discourse, which is very powerful in Flemish education as a lot of (special) schools and institutions were established and are run by Catholic organizations (Verstraete 2016). Care is often seen as a unilateral, one-dimensional way through which children are reduced to passive recipients rather than active participants¹⁷. As one SENCO said: "*We have an exchange program with a school in Tanzania but we wouldn't take care of the boy in our community? No, taking care of each other is in the DNA of our school. So, we (the school team) decided: we will do our best and go for it.*" Ever since the period of 'Enlightenment', care has focused on taking non-productive people to institutions, special schools and hospitals, in order to make them profitable

¹⁶ The quotes I use make it more vivid, these were gathered throughout the many encounters and collaborations with SENCOs during this research and professional developments.

¹⁷ It's important to note that "people with a disability are considered historical actors who not only undergo suppressing and discriminative power structures but also actively seem to challenge the dominant views and attitudes towards 'deficit' and 'abnormal behavior' by means of protest" (Verstraete 2004, 79).

and normal (Verstraete 2004). This comes together with the idea that people should receive proper education to transform them into active members of the society. As a principal said: *“The focus of the support (special teacher and the speech therapist) is on mathematics. Petra has high grades and maybe with the extra support she can go to university. In the long term, she can have a job and gets a place in society.”*

Our special educational services are thus rooted in a history of care and impairment (Mortier 2010). The most important conceptual leap is the move from the individual to the social barriers (Goodley 2017). ‘The starting point is that persons with a disability experience a mismatch between personal competency and environmental demands that results in support needs that necessitate particular types and intensities of individualized supports. If the individualized supports are based on thoughtful planning and application, it’s more likely that they will lead to improved human functioning and personal outcomes’ (Thompson et al. 2009, 139-138). So, the focus of support shifts to understanding people by the types and intensity of support needs, instead of by their deficits. As a SENCO said: *“Her file with all the different labels and difficult words, syndrome X and Z, we would have said no to Sandra. But we brought everything together, the hours of support, her computer device, her classmates from kindergarten - there were 15 buddies- then the picture was different.”*

Under the influence of the normalisation movement an integration concept was adopted and found its expression in ‘Integrated Education’; the target group were children who could basically adjust with (little) support to the expectations of regular education (Mortier 2010). The school received support from special education teachers, who mainly worked on an individual basis with children. It was about stimulating collaboration between regular and special education. A teacher reflects on her experience: *“I received a lot of support. The special teacher gave me advice, positive feedback and just the hours that Kimberly was not in my class, I could work up tempo with the rest of the children.”*

The human rights based perspective, and the social model of disability enforcing inclusion, resulted in different conventions and rights for people with a disability (for example the UN Convention 2006). This shift in thinking comes together with a strong trend towards higher participation for people with a disability, who are full members of society and have the right to belong. This movement was embodied in the preliminary draft of the Educational Care-decree (‘Leerzorg-decree’). The underlying idea was to develop one common framework with care continuity (Vandenbroucke 2007), but there appeared to be no broad societal support for the implementation of it (De Schauwer et al. 2017a). If this decree had been in force, the SENCO’s role would be different and would focus on all students. Now with the M-decree (Measures for students with educational needs), the Flemish government put inclusive education back on the agenda, but again, care is linked to the target group – students with educational needs. The SENCO’s work and responsibilities are narrowed down and connected to this specific group, whereby we first identify children, and then develop actions to support and include them (Graham and Slee 2005). This change also captures the tension between whether the SENCO’s role should be universal or specialist (Mackenzie 2007, Pearson 2008, Hallet and Hallet 2010), and whether the responsibility should reside in one individual (Norwich 2010) or must be distributed more broadly (Fitzgerald and Radford 2017).

In 2009 Belgium ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), whereby State Parties will ensure that reasonable accommodation of the individual’s requirements is made where support is required, within regular education. One of the SENCO said: *“We organize a second intake to discuss the reasonable accommodations. I have made a list with various adaptations. I always say to the teacher pick five adaptations instead of ten, but make sure you can realize them.”* Through the evolution of science and technology the opportunities for participation have increased, and at the same time, the trend has been toward ‘perfecting technologies’ to normalize difference (Campbell 2009; Baker 2002). In times of austerity, the M-decree is sometimes seen as a way to lower the high cost of special education. Support is not always sufficient, and for that reason children combine different support systems in order to get the support they need: volunteers and students, direct budget, therapists, parents and grandparents.

Society in every European town and city has become much more diverse than ever before in terms of the ethics and socio-economic background of its inhabitants (Pinxten and De Munter in Mortier 2010, 15). This comes along with the need to accept and value diversity. The greater diversity has an impact on how we speak, think and act (Annamma et al. 2013). A SENCO said: *“The teacher welcomed Guldane and her classroom was decorated with words. It will not take long before she can speak Dutch.”* Over the last decade there has been a world-wide explosion in labelling and an increased focus on testing and measuring. As a result, care is linked to the ‘curve of the average’ and children who are perceived as different become the target of intervention (Ball 1990). Historically there are more categories defined, and they are all relevant to the work of the SENCO. There is also a tendency of organizing care around a label (Artiles, Harris-Murri, Rostenberg 2006). Evidence of this is the high incidence of labelling (6.73% of the total student population). In relation to inclusion such a focus has the potential danger of moving away from efforts that look at contextual factors towards a focus on labelled individuals’ deficiencies. The last influence we want to highlight is the focus on quality standards, measurements and outcomes, efficiency and strategies and technicalities. With the new support model, there is a tendency to structure support and the responsibility that comes along with it, a SENCO gave the following example: *“The pedagogical counsellor showed me (SENCO) the new care continuum, the triangle, I ‘m responsible for level 0 and 1 and he’s responsible for the top.”*

This last tension is connected to how ‘coordination’ or leadership of the SENCO is installed. The care and the coordination is organized around one child rather than at the whole school level. Like Fitzgerald and Radford (2017, 452) conclude “SENCOs continue to fulfil largely operational roles and are limited in their capacity to effect change in inclusive practice from a whole-school perspective”. Coordination is reduced to operational practices such as organizing meetings, communicating with different partners, setting up and maintaining procedures; with less attention to, or leadership of, school policy decisions supporting inclusive practices. Their leadership role is not emphasised in the latest policy documents around the M-decree, or in the new support model, both of which would have provided an ideal opportunity to underline their role and responsibility in developing an integrated support policy.

So, I have explored the different discourses at work in Flemish education, and more specifically, the discursive practices, through the epistemology of the concept of ‘care’ and ‘coordinator’, in order to better understand the context of the SENCO. In the next part, I want to give an overview of the everyday practice and lived experience of the SENCO.

Who am I?: The handyman, the expert, a critical friend...?

Many researchers (Layton 2005; Swedz 2007; Pearson 2008; Oldham and Radford 2011; Nauwelaerts 2007) have concluded that the SENCO function is a challenging role with a demanding range of tasks, expectations and pressures. As Cowne (2005) says: “A SENCO needs to be a master of many trades”, and a lot of competences are required, for example, strong communicative and collaborative skills, leadership skills, change competence and knowledge around philosophy of inclusion and disability-specific knowledge. The SENCO’s work is defined by an almost overwhelming repertoire of responsibilities (Hallet and Hallet 2010). So, the SENCO works alongside colleagues, while also having to change the hearts and minds of teachers (Done et al. 2015), *and* act as a change agent for children with special needs, *and* transform policy so the school becomes an integrated inclusive school (Swedz 2007). The responsibility for inclusion is collective (at school level) but simultaneously individualized. Individuals become the agents who are responsible for the success, or who are blamed for its failure (Davies and Bansel 2007). Such individualisation of responsibility is characteristic of the era of accountability we are living in—an era that mobilises the responsibility-blame discourse.

We live in a time where SENCOs’ (and all other educational partners’) work is increasingly being re-cast in instrumental terms (such as in checklists of professional standards, competences and effectiveness). So, where does the work of care and responsibility fit in? Responsibility is commonly rendered as self-responsibility or converted to the notion of responsabilisation (McLeod 2017, 45). It makes the SENCO vulnerable to account-

ability discourses and this generates uncertainty. It makes them insecure, comparing themselves with others and asking questions such as whether they are doing well enough. A lot of the work undertaken by the SENCO is invisible work or not capable of being measured, so they have to find ways to make their work recognizable, and to try to get recognition for it. The neoliberal discourse requires a never-ending flexibility in response to surveillance measures and an increased responsibility for their own survival. As a result, the SENCO becomes a high-performance subject driven by accountability (Davies 2015). Recent research (Giroux 2014; Revelles- Benavente and Gonzalez Ramos 2017) has documented the damaging personal and social effect of this emphasis on accountability and responsabilisation.

“In the meeting, a father starts crying because he was not aware how serious his son’s problems were. After the meeting, I said: ‘I think it’s time for a cup of coffee’. At those moments, you do not stand there with your watch, but I know that some teachers think, ‘What is she doing now?’, and I always have the feeling that I have to ‘report’ afterwards why I do what I do, and that it matters.” (SENCO)

It is a complex task to specify which assignments and responsibilities are related to a SENCO’s job (Vanderlinde and Gombeir 2005; Van de Putte and Vandeveld 2012). Kearns (2005) focused on the variety of roles that SENCOs undertake (arbiter, rescuer, auditor, collaborator and expert). I will use these subdivisions to give an overview of the everyday practice of the SENCO¹⁸. It’s not my intention to reduce the SENCO to a set of tasks or roles that they have to take up, where everything is already clear and they just have to perform. Together, the SENCO’s and I, have worked to recognize the entangled, contradictory discursive practice being mobilised, and to try in our writings to move beyond the static and restrictive concept of role, and become more attentive to the ‘positioning’ of the SENCO. Positioning is focused on both the ongoing relationality, and the multiple discourses at play (Davies 2008). The position of SENCO emerges through the mutual intra-active entanglements with other agents and this will be different for each SENCO in his/her specific educational assemblage.

SENCO as Arbiter:

The SENCOs are required to work alongside colleagues while also trying to influence staff attitudes (Fitzgerald and Radford 2017). Many teachers conceptualise inclusion differently or have a negative perception of the M-decree/inclusion (Department of Education and Training 2017). The SENCO supports the teacher in finding answers to cope with this confusion (about what is supposed to be done), frustration (with the way the current climate of standards and accountability constrains teachers’ work), guilt (about the exclusion created for individual students), and exhaustion (associated with a sense of failure) (Allan 2009). The SENCOs are focused on helping others, developing competence and boosting the confidence of teachers, students, parents, etc. Sometimes there are different, contradictory ideas and views and the SENCO needs to mediate between the different parties and negotiate the space for children, or negotiate the boundaries between child/teacher, child/community, child/parents; parents/schools, etc. (Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2005) and try to understand the children in their multiple identities (Goodley 2007). The SENCOs experience this role as emotionally demanding because they want to do good for everyone.

“The teacher had a good picture and it is obvious that there are serious difficulties with Stan. She insisted on taking a test so that support could be set up. But I felt that it was too early for the parents. At such a moment, it’s negotiating with the teacher to give the parents time and respect their decision, but at the same time it’s also searching for solutions that the teacher can handle the difficulties in her classroom and feels supported.” (SENCO)

18 The quotes I use make it more vivid, these were gathered throughout the many encounters and collaborations with SENCOs during this research and professional developments.

SENCO as Rescuer:

Support is often in the form of the design of didactic materials, making preparations or corrections, co-teaching, working with a group of student(s) in or out of the classroom, and replacement of the teacher when he/she is absent. In this role, the SENCO is doing the same tasks as the teachers. The focus of the support is on cognitive participation and qualification, and less attention is paid to other educational goals such as socialisation and subjectification (Biesta 2011; Struyf et al. 2012). The support largely entails turning everyone into one kind of being at some level (Baker 2002). Some SENCOs choose to support in the classroom in order to keep in touch with practice, and also because working directly with children gives a lot of job satisfaction (Van de Putte et al. 2010). The classroom support is mostly valued and sometimes preferred by teachers (Baets 2006).

“Every teacher ‘gets’ one hour that I come into their classroom and they can choose what they want me to do but mostly I work with a small group. For me this is a moment to feel what is going on in the classroom. And when there is a meeting and I hear the teacher talking about the dynamics in the class group, or the difficulty with this particular child, ... then this child, this class and this teacher are not numbers.” (SENCO)

Special needs come with the idea that you need special services and resources and therefore children who are perceived as different/disabled are not always seen as the responsibility of the regular teacher. Teachers feel overwhelmed by the extensive range of tasks that come with care and have the feeling they have to survive, leaving little space for imagination, inventiveness and implementing innovations (Abott 2007). Creative thought is switched off and responsibility is handed over to the SENCO. The SENCO takes over this responsibility and is focused on finding solutions for individual situations to help the teacher, the child, the parent, etc., sometimes far beyond their capabilities. The SENCO compensates, fixes deficits, covers up faults, is everywhere at once, ... to keep a ‘system of perfection’.

“Tom is 5 years old and has a history of family violence. In the school it’s going well but at home he destroys material and terrorises his mother. We want to make sure that they get support and we accomplished that they could enrol in a parenting course. When they had to be somewhere, I called the mother in the morning to say where she had to be and which bus she had to take. But recently the father has forbidden the attendance in the course. I’m searching for other services, maybe we can find somebody who can come to school when the mother drops him off or maybe I can give some consultations.” (SENCO)

SENCO as Auditor:

Writing, implementing and monitoring a school-wide policy on care, are tasks relating to coordinating, supervising and overseeing the day-to-day operation of the school’s care policy. These involve liaising with teachers and external agencies and coordination of the different consultations between different parties. Schools have become accountable, and are expected to function as self-managing organisations that continuously investigate their own conditions and learning outcomes in order to increase their markers of quality (Ranson 2003 in Struyve 2016). The SENCO sets up initiatives to improve the quality of education. In addition, the SENCO follows many professional development and afterwards has to implement the content and insights in the school.

“Because of the low grades I had set up an investigation which verified that our Dutch text book did not meet the needs of our students. We decided to work with a different textbook, but the teacher of the sixth grade refused. At that moment, I had to react to make clear this is not an individual choice because there needs to be a continuation over the years. The teacher felt criticized and was angry with me. The principal had to speak to her and explain that this was a school decision and that I had the mandate to discuss this and makes decisions about it.” (SENCO)

This aspect of the SENCO position mainly involves management tasks such as planning and organising meetings and consultations, setting up and following procedures around special needs, monitoring the progress of

students, overseeing the records of students with digital tracking systems, administration of meetings, data management, preparation of reports and action plans and record-keeping with a focus on meeting external accountabilities. In carrying out these functions, the madness of modern capitalism comes to the foreground; the SENCO, like every other individual in our neoliberal society, is regulated and controlled through technologies of management (Bendix-Petersen and Davies 2010). There is an intensification in their work, especially in terms of paperwork associated with following up students, and other accountability measures. There is concern about spending a huge amount of time completing (invisible?) administrative tasks that have little impact on practice.

“Next month we have inspection and I try to make an effort to get all the paperwork done. Teachers do not want to work here with the digital student tracking system so I try to digitize as much as possible. In our previous review, it was a weakness and we got bad comments on that. I sometimes have the feeling that if the papers are filled in correctly that’s all that matters. It comes along with a lot of procedures and endless paper work. It just never stops.”

SENCO as Expert:

There is a great emphasis on specialist knowledge, and a ‘plethora of information and advice’ (Goodley and Tregaskis 2006), and as a result a lot of SENCOs undertake additional training, especially on the different categories and labels (Struyf et al. 2012). This knowledge helps ensure that the development and behaviour of children can be understood, and that support can be provided. Meanwhile, we also know that teachers are more likely to pass questions and ‘hand over’ children to specialists such as the SENCO (Abott 2007), because they believe that specialists have more suitable answers and more appropriate treatments (Van de Putte and De Schauwer 2013). This creates a binary (expert/amateur), and creates a hierarchical relationship. The SENCO is an important actor who checks whether children are going through every milestone correctly (Connor and Ferri 2007) and who plays an important role in categorising children with special needs and providing deficit-oriented knowledge and practical solutions for teaching. This categorisation is necessary to receive funding, extra support and resources, but at the same time labelling encourages child-deficit assumptions, where teaching and support are about normalising and managing aspects of individual behaviour that are different from the norm. The Assessment for Intervention (AFI) discourages labelling, but still the identification of difference facilitates a recognition of ‘types’ of failings in children (Allan 2007). The SENCO in this way is part of the ‘culture of pathologising’ children insofar as s/he participates in gate-keeping structures (Baker 2002).

“Because of our profession or function the focus was on the labels and the deficits of children, and then teachers often reacted: ‘I do not want him, he has to go to special education’ and labels just open the gate [to special education]. We have learned the hard way that a strategy of disorder-thinking will not do and despite the movement resulting from the Assessment for Intervention (AFI) I cannot say we are there yet, it’s embedded in our society – we have to be all hyper-normal. A child who has one weaker test result or one substandard term result goes the next day to the speech therapist. (SENCO)

SENCO as Collaborator:

The SENCO is a key figure in the school for students, teachers, parents and external stakeholders. In recent years this last group of actors (speech therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists, etc.) have substantially increased in number due to the growing child-oriented, paid support in regular educational care (Petry 2012). The SENCO works closely with teachers, parents and support personnel to share ideas about practice and to engage in collaborative curriculum planning. The discursive shift in which disability is viewed as a social rather than an individual problem, brings the focus to the context of the child (Colins, Connor, Ferri, Gallagher, Samson 2015). It’s about moving away from being an expert in diagnosis to becoming a facilitator in the co-creation process.

“It’s working together with a lot of people, whereby listening and asking the right questions is important, and not having the desire to solve every difficulty.” (SENCO)

Collaborative work is not that common in Flemish education (Struyf et al. 2012) and some teachers are still reluctant to ask for support. As a result, the SENCOs try to work closely with the classroom teachers, in the hope that they can create an opening (Van de Putte 2010). The fact that they know the ins-and-outs of the school, and have close relationships with the different personnel, is appreciated by teachers. In most schools consultation structures and procedures have been installed under legislative incentives such as the Assessment for Intervention (AFI), meaning that more information is shared, there is early detection of problems, and development of action plans. However, according to recent studies, support for the involvement of teachers as first-line helpers is rather scarce (Struyf, et al. 2012; Van de Putte and De Schauwer 2015), so it’s more of a consultation than a collaborative process (Petry 2012). In the collaborative process parents are often the missing voices (Van de Putte and De Schauwer 2015). Working together is very popular, but that does not mean that everything can be seen as working collaboratively (Knackendoffel 2007). The concepts and knowledge required to work together collaboratively are often lacking, and many teachers express discomfort and anxiety about engaging in collaborative practices (Johnson 2010) to develop inclusive-learning environments. Teachers and educational professionals are not used to intensive cooperation.

Today, leadership in school is no longer carried solely by the principal (Struyve 2016) as the SENCO takes up much of this leading role. Most SENCOs position themselves as leaders and managers (Abott 2007). Struyve et al. (2014) indicate that the SENCO receives the legitimacy to act as a teacher-leader when their expertise is recognized, and when teachers perceive their task as first line helpers, and when the principal is willing to release power. The SENCO sometimes has the experience that the relationships are at risk. Sometimes the SENCOs function as a pass-through between teachers and principal, or sometimes teachers feel unsafe and controlled because of the close relationship between the SENCO and the principal (Van de Putte 2010).

“We couldn’t come to an agreement around lunch time surveillance. The principal decided that she would make a decision. After the meeting the teachers weren’t that happy about it. So they asked me if I could discuss it again with the principal. In some cases, I do this but in things like this they have to do it themselves. I’m not a messenger.” (SENCO)

A lot of SENCOs have a strong commitment to an equity pedagogy and they want their colleagues to share the same values. Taking up the SENCO’s responsibilities is seen as an opportunity to participate in school policy and decision-making, and influencing others. This can bring a sense of ‘moral superiority’ and with taking up the position of the ‘right minded’, and then positioning the other in relation to their own particular moral order (Davies 2008).

“In my first work experience, I had a principal who enjoyed classifying kids. I taught in the 2nd grade and there was a boy from a lower social class and he could not read. I promised myself to let him flourish in my classroom. The principal came into my classroom and then he pointed out a sum on the blackboard and asked, “Who can NOT solve this?” And then the children had to point to the ‘stupid’ children of the class, a lot of the time it was Johnny. I stood there but I did not do anything. I still think I have done too little for Johnny. Now I want to make a difference. It’s kind of an outstanding account. I’m still in debt. As a SENCO I can now ensure that such practices no longer happen.” (SENCO)

Sometimes the SENCO feels impatient and frustrated with the ‘slow’ movement of change, and at the same time they recognize and understand the perspective of their colleagues, when they are caught within the striated lines of ‘standards’, preconceived outcomes and accountability. The achievements and failures are seen as the result of individual efforts and abilities, and in this way the responsibility or blame is attributed to individual teachers, students, SENCOs, parents.

The SENCOs believe that the extension of their functions goes hand-in-hand with isolation, and they experience a different sense of belonging in a school team (Struyve 2016). Their isolation or exceptional position also comes with often being seen as ‘the sole agitators in schools and they, like their children who are different/disabled, are marginalized by the wider school culture’ (Goodley 2017, 172).

“As a SENCO you are less closely involved with your colleagues than a teacher. Even by physical presence. As a teacher you walk in the same hallway. You say something in between. And here you are so lonely in your ivory tower. Things to decide or to discuss or look up. It also has to do with responsibility. This morning when I came into the class, Teacher Ann said ‘this is a case for you’ and she literally handed him over to me.” (SENCO)

Through the detailed description of the SENCOs’ practice we can see how the SENCO is constituted by various discourses that enables and limits the lives of children who are different/disabled. The various positions of the SENCO emerge through the mutual intra-active entanglements with other agents. Some positions maintain the social order and some disrupt those habitual citational practices. At times the SENCO operates as a justification for the continued exclusion and deficit position of children who are perceived as different/disabled and at times the SENCO disrupts the ‘knowing order’ creating openness to difference. In the exploration of their everyday practice and lived experience, we could see how the SENCO (like every other actor in the educational assemblage) is positioned as an individual responsible for the realisation of the sometimes conflicting objectives (Done 2017). In this research, I want to problematise the danger of putting all the responsibility on one person, because it mobilizes a responsibility-blame discourse. Rather than being locked into the present patterns of such relentless individualisation and accountability, I want to do research in ways where there is a possibility to produce, over time, different practices and different kinds of subjects. In order to do this I want to rethink the concept of agency and responsibility, and I do this with the SENCO group. Together we take into account the complex landscape of discursive practices that are working on and through the bodies in the educational assemblage.

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CHAPTER 3

Research as an assemblage

In the next chapter I have not described the methodology as a formalised and methods-driven research design; instead the research is presented as an assemblage. Assemblage is a key concept in poststructural/new materialist writing, and also in this PhD. A research assemblage is a ‘*kind of chaotic network of habitual and non-habitual connections, always in flux, always reassembling in different ways*’ (Potts as cited in Fox and Allred 2014, 401); just so, this research developed in unpredictable and rhizomatic ways. There was no preconceived plan, rather the research emerged out of interactions and connections. In the first part of this chapter I describe how we can look to the three co(llaborative) learners groups as an intertwined project, and how the groups (de)(re) territorialize each other. After that I explore how the researcher is part of an assemblage and a brief overview is given into my position as researcher. A more detailed description of the position of the researcher in facilitating a collective biography can be found in the paper ‘*Participative research: Being personally involved as a researcher*¹⁹’. The last part of this chapter outlines the diffractive methodologies—collective biography and diffractive script. This chapter is linked to the following papers: ‘*Collective biography: using memory work to explore the space-in-between normativity and difference/disability*²⁰’ and ‘*Animating disability differently: mobilizing a heterotopian imagination*²¹’. The first paper provides a detailed description of collective biography methodology. Both papers give an insight into how the methodology is continuously open to change and experiment.

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Intertwined co(laborative) learner groups

In the first chapter of this PhD the co(laborative) learner groups were presented and initially they appeared as separate and not entangled. Through the conversations with Prof. Bronwyn Davies, who was one of my supervisors, I found ways to make sense of this research journey and how we can look at the various collaborations as an intertwined project. She gave me Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the wasp and the orchid and it helped me to see how the completely different separate rhizomes are (de)(re)territorializing each other (Davies, Somerville, Clairborne 2017).

Deleuze and Guattari imagine there to be a wasp-orchid assemblage, where the boundaries of the one cannot be thoroughly distinguished from the boundaries of the other. Rather it is in terms of code and traces that the stratum of a plant line intersects unexpectedly (there is nothing in the nature of a plant that would anticipate it becoming-animal in code), with the stratum of an animal line, where each becomes the function of the other. The orchid leaves its own territory by forming an image, by imitating a wasp; but the wasp returns to its territory in this image while leaving its turf at the same time and becoming part of the orchid's reproduction apparatus; the wasp reterritorializes the orchid by carrying pollen. Capture code, surplus-value code, increase of valence, a true becoming, becoming-the-wasp of the orchid, becoming-the-orchid of the wasp²². 'Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorializing of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further. There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 10)

Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the wasp and the orchid provides an understanding of how the three different rhizomes (the collaborative work with the Disability Studies Group (DSE), the collaborative work with the Collective Biography Group and the collaborative work with the SENCOs) affect each other and are intertwined and mutually entangled. To understand or to make meaning of the PhD, it's important to make the connection visible between these collaborative groups.

Through the DSE I was introduced to the poststructural/new materialist methodology of collective biography. Together with various colleagues of the DSE I participated in four collective biography workshops around difference and disability, facilitated by Prof. Davies. This opened up a new space for me, and for the DSE. It deterritorialised what research could be, and a new way of doing research became possible.

In our DSE research we took up the challenge of producing research that was of value to people labelled as disabled and to their network of families and supporters. Disability Studies makes us think about the ways we can/should support people to enhance their participation and remove barriers that prohibit this participation (Van Hove et al. 2008). To achieve this, I did research that had strong connections with practice. In the first year of the research I worked with different qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations of the everyday interactions and specific events where the SENCOs were involved. I made notes, transcribed the interviews, coded and re-coded the experiences and 'transformed them in common sense' (Mercieca and Mercieca 2010). But it was difficult to find any breakthrough into new understandings because those moments of everyday interaction could be read in many ways, all and none of which could be seen as 'true' (Laws 2012, 15). There was also the danger of creating (unintended) binaries (people with and without disabilities, them and us, the SENCO as expert vs the novice teacher). During the initial analysis of my data, categories were produced and reaffirmed. Using these categories risked stigmatising and stereotyping individuals and implied that moral judgments were being made. For example, the innovative SENCO vs the traditional teacher binary was created, where the latter were the subordinate category. This analysis didn't capture the complex and dynamic forces involved in everyday practice, and the SENCO was positioned as an "individual who could exist independent of various collective discourses, of history, of time and place" (Davies and Gannon 2006, 7). Up to that point I had treated data as being unproblematic, they were simply something to collect and analyse (Koro-Ljunberg and Maclure 2013) but

²² <https://kvond.wordpress.com/2008/05/15/23/>

when it became apparent what the research produced, it felt like a mismatch with my values as a disability studies scholar, where I sought to critique, deconstruct and transform binaries (abled/disabled, normal/abnormal, etc.) (Meekosha and Shuttleworth 2009).

Collective biography is a research strategy that works with memories; it tries to give an answer to those issues and it challenges us to embrace a more complex, creative and critical engagement with data. This poststructural/new materialist research methodology provides insights into the ways in which individuals and events are socially and discursively made (Davies and Gannon 2009). My own embodied experience of participating in a collective biography workshop where I could see how discourses were working was an eye opener. This opened up the collaborative work with the SENCO's, and I could inspire them to participate in a collective biography around the subject 'Taking and not taking up responsibility'. In this way, the PhD was deterritorialised and opened up in different direction.

A PhD is seen as an individual process, it also comes along with a personal degree 'doctor of educational sciences' that indicates your achievement and success. The neoliberal approach to university management, emphasises quantifiable, individual performance. An example of this is the number of publications on which you have to be first author, individual contributions and presentations at conferences, the disciplinary practices like progress reports, and if you want a further academic career you should reflect on 'ranking and impact' factor of the journal you publish in etc. All those activities are measured against a comparable group, person or institution (Savat and Thompson 2015). This means that collaborations must be almost invisible because they are perceived to detract from the value of the individual work. A complementary discourse of mastery further fosters a desire to be recognised for the work that I have done, and the trajectory of my work. There is also the desire to do 'good' research of a 'high' standard and to do research that makes a difference. So, it's challenging to look at how this collaborative work—that is at the centre of the methodology—can have a place and space in a neoliberal university. The insecurities around this were often the topic of discussion in the DSE; we thought collaboratively about how we could go beyond those institutionalized practices, and this supported me in extend this intertwined project. Mapping out how the collaborative groups are interwoven is an example of making the research transparent and more stratified and thus recognizable.

It is hard work doing research outside the dominant discourse, and doing something new in academic and personal work (St. Pierre 2015). Some places were 'safe' spaces such as the annual International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (Urbana – Champaign) where it was possible to present research and to experiment with concepts, but other spaces felt more dangerous. For example, at our faculty, where I had to present the results of the collective biography work with the SENCOs and describe the concept of assemblage following a presentation of neuroscience research. The contrast felt enormous between the scans of the brains as hard proof, and an image where you plug in a philosophical concept. It was a challenging task and required a lot of courage, both to present the research and to answer the questions about objectivity and reliability that came afterwards.

It took us two years to get the articles published that the collective biography group wrote, drawing on the concept of 'Monster'. Often the methodology was questioned by the reviewers; the memory stories in the collective biography were read as case studies, or the participants were viewed as individual autonomous subjects. This resistance to our work within the field of Disability Studies caused uncertainty, and doubts were raised about the consequences of doing research differently. However, the collaboration with the SENCOs brought energy and showed the impact that this kind of research can have, as one of the SENCOs said: *"I'm working in a new school and after the collective biography workshop it became clear that I cannot walk in and say here I am, this is my mandate. I paid a lot of attention to the placement of my office, next to principal or in the middle of the school, because as we have seen in the collective biography, it has agency. I thought about what makes the office possible or impossible."* Such a response was a driving force to continue with this kind of research, to find a place for our papers, to look for encouraging environments in which to present our work and to examine how we could strengthen our assemblages.

Theory and concepts are central to this kind of research. Sometimes it was a struggle to work through the difficult and intensive readings (Butler, Shildrick, Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault, Barad, etc.). It required time to get familiar with the poststructural/new materialist concepts and the collaborative way of working with them. At the same time the collaborative work with the SENCOs reterritorialized the theoretical work because they were not used to reading academic and philosophical texts. The collaborative work with the SENCOs drew attention to the accessibility of theory and concepts and we had to search for different, creative sources which could help us to understand the concepts. For example, in the collective biography with the SENCOs, we discussed the text in a very detailed way, and, as an alternative to reading, we watched a YouTube film where ‘subjectification’ was explained. In this way it deterritorialized the collective work in the collective biography group and DSE, were we took up the challenges to think how we could be accessible in our writings and presentations at conferences.

Concepts are not bound to one or other of the collaborative groups; there is intra-action between the different concepts we used. For example, the concept of assemblage that came out of the work with the SENCOs supported an understanding of the concept of heterotopia used in the collective biography group. The creative work we did in the collective biography group was helpful in creating the diffractive script. It’s not about what a concept is, but what it produces, how it opens new thinking (Allan 2007).

So, the boundaries between the collaborative groups were blurry and at moments it looked chaotic and messy. The process of writing and the final stage of the PhD - of bringing everything together- helped with seeing connections and movements, and was integral to the emergence of new understandings. So, what first was seen as a binary, as various different research projects imploded in new territorialisings (Davies et al. 2017), new possibilities opened, and the research journey took off in different directions.

It became a very exciting journey in which not-knowing, and waiting, were vital strategies for me as an emerging post-structural/ new materialist researcher. It meant, on the one hand, looking at the research with an open mind and being carried away in those moments where there is a possibility of going into the not-yet-known. I learned not to want to find totalising truths.

Researcher as part of the assemblage

The collaborative nature of this work brings to the forefront the experience in which the researcher and the researched engage with each other “to affect and be affected” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, xvi). The researcher is not separate from the assemblage, instead the researcher is entangled with their own history, desires, discourses etc. I experienced this very intensely as issues surrounding inclusive education became entwined with my personal life. I became the mother of a child that didn’t follow the standard pathway of schooling. In the beginning, the experience overwhelmed and paralysed me, and I tried to put the experiences and perspectives it brought to one side. But it didn’t work; so I brought in my own narrative, my own embodied experiences as a parent in the paper *‘Participative research: Being personally involved as a researcher’*. I undertook this work not to be judgmental of the school, teachers, support workers, etc. or to privilege myself as the one who more correctly understood the truth. I did it to become aware of the way in which discursive practices, such as deficit-thinking, work on and through us. Alcoff (1991) points out that it is important to investigate our own positionality, and the discursive practices that constitute each one of us, and how that impacts on what we are saying. My experience as a parent means that I’m alert to the possibility that parents can be the ‘missing voice’ and can be put in a subordinated position during an inclusive trajectory. It also brings a serious commitment to remaining open to different narratives, perspectives and discourses.

This investigation of my positionality is also combined with my search for the way to facilitate a collective biography workshop. Collective biography is not a rule following method with fixed research designs where steps need to be followed. So, questions arose for me about my position as a researcher in that process. In the previous qualitative research that I conducted, I had learned to make myself invisible or certainly not to play a central

role. On the other hand, I was sometimes positioned by myself and others as the expert, the one who takes the lead in doing the research, in developing conclusions and constructing knowledge. But in the collaborative process I had to take up a different position, not on the sideline, but also not in the middle. While decisions were made collaboratively, the workshop and the process needed to be facilitated by me. Taking up this position was a new experience for me and demonstrated the methodological challenges involved in both participating in and facilitating such collaborative processes. This search is discussed in the paper “*Participative research: Being personally involved as a researcher*“, where the influence of the Theme Centered Interaction (TCI) comes to the foreground (see p. 58).

During the research I followed a long-term professional development TCI training. TCI is developed by Ruth Cohen, and has foundations in psychoanalysis, humanistic psychology, educational-pedagogy and philosophy. In the paper, I used the term of ‘own leadership’ (chairperson postulate) to investigate my position within the collective biography workshop that I facilitated. The term ‘own leadership’ seems at first glance to contrast with post-structuralism/new materialism because it could be read as embedded in a humanistic discourse. I never experienced it as such during the training; we were instead challenged to see the discursive practices that were working on us. My reading of the TCI axioms actually helped me to move beyond the idea of the human as an independent and autonomous being. For example, the ‘existential – anthropological axiom’, emphasizes that ‘*we are entities that are part of the universe, equally autonomous and interdependent*’. This axiom breaks for me the taken-for-granted idea that we are all distinct entities, and this insight comes together with a focus on connection and collaboration. TCI was part of my assemblage, and helped me to take up the position of becoming researcher through encounter and personal involvement, ‘to affect and be affected’ (Davies 2014).

So instead of distancing myself and pushing myself aside, I used the affective flows to de-stabilise or de-territorialise the research and open up new ways of becoming, and of becoming a researcher. This investigation of my position and the in-depth description of facilitating the process of the collective biography workshop made it possible to make visible the discursive practices that constitute me and make my multiplicity visible – becoming a woman, mother, a disability scholar, a researcher, and so on.

Diffraction methodology

At the beginning of the PhD I was inspired by poststructuralist/ new materialist concepts and the methodology of collective biography. This came along with the insight that a subject is conceived as emergent in each moment, moments that are simultaneously discursive, relational and material (Davies 2014). As a result, I looked at the SENCOS differently, not as separate entities, but as entangled. The epistemological, ontological and ethical assumptions embedded in this kind of research (Bozalek and Zembylas 2016), had an impact on how the research was conducted. Poststructuralist/new materialist methodologies de-individualize those doing the research, and seek encounters, in which the research itself, both its practices and its findings, emerge as something new (Davies and Gannon 2013). In those intra-active spaces, knowledge emerges; collaborative work deterritorialises the static and fixed structures of thought; creativity and flow emerge and taken-for-granted practices are questioned.

Poststructuralism/new materialism provides a refreshing perspective on doing qualitative inquiry; it moves beyond reflection, or mirroring of what is assumed to be already there (Mitchell 2017), and takes up the concept and practice of diffraction. Diffraction means to break apart in different directions (Barad 2007), it’s a dynamic, entangled process that enacts newness (Mitchell 2017). Diffraction requires us ‘to read insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specifications of relations of difference and how they matter’ (Barad 2007, 71). The different concepts of Deleuze and Guattari, Barad, etc., the reading groups, the performances of the script play, the encounters with my supervisors, my experience as a mother, the SENCOS’ practices, the evolutions with the M-decree, and so on. are all actively interfering with each other, and to look at them diffractively opens up the possibility that something different comes to matter.

So, I have been challenged to take nothing for granted and to rethink my practice, theory, concepts and methodologies. The collaborative work with the SENCOS and the literature (see Chapter 2) generated two concepts - agency and responsibility – that we wanted to explore further. So we arrived at the following research questions:

- How might we rethink the concept of agency?
- How might we rethink the concept of responsibility?

Different post-structural/new materialist methodologies were used (collective biography and a diffractive script play), to rethinking these concepts. While the various methodologies are outlined and described in the papers/articles of the PhD, here I will discuss the diffractive methodologies.

Collective biography ²³

During the six years of the research I participated in five collective biographies. The methodology of the collective biography is developed mainly by Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon (2006, 2009, 2013) and it works with the telling and sharing of stories around a relevant research topic. In the collective biography with the SENCOS stories were told around the question *‘What’s your (first) memory of taking up or not taking up responsibility?’* It’s not about the accuracy of the memory or the experience of an individual, rather it’s about the construction of knowledge that emerges from multiple intra-actions (Davies and Gannon 2006). The experience of listening and being listened to opens up the everyday discourses through which we come to exist, and makes dichotomy and categorisations visible (De Schauwer, Van de Putte, Blockmans, Davies 2016a). The memory-work, the concepts, the conceptual analysis, the participants, the space and place are brought into a diffractive relation with one another (De Schauwer, Van de Putte, Davies 2017). To expand the possibilities for mapping differences, we used material images of the workplace of each participant.

Integral to the process is the collaborative work after the workshop, this is collaboratively writing an analytic text using the written memories and plugging in philosophical concepts that will tease out new insights and understandings from the memories. The papers that came out of the Collective Biography Group have adopted this intensive collaborative writing process to unravel the discursive nets in which the memories are caught up. I took up responsibility for the writing in the papers that came from the work with the SENCOS. Concepts and abstracts from the text were discussed with the SENCOS. The creation of a collective learning group required a lot of commitment, was time-consuming, and difficult to schedule. Collaborative work happens in different intensities, but what is important is that the whole process allows for transformation, rather than just remaining at the same level of understanding, and rather than representing what’s assumed to be already there. I have continued this collective work until the end, the conclusion is a product of collaborative work. Together with the SENCOS I answered the question, what do we learn and what does it mean for the SENCO and his/her educational practice, where does this research interfere and matter? This inspiring moment was again a moment of collective learning and can be seen as the foundation of the conclusion.

So it becomes clear that diffractive methodologies work not so much as method to be followed but as emergent possibilities (De Schauwer, Van de Putte, Claes, Verstichele, Davies. 2016b). *“[O]ne must begin anew with little “methodological” help – with no empirical methods textbooks that describe research designs (recipes) and structuring practices that explain where to begin and what to do next and then next.” (St. Pierre 2015, 80).* Instead it asks for a continuous exploration of, and experimentation on, how to create spaces in which to open thought and which

²³ A more detailed description of the methodology can be found in the paper De Schauwer, E. Van de Putte, I., Davies, B. (2017) Collective biography: using memory work to explore the space-in-between normativity and difference/disability. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 24(1), 8-19.

remain open to changing strategies (Gannon 2001). If this does not take place, the research only reproduces more of the same. The various collective biographies evolved during the different collaborations; for example we developed the strategy of adding afterthoughts to each memory story; tracing what it was each memory story enabled us to do conceptually (De Schauwer et al. 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b). There was also experimentation with arts to expand the methodology, challenging the dominance of language, and we worked to integrate multiple perspectives. In the collective biography around the concept of 'heterotopia' we animated our stories through painting and through making clay models of the characters and of the material objects in our stories (De Schauwer et al. 2017a). I cannot say that I jumped immediately into this way of doing research, I needed time to work with art and experimentation. In the workshop around monstrosity some of the participants animated their own memories through art work. At that time, I felt resistance and I thought it wasn't 'my cup of tea'. But out of the multiple interactions and wanderings grew inspiration and dedication to engage in thinking differently, and I came to understand that creativity, experimentation and imagination are essential in contributing to re-thinking and re-animating qualitative inquiry. This shift made it possible for my resistances, insecurities and doubts to fade away and be replaced by a great pleasure in developing and working with diffractive scripts and excitement about what this kind of research can produce.

Diffractive script

In diffractive research, it is important not to get caught up in reflection and reflexivity as this might create categories of difference. This happened with a story that came out of the collective biography workshop with the SENCOS, the particular memory and the discussion were mired in judgment and new ways of thinking were foreclosed. So we looked how we could put the research to work in order to think differently (Mazzei 2016). Barad (2014) says it begins "by re-turning – not by returning as in reflecting on or going back to a past that was, but re-turning as in turning it over and over again – iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities (spacetime-matterings), new diffraction patterns" (Barad 2014, 168). So we 'returned' the story in a diffractive script that contained the multiple voices, the desires, the histories, the ambiguities, etc. and the different performances of the script provided input for reworking the script and the way we worked with it. The collective work of listening to the story, performing the script and reflecting upon it in mutual entanglement with other agents enabled us to listen differently and to contest moral judgments and the power of normative discourses.

The entanglement with the material world came more and more part of the PhD, I became to see that "matter is not the background of human activity" (Fox and Allred 2014), instead I experienced that 'materiality is as much force as entity, as much energy as matter, as much intensity as extension,.. human, non-human are all vital materialities" (Bennet 2010, 20). To bring in materiality and to de-centre the human subject we worked with an image of the workplace of each participant in the collective biography with the SENCOS and in the diffractive script a Greek choir – as appeared in ancient Greek theatre – was included to incorporate "an intra-active relationship between all living organisms and the material environment such as artefacts, spaces and place that we occupy and use in our daily practice" (Lenz Taguchi 2010, 10). The agential forces of human and non-humans are entangled and, through their interferences, produce new knowledge (Mitchell 2017). A diffractive methodology draws attention to the lines of force through which we are each, singly and as entangled multiplicities, produced through these encounters, always in process of becoming-other-than-we-were-before (Davies 2015). Through which the diffractive methodology borders and categories were troubled (Haraway as cited in Patchini –Ketchabaw and Clarck 2014) and other questions came to the front 'who and what comes to matter' (Barad 2014). This diffractive research transforms existing patterns of thinking and practice in a way that enables normative ideas of schooling, learning and belonging to be challenged. Within this kind of research I took up Slee's (2011 in Messiou 2017) invitation to think about our role in shaping the world we live in and what world we prefer and this starts with questioning and reconsidering our own position in the world because we are part of the world in this ongoing intra-activity.

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Participative research: Being personally involved as a researcher²⁴

Abstract

This article investigates how research becomes a dialogue, an intra-action, in which the researcher is personally involved while at the same time guiding the process, in order to accomplish shared responsibility. In this way, participative research can lead to different, new insights and activism.

More than just an introduction...

I ring the doorbell. I breathe deeply to calm myself and to reduce the stress of the train ride and related delay. The train was full of people coming from a national demonstration, a tense atmosphere which did not allow me to deal with a difficult meeting at work and focus on the upcoming meeting with the teacher of my son. I hear a loud buzz, the school gate opens. I take another deep breath, straighten my shoulders and then, with a big step forward, I walk into the school.

The door of the secretary office opens. The principal comes out and says: "I am joining the meeting, so that I know what is being said by everyone."

I want to go back outside. I know what this means. It is not good. Instantly, I recall what was difficult, the struggles, the conversations...

I want to shout but I remain silent...

We arrive at the classroom. The SENCO is waiting in front of a closed door:

Ok, another person joining the meeting. The message has to be clear. I know this approach, 'strengthening the troops'. I have seen it happen to many other parents. The surprise element has the intended effect. My heart beats faster.

There we are, outside of the classroom. Everyone remains silent; nobody is looking at me. I start to chat about the national demonstration and the train ride.

I feel the relief of the others. We can act as normal as possible, as I await the verdict.

I want to shout but I remain silent...

The parents who talked to the teacher before me come out. We go inside, four desks have been placed to face each other. The teacher, the principal and the SENCO sit down around me, two in front of me, one next to me. The circle is closed. I feel LOCKED IN. Nobody is looking at me. The silence is interrupted by the teacher, who puts down a school report and says: "We are not going to discuss his grades; first I want to talk about his behaviour. But maybe you should first tell us what he tells you about school."

²⁴ Based on: Boek chapter: Van de Putte, I. and De Schauwer, E. (2016). Ik breng mezelf in als onderzoeker: van participatief naar participierend onderzoek. Translated: Participative research: Being personally involved as a researcher. In G. Van Hove, A. Schippers, M. Cardol, E. De Schauwer (red.) *Disability studies in de Lage Landen*. (pp.277-295). Garant: Antwerpen-Appeldoorn.

Only the teacher is looking at me, as she waits for an answer. I start ... but then I feel the emotions bubble up. Where is this going? ... I stop...

The teacher continues: "We think he is at the end of his possibilities. He has to work above his level so he is looking for a form of release. He is looking for a way to prove himself."

I want to shout but I remain silent...

I: "I understand, some of the tasks are a bit pointless." For example, for the dictation he has to memorize all the words, but he has not developed any insight into the structure of words. It would be good to make adjustments."

The teacher responds: "We believe we have to let go of the standard developmental objectives. It is too much for him."

The principal looks at the teacher and the SENCO, and shakes her head. "No, it's not about remediation; it's REALLY about letting go. Letting the developmental goals of the 4th grade go."

It is silent...

I want to shout but I remain silent...

I: "Sorry, I cannot answer you right now. This does not feel safe. I do not know what I have to answer. " This is not fair. For two years we have been asking them to take his needs serious. But until now, his problems were not visible. With the exception of a few remedial adjustments. It is not fair to put all the blame on him. You cannot deny him the support and then conclude that the level is too high for him.

I try to bring in the barriers in the environment instead of making him the problem.

The focus should be on how to adapt the education to him and not the other way around. How can we take into account his struggles with reading and writing?

I: So you are saying that we have to make a decision based on what he can do, where he needs remedial teaching, where he needs resources and where we need to formulate other goals?"

I have to be careful and I cannot use the educational jargon. I must show that I accept their evaluation. I do not want to be seen as the mother who is blind to her son's problems. I do not have a problem acknowledging that; so I nod... But it feels like a betrayal.

I have to create another image of him. We cannot give him up

"But where can he be successful then?"

This breaks my heart... I want to give examples of his philosophical questions, his reasoning ability...

I keep going, because I do not want the conversation to stop. But I feel them giving up on him... What can I bring up? Is there still anything I can say?

I: "I understand that we must make certain choices but the main goal must be to support him so that he can be part of and participate in THIS society."

I see the teacher looking at the clock. Are there other parents in the hall? I do not want it to end here.

I want to shout but I remain silent...

We wrap up the conversation. I walk out of the school. My backpack feels heavy, I bike and let the rain fall on my face, but no tears flow because at home he is waiting and the last thing I want is that he sees my sadness, disappointment, anger, ...

I want to shout but I remain silent...

I want to use this critical incident as a starting point to describe how I came to be personally involved in my PhD study. Besides a researcher, I am also a mother of two boys. And because of the educational trajectory of my eldest son, I literally became part of my research topic 'inclusion'. Within the inclusion process, I am no longer merely a supporter, a researcher and an activist, but now also an experience expert. These different positions influence each other. The event described above shows how I experienced not feeling heard as a parent. The meeting was organized in such a way that I did not feel as an equal partner. I was placed in the position of the not-knowing parent, not able to speak freely or share my experience and knowledge. I could only be the comprehensive and docile parent. The school does not intend to make parents feel incompetent. It is rather the underlying assumption that 'parents need to be informed about what is good for their child' and that has an impact on the collaboration and the position of the different partners. The discourse of deficit thinking made me lose control as a parent and no longer able to determine the expectations and goals of my son's school course. This event had such an immense impact on me because my work as a Disability scholar always starts from the idea that people themselves are the expert on their own life. The lived experiences and feelings of people are the starting point. I approach persons with a disability and their network as people with rights instead of 'care objects'. (Van Hove et al 2014a) This perspective towards human rights is strongly embedded in my world view, which was inspired by theoretical framework but also by different real-life experiences. For instance, in my practical training I supported children from the age of preschool until 16 years in a welfare centre. All children were placed by a judge because of their home situation.

The clock says five o'clock. It's very busy in the age group. Children are running in and out to get their stuff together. Most of the children are going home for the weekend. Today is an important day for 5-year-old Chris. He can go home to his mother for the first time in two months. He looks for his teddy bear and finishes his weekend bag first. The colleagues are drinking coffee at the table and discussing the new work schedule and the problems and tensions around it. It's becoming later and later, and Chris is still waiting outside. It becomes obvious that his mother won't

show up. I ask the colleagues what to do. One of them replies: "Well, what did you expect? She probably has a new boyfriend. People like that should not have children. If I were a judge, I would deal with it differently." She looks back at her schedule and counts her hours. I'm surprised by her reaction. I hurry outside, sit down besides Chris and wait for his mother with him. It's becoming colder and darker. Eventually, he takes my hand, and we go back inside together. Once inside, he lets go of my hand and runs towards the sofa. He jumps between two older boys who stay there during the weekend. Together they watch the Simpsons.

I can still remember the feeling of waiting together out in the cold. This experience affected me profoundly and made me choose to encounter and work differently with people. I try to take different perspectives, have respect for people and believe in the possibility to change, both for people as for situations. The activist in me was born.

Disability Studies as an academic discipline

In the interdisciplinary field of Disability Studies, the idea of political activism really appeals to me. Disability Studies does not consider disability as an individual, medical problem. It is regarded as a phenomenon that only gains meaning in a social or cultural context. This view shifts the focus towards the barriers and thresholds that people with disabilities experience in their participation in society (Coene & Uvijn 2013). Disability Studies resolutely chooses inclusion, support, dialogue and empowerment (Van Hove et al. 2008).

"Disability studies invites us to become careful and active listeners (Rinaldi 2005) to what people want and how they want to participate. It makes us think about ways we can/should support people with disabilities to enhance their participation and opportunities to participate." (Van Hove et al. 2014b)

The realisation of inclusion and participation assumes a removal of barriers. It supposes that we are obliged to realise that every individual gets access and feels welcome (De Schauwer 2013, 47). This realisation asks for a well-defined process of support and engagement in which connection, openness and dialogue are sought. Dialogue is considered to be a process of transformation in which you cannot control the final result.

"Dialogue is of absolute importance. It is an idea of dialogue not as an exchange but as a process of transformation where you lose absolutely the possibility of controlling the final result." (Rinaldi 2005, 184)

This kind of dialogue does not represent detached, objective professionals, one-size-fits-all solutions or specialized approaches. Instead, it assumes a collaboration based on partnerships (Van Hove et al, 2008) and a break with the dominant thinking in terms of deficit. Therefore, we can no longer stay neutral (Freire 2004). This view asks for a shared activism and resistance towards social change (Van Hove et al. 2014a). My aim as a researcher is to reconfigure the world we live in and to contribute to an inclusive society (Hoppe, Schippers, Kool, 2011).

In search of participative research

To create change, practice must be both the starting and end point of the research. To enable a more inclusive society, collaboration is needed in our research.

"Researchers are forced to leave their desks. They are challenged to (re)define reality in dialogue with the children, their parents, other persons involved and the local community." (Pfeiffer in Goodley & Van Hove, 2005).

To take up this challenge I worked with qualitative methodologies. In a participative action study, I developed a concept that aimed to support teachers in dealing with diversity (Van de Putte et al. 2010). Although I closely co-operated with five SENCOs²⁵, it was difficult to bring about change, for several reasons. First, the SENCOs accomplish a wide array of tasks in their (limited) assignments. Second, they have to deal with high standards of competence; having to be both ‘expert pedagogue’ and ‘expert didactics’. Because of the high pressure to perform, SENCOs often end up merely ‘trying to survive’ and only able to react to external stimulants and expectations (van de Braak, 2011). Their engagement with change is rather limited, nor could the practice-oriented research facilitate this sufficiently. In addition, there is also the danger to create (unintended) binaries in the research. In the analysis of my data categories and moral judgments were established. Below is an example of an observation and associated analysis:

“This morning the new teacher Catherine arrives at my office (SENCOs office). She tells me: ‘Mansoor has become crazy. He’s screaming and crying and I’m not able to calm him down’”. So I go with her to the classroom. In the meanwhile, almost all children are crying. Catherine is already the third teacher since the beginning of the school year. Mansoor is from Afghanistan and has been traumatized. He needs a lot of security. So I stay with Mansoor and ask him if he would rather go to teacher Els, his teacher from last year. Mansoor stops crying and grabs my hand and together we walk to teacher Els. I say to teacher Els: “You have an assistant for the day”. Els welcomes him very warmly. I go back to Catherine and tell her that she shouldn’t take it personally but we have to think how she can build a relationship with Mansoor. (Notes observation)

Analysis data: The SENCO is considered a ‘helper in need’. The teacher literally leaves the class to ask for help. Does this mean that children with specific needs are regarded as a separate category and therefore also the responsibility of someone else? What does this incident reveal about the expectation that a ‘good’ teacher is in control of the classroom? From this perspective, the practice of the teacher is not seen in a setting of learning. The action of the SENCO can be considered as an action to regain normalcy; the teacher does not get space and place to learn.

This fragment demonstrates that categories are put in place, compared and stigmatized. In this instance, the teacher is presented as a static object with a well-defined and stable identity: not able or allowed not to learn. Thus, a binary category is created, like the binaries (man/woman, white/black, normal/abnormal); where one (the SENCO) is considered ‘better’ than the other (the teacher) (Shildrick 2002). Disability Studies aims to avoid this kind of binary thinking. However, the analysis above does not succeed in this aspiration. In positioning myself as “the righteous who questions the practices of those others who ignorantly discriminate” (De Schauwer et al. 2016), I missed out on opportunities to gain new insights. I positioned myself outside of the observation although it is simply impossible to describe reality independent of my own perspective.

The qualitative methods I used didn’t produce the desired change and thus often lack the perspective suitable for a Disability Studies approach. The question remains: “*How can I encounter people to take up (shared) responsibility?*” In order to realize the participatory and emancipatory character of Disability Studies in my research, there were two things that helped me in my search for a means of facilitating such encounters. First, the framework of ‘theme-centered interaction’ (TCI) and the concept of ‘own leadership’ gave insight into how shared responsibility can be obtained. Second, the research methodology of ‘collective biography’ (CB) was also helpful because it uses a post-structural/new materialist conception of the subject – a subject-in-relation (Davies and Gannon 2009).

25 SENCOs are support givers in regular primary school. Their job is threefold: coordination of the support policy, teacher support and student support.

Theme-centered interaction: a framework of shared responsibility

At the beginning of my PhD research I encountered ‘theme-centered interaction’ (TCI): which “is a comprehensive, holistic action concept that has the goal of shaping situations in which humans interact, work, live and learn together such that they consciously experience each other as humane and humanizing’ (Schneider-Landolf et al 2013, 12). TCI is an action concept that aims to develop qualities of leadership and to inspire shared responsibility in creating assignments and processes of constructive collaboration (Schneider-Landolf et al 2013). The roots of TCI are the personal history of the founder Ruth Cohn and the theoretical schools of psychoanalysis and humanistic psychology.

Ruth Cohn (1912-2010) was born in a Jewish family in Berlin. She grew up in a protected environment and studied macro-economics and psychology. After some unpleasant experiences with the emerging nationalism, she moved to Switzerland where she continued to study pedagogy, philosophy, literature and psychoanalysis. In 1914 she moved to the United States. Cohn did not receive a permit to work as a psychoanalyst and work with adults, but was only allowed to work with children. This made her angry, as if the problems of children were any less important. Again she was experiencing inequality based on religion, age, gender... Cohn worked as a teacher’s assistant at the Bankstreet schools (a progressive teacher training college), where the idea of ‘living learning’ originated. “Looking back, I know that Bankstreet has been the source of ‘living learning’: following the track of children’s interests” (Cohn in Schneider-Landolf et al 2013, 22). From there, her therapeutic work developed: she chose not to take her own person out of the therapeutic encounter but rather to develop a warm relationship, to work in groups and to deal with actual problems. She succeeded in combining insights from psychoanalysis and social psychology.

Her experience of the Nazi dictatorship was the most important motive to push the ‘chairperson postulate’/‘be your own leader’ idea to the forefront in her framework. She aimed to achieve that people practiced their considerations of ‘should’ (ethics and morality), ‘like’ (desire) and ‘must’ (feel obliged to) (Schneider-Landolf et al. 2013, 116). This implies that you do not wait for someone to guide the situation but that you take up responsibility. An important concept in this framework is ‘participative leadership’. The participative leader strives for equal collaboration relations and attempts to realize shared responsibility on the content/ theme, on the one hand, and promote the personal leadership of each participant, on the other hand. This style of leadership inspires participants to take up responsibility. Participative leadership integrates leading and participating. This concept became a key principle in my research. By leading and participating as a researcher, shared responsibility is mobilized.

Collective biography methodology

Our research group Disability Studies at Ghent University was introduced to Collective Biography (CB) through Prof. Davies. In the research methodology of CB, embodied memories of a relevant research topic/concept are shared. This research concept is central in both the memory work and the conceptual analysis; with the aim to rethink the social world (Hickey-Moody and Malins 2007, 2). During collective biographies, participants share their memories which are triggered by a starting question that focusses on the research concept (for example, what is your first memory of taking up responsibility?). Every participant can ‘plug in’ and experience how the concept works through telling, listening, inquiring and writing. Collective biography does not aim to reconstruct reliable memories or to generalize knowledge, but to create knowledge how individuals are constructed.

As poststructuralist research, the methodology of collective biography departs from the insight that knowledge is constructed by both the researcher and the data (Davies and Gannon 2006).

“Post-qualitative research seeks not to get bogged down in categorization, in causal explanations and in attempts to represent what already exists. Its focus is, rather, on the encounters through which the entangled enlivening of being is emergent (Barad 2007 in Davies and Gannon 2013). Such research demands of the researcher new skills of listening to the minute details of life as it unfolds in all its multiplicity, in its repetitions and in its leaps into the unexpected and new (Davies et al. 2013).”

This research methodology asks for a well-defined way of listening. While we usually listen to fit the story into our existing knowledge, the strategy of listening during collective biography requires us to give up our prejudices.

“It means opening up the ongoing possibility of coming to see life, and one’s relation to it, in new and surprising ways. Emergent listening might begin with what is known, but it is open to creatively evolving into something new. Emergent listening opens up the possibility of new ways of knowing and new ways of being, both for who listen and those who are listened to.” (Davies 2014, 21)

Through the encounter, the memory work and the conceptual analysis, the research develops into something new. We gain insight into how discourse affects us and how it shapes and take up themselves The autobiographical story morphs into a collective knowledge construction. Barad (2007) explains this with the neologism of ‘intra-action’. While ‘interaction’ suggests that people are separate individuals that precede their ‘interaction’, ‘intra-action’ suggests that individuals emerge from their encounter of intra-action.

“It is important to note that the “distinct” agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, “agencies are distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements” (Barad 2007, 33)

The researcher is no longer invisible in these encounters; on the contrary, the researcher participates in and is part of the encounter. A process comes alive when all participants, including the leader, contribute and are involved in content as well as encounter (van de Braak, 2011). For me, this is the connection between collective biography and the concept of ‘participative leadership’ in TCI. It is about finding ‘tuned’ leadership as a researcher in order to enable participants to take up responsibility. In what follows, I describe the process of CB in encounters with four SENCOS. I give insight into my search for participative leadership or “how to become a participative researcher” as well as into the way I guided the CB and generated ‘shared responsibility’. There are four stages in this process: the introduction, the invitation, the collective biography itself and the completion.

Introduction to the collective biography

For more than 10 years, I had been working with a group of four SENCOS for 7 years. Throughout these years, my position has changed considerably. First, I was their teacher, supervisor and evaluator within a long-term trajectory of professionalization. The SENCOS presented their struggles, wrote supervision reports and finished their training with a thesis on their learning process. After that, we closely collaborated in a long-term action-centred study. For the current research, I had to convince them to participate in a different way.

When I first suggested the idea of a collective biography, one of the SENCOS said: “I do not know what it will be, but I trust you. You have already introduced several new approaches and it has always turned out well.” On the one hand, this reaction illustrates the strong relationship between the research participants and myself. On the other hand, it also reveals their passive, submissive attitude, while I was actually aiming for an active and activist attitude. This observation clarified that I had to explain why I had chosen this specific research methodology. Taking up leadership presumes transparency and involvement of the participants in content, assignments and aims. It was my intent to fully involve the SENCOS in a partnership in which we made choices together, in which everyone gave input and took up responsibility.

Since the SENCOs were already familiar with TCI from their trajectory of professionalization, I decided to use the concept of ‘own leadership’ (‘chairperson postulate’) as the starting point for the collective biography. I illustrated this concept with examples of my own and their practice, and made the connection with the research. ‘Own leadership’ does not mean being dependent on the ‘formal leadership’ of the researcher, but rather taking up responsibility and reporting potential failures/obstacles. The SENCOs became interested and immediately exchanged ideas about possible meanings of ‘own leadership’. During this exchange, once again I slid back into the role of ‘educator’. I drew the axioms, postulates and the four-factor model of TCI on the blackboard when I should have utilized the knowledge of the group to work it out together. It became clear that I would have to be mindful of how I positioned myself and attempt to take up an equal role.

Invitation to the collective biography

The invitation for the three days of collective biography already introduced the SENCOs to the content to be discussed, namely their nomadic identity. How they constantly moving as an individual-in-relation? People without an academic education have considerable practical knowledge but less theoretical awareness (Hoppe 2011). I hesitated to give theoretical input because theory could possibly discourage them and make them give up. In order to lower the barrier, I differentiated in the way the theoretical input could be acquired. On the one hand, I gave them a book chapter of ‘Identity’ by Paul Verhaeghe (2012). On the other hand, I sent a YouTube link (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIUFAnQRcNo>) to a taped interview with the author of the book. Thus, an attempt was made to address the diversity within the group.

It was fundamental to involve the SENCOs in the process of how theory is developed. CB is a poststructuralist methodology with a specific point of view about subjectivation.

“The temporal paradox of the subject is such that, of necessity, we must lose the perspective of a subject already formed in order to account for our own becoming” (Butler 1997, 30)

This perspective considers the ‘self’ as mobile, dynamic and anti-essentialist and thus in a constant process of moving and becoming, because expectations, experiences, opinions, possibilities and desires constantly change through time and in interaction with their environment (De Schauwer: 2011, 230). Similarly, Verhaeghe (2012, 15) is doubtful about the “eternal, permanent I” and the “profound, steady core”. Identity has more to do with ‘becoming’ than with ‘being’. In this view, identity is a continuum, a plurality, a fusion, originating in relationships. Deleuze emphasizes the importance of ‘and-and’ in our identity: “We are this and that, always becoming something more, something else” (Davies and Gannon 2009, 28). This point of view on subjectivation would be the basis for the analysis of the memories that were told during the CB

“When you consider others as part of your identity, then their different, sometimes divergent, theories and opinions are seen as a resource. The awareness of the value of these differences and of having dialogue among them increases (Rinaldi, 2005 in Davies, 2014)”.

The week before the CB, the difficulty of having to take on the role of both leader and participant suddenly made me feel incompetent, as did the age difference between the SENCOs (aged between 46 and 55) and myself (38 years old). I was struck by uncertainty and doubt and I literally threw myself on the entire ‘web of science’ database. I went online to download all articles on ‘collective biography’, ‘special needs coordinator’ and ‘responsibility’ in an attempt to calm my nerves.

One of the principals had doubts about whether he would grant permission. He had estimated the absence of the SENCO for several days and was not sure whether the content was suitable. In the first instance, I let the SENCO clarify this, but when this did not work, I had a meeting with the principal. Eventually he gave permission with the message ‘I hope that she would like to remain the SENCO in this school because I see how personal and challenging the content is of the CB’. By including the SENCO in the research design and communication with her principal, I shared the responsibility and did not immediately take up the position of the ‘rescuer in

need'. After the meeting with the principal, I fully realised what this meeting could do with our collaboration. None of us knew what process we would go through and where we would end up.

Three-day collective biography

A safe start

The CB took place in a beautiful house, far away from the hustle and bustle of the schools and the daily worries. This spacious and pleasant location has different seating areas, both inside and outside. The arrival was cordial and warm as always, but I felt everyone's hesitation about what this three-day meeting would bring. Own leadership starts with awareness (van de Braak 2011). The questions important here are *"what am I aware of in a certain situation and what do I want to do with this?"* Hence, it is important to realize that you are part of the bigger picture. By focusing on myself as well as on the outside world, I decided to provide some room for this hesitation to be vented. I started from the critical incident with the principal discussed above and the uncertainty this brought, which had affected my feelings towards this three-day meeting. I felt responsible for the process and wanted to do well and to be caring to everyone, but I also felt a sense of guilt because I had pulled them away from their busy schedules. I invited them to think and share something around the following questions:

"This morning you did not drive to school and you did not go to my office, but we came here instead. I would like to dwell on 'What did you leave behind? What do you miss? What do you want to miss?' Everyone can join in and tell their story."



Example of a workplace of a SENCO

By creating space, everybody could 'plug in' and 'hitch on', and a joint start was made. Again, a connection could be made with every individual as well as the group. By organizing the CB, I was aiming for a gradual transition towards 'memory work'. By means of an image of their workplace (classroom, office, ...), the SENCOs were prompted to talk about their work situation. Stories were told based on the questions: *"What does my workplace reveal about my place within the school? Who comes in? Who do I keep out?"* Everyone had brought a picture, and someone had even made a beautiful collage.

During the exchange, I had taken charge by paying attention to their way of listening to each other and inviting them to question each other.

"We do not solely focus on what we do as a SENCO or our tasks. Along with this, we also listen to the way the SENCO relates to the teachers, and how the SENCO is positioned. So, we also take the second part of the question into consideration: who comes in and who do I keep out?"

In the encounter, a dynamic arose, and I felt my nerves subside. Everyone was enthusiastic, and we had profound discussion. One of the SENCOs said: *"We have heard so many stories from each other but this says it all: We should have done this earlier!"* This comment gave me energy and confidence. I was the last to discuss the picture of my workplace. This revealed a recurring pattern: I am strongly committed to supporting others and will not always show myself, which can sometimes feel as forgetting myself. It is clearly a balancing exercise for me to join in as a participant and not take on the role of observant.

Not only was the encounter energetic as well as energizing, the participants also managed to co-create the process and take on their own leadership. For example, when we started the exchange, one of the SENCOs said that she wanted to be the first one to discuss her picture.

“I would like to start, otherwise I can’t listen. So if you talk about shaping the exchange together, I feel free to do so”.

Because of such intercessions, I felt that more shared responsibility was taken towards ‘becoming researchers’. I therefore expressed my appreciation when individuals took initiatives in taking on their leadership.

“Taking up own leadership is about leadership qualities to take care of oneself and looking for possibilities to be able to have a valuable contribution towards the context you are part of (van de Braak 2011).”

At one point in the exchange, a participant was judging another participant, and I decided to intervene to frame and nuance the comments. Generally, my leadership style –tends to be caring and protecting, thus taking responsibility away from others. This seems to be rooted in a subconscious quest for harmony (van de Braak 2011), communality and connections between people. In this situation, I acted from this tendency to protect, even though it was unnecessary. The SENCO could have reacted herself or I could have pointed out the way in which we were communicating, for example *“If you say something about someone’s way of acting or their characteristics, also mention what this means to you”* (Cohn 2010). Overall, the CB had made a safe start with good dynamics and real encounter, so a transition could be made to the memories.

Memory stories

The first ‘memory question’ was *“What is my first memory of taking responsibility?”* The participants were asked to consider this for 5 minutes and to sense which memory came to mind. Their hesitation was palpable as they expressed their concerns: *“What comes to mind right now is something from my childhood and it is really silly”*. I reassured them, motivated them and invited them to share their story. The first story was met with laughter. After that, the conversation started to flow more smoothly, and the exchange took off as the stories triggered other memories. Everyone – including me – shared their memories hereby we asked each other questions to get the story clear. After that, I invited them to write their story down as vividly as possible, for example going back to childhood and using language that suits the age. Again, uncertainties arose among the participants as to whether they would succeed in this. I motivated them and I expressed that I felt like their stories were going to do the job and that I had confidence in the process. An important part of leadership is to motivate others to go one step further.

The first story was brought as a ‘performance’, very vividly and embodied. Everyone was immediately drawn into the story. I invited them to meet the other and to be open to being moved by the story. From listening openly, what was unclear was questioned, and everybody listened in such an open way that they could really imagine and ‘feel’ the experience. I encouraged them to ‘stretch’ their thoughts, focusing on what they did not already know, and as the profound question *“What is it like to be this person?”* (De Schauwer, Van de Putte, Davies 2017).

Through developing the skills of listening and attending to the minute bodily detail of moments of being, it becomes possible for each story to become a collective story, its purpose is no longer to signal the substance of any particular individual but to open participants to new insights into the processes of being and becoming in the world – new ways of being subjects (Davies and Gannon, 2006).

The story below is one of the stories told during the CB. Lieve comes from a family of five children. She is the second in line, has one older brother, two younger sisters and one younger brother. The story is written from the perspective of her eight year old self. When the eldest brother was given a separate bedroom, the three girls had to sleep together in one room. Lieve got a separate bed, and the two youngest sisters (a six year old and a two year old) were put together in a double bed. The cord to turn off the light was hung above Lieve’s bed.

I am in bed. My sisters An and Els are lying in the bed next to mine. The cord is hanging above my head. Yes, it is time to be quiet.

Me: "Now I don't want to hear another sound"

Els: "Yes but..., yes but..."

Me: "No buts. It's already late"

I leave the light on for a little bit. "I will soon tuck you in."

Els's twisting and turning, increasingly fierce.

Me: "Els"

Els: "I have to say something to mom."

Me: "What is it? Can't it wait till tomorrow? Mom is still working."

Els: "Tomorrow I have to bring a fabric to school, for my teacher, Rosanne. She wants to teach us how to sew."

Me: "Okay, go ahead. But come back immediately."

Els leaves the room. I put An down, I tuck her in, give her a blessing and bug her. An enjoys it and closes her eyes. Els comes back and jumps into bed. I also put her down, tuck her in, give her a blessing and bug her and then I'm also getting into bed.

I feel happy and leave the light on for a moment.

I hear An – she's turning and turning.

Maybe the light is bothering her? I turn off the light. This went well. Mission accomplished!

I can hear An and Els breathing more calmly. They are asleep.

It is a pity that I'm lying here alone.

Much later, I hear mom and dad. I close my eyes. Mom leans forward, gives me a blessing and a kiss. She waits for a moment and gives me an extra kiss.

It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a conceptual analysis of this story. It is used here to illustrate how the concept of responsibility affects the story. Lieve is the eldest of five, and it was her job to put her sisters to bed. This was at a time when a younger sister had died and her parents did not have the energy to take this on themselves. She took on this task unspoken, without being asked for it, other than by the positioning of the light cord above her bed. This responsibility goes hand in hand with a certain power. She is able to make decisions about her sisters, and responsibility is established by the acknowledgement she gets from her mother (the kiss Lieve gets, and only Lieve). The memory and the discussion of the story, as well as how the concept is reflected in the story, allow even an abstract concept such as responsibility to be translated into practice and new insights to emerge.

"I have sought, through stories of encounters with children, to bring a number of concepts vividly to life, showing their power to open up new ways of thinking and of intra-acting." (Davies 2014, 82).

Questioning collective biography: participative leadership at its sharpest

Talking about the stories the effects of the dominant discourse became visible as well as links with other stories. CB can be very intense because it is personal: *"Who am I becoming? What is it to be this person?"* However, CB does not aim to be therapeutic. Therefore, when a very personal theme came up during the encounter, I was paralyzed for a moment and did not know how to act. At that moment, my position as a professional came to the foreground. I was supposed to know what to do. The expert position came with a feeling of *"I am responsible and I need to solve"*. Eventually, the other participants were the ones to break the silence and start interacting. Only when I allowed myself to leave my professional/expert role, was I able to participate.

A colleague, took care of the food and all practical arrangements so I could focus on the process of the CB. At the end of the day, I could chat and reflect with her on our stories and on what it meant for myself and the group. She was not looking for answers, but helped me in my reflection and challenged me to take different

perspectives when considering my own choices and those of others. This interaction helped me to keep my focus on the appropriate measure of my leadership. Leadership is shown through not avoiding stories, difficulties and conflicts (Shneider-Landolf et al. 2013). To this end, I introduced a round to discuss all the ‘odds and ends’ by stating that stories continue to work on us even after they have been told. In that way, we discussed the way of working and the meaning of CB.

When discussing the question “*What is your first memory of not being responsible?*”, the participants found it much harder to empathise. They came up with excuses for each other, to take away the blame. This is an example of a reaction: “*I don’t agree; you did take your responsibility.*” It was crucial for me to intervene, stimulate and steer, but I was unable to. I felt physically and emotionally exhausted. The previous phase of the CB had caused more stress than I dared to admit, and I had no more energy to listen to the stories. At that moment, I was confronted with my choice of a ‘challenging’ research methodology, which was unfamiliar and for which I needed to be personally involved. Only then did I realize how responsible and accountable I felt for the success of the CB, which shows how difficult it is to achieve shared responsibility.

Saying goodbye – a glance at the practice

At the end of the CB, there was a last question to discuss: “*What will remain after the three days? What will I take with me to tomorrow and what worries me about tomorrow?*” The participants were asked to go back to the image of their workplace. The focus shifted back towards the professional role of the SENCOs and their own practice. This was an opportunity for each SENCO to reach back to their own goals: “*What do I want? How will I get there?...*” The transfer to their own needs is important for the self-guidance of each participant. These questions elicited different answers, and it was important to leave these as they were, in order to be respectful to each person and ability (Cohn 2010). In that moment, the participants appeared to be taking up their ownership of personal leadership. They specified clear actions to be taken, as well as obstacles to overcome in their educational practice. Overall, there was a clear sense of uncertainty as to whether they would be able to continue working with their colleagues and principal in the same manner as during the encounter.

Throughout the CB, a close relation had developed among the participants. In previous research projects, I often acted as the ‘glue’ between the participants: there was a connection between me and every participant, but less so among the participants. After this experience, I felt that the connection had deepened between all of us, thus starting a partnership between the different stakeholders. We had become a learning community, which could continue in an emancipatory manner.

After the CB, we met each other on a regular basis, to analyze the stories, the afterthoughts and the insights, which later converted into a paper. Hence, I also hoped to involve them in the following phases of the research. Although time consuming, this continued contact with the participants was of definite value to the research process.

“A paper is then collaboratively developed, working with the insights that have merged through the process of memory work. This stage of collaborative writing may well be the place where further shifts in thought are accomplished.” (Davies and Gannon, 2006)

Concluding thoughts

The above-mentioned process led to understanding of how the methodology of CB and the corresponding leadership of the researcher generate different insights and engender activism, thus approximating the Disability Studies' perspective.

Collective biography is not a typical research methodology comprising consecutive phases and methods. It requires a different way of knowledge construction and calls for a different positioning of the researcher, questioning the researcher as 'all-knowing expert'. Instead, the expertise lies in searching together and is guided by 'what we do not know'. Thus, research becomes a dialogical process. In these encounters, the openness to listen for what we do not know is prioritized. It is in and through the encounter that we evolve to something new.

"A research encounter in this sense is experimental - the researcher does not know in advance what onto - epistemological knowledge will emerge from it. [...] It opens the possibility of seeing how something comes to matter, not only in the world that we observe, but also in research practice." (Davies 2014).

By researching together how discourse and practice work in and through us, we open ourselves up and begin to move towards social change. These encounters allow us to experience a broadening of our potential for thinking and acting differently. In this way, CB becomes a research methodology which breaks with patterns that we take for granted.

"Knowing how things work can allow you to change them, to know when rules can or should be broken, and to work out how to invent and create in ways that go beyond the already known." (Davies 2014, 23)

With these encounters, which are essentially moments of intra-action, it becomes clear that we are influenced and affected by one another. I only become researcher in relationship with the other. In this intra-action as 'an ongoing mutual constitution of entangled agencies' (Barad 2007), the different positions that a person takes up have an impact on the positioning of the other participants. The 'self' and the 'other' become so tightly connected that they start to blend. Each of us is 'a multiplicity in connection with other multiplicities, even where those multiplicities contain, as they inevitably do, opposing lines of force' (Davies 2014, 9). For example I am a researcher, as well as an activist, as well as a support worker, as well as a mother, as well as... All these different roles/positions make me into the person/researcher I am. These different roles make me attentive to those who risk not being heard and to moments of inclusion/exclusion. However, this involvement brings along some contradictions and tensions: on the one hand, I can easily understand different perspectives and, on the other hand, I am vulnerable. It is an 'and-and' situation: I am strong and weak, emotional and rational, an individual and part of a larger whole...

"We are neither the singular subjected being nor the collective terms of our subjection, but singular and plural, where singularity can refer to all of humanity, and plurality can refer to each one of us. Deleuze plays with this thought when he writes about the "single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and unique Ocean for all the drops, a single clamor of Being for all beings" (Davies 2014, p. 35)."

In a process of collective biography, this intra-action plays an important role: every participant shares personal memories while at the same time taking part as researcher, and the researcher is also participant. In TCI terms this is called 'participative leadership'. A fundamental aspect of participative leadership is that the leader is actively involved. Hintner et al (2013 in Schneider-Landolf.) developed the conceptualization of participation. They differentiated between several forms of participation, involvement, and being personally connected (van de Braak 2011). During the CB, I participated in every activity (photos, stories, conversations, eating...). I was involved with such an intensity that it was difficult to take up leadership for 3 days straight. I shared a great deal out of my own life in my memory story. It was a constant balancing act to decide when and where to intervene. Moreover, in the writing of this article lay additional opportunities to reveal myself. This part of being involved

happens not only consciously but also subconsciously. Consciously, I made certain decisions and considerations. For example, when I noticed the participants hesitating to share memories, I voiced this hesitation and motivated them to get past it. Unconscious aspects such as projection had to be examined, reflected on and practiced before I could deal with them in group. Nonetheless, these hidden themes strongly influence our behaviour (Beentjes 2013).

“I was both an equal participant in the memory work and the leader. And this often required a delicate stepping back as well as a decisive movement forward. Knowing when to be silent and absent was as important as the particular quality of being there (Davies and Gannon 2006, 197)”.

Leading AND participating is exercising in taking up and giving responsibility. For me, here lies the key of moving people into a well-intended direction based on humanitarian values. When the research participants become owners of leadership, they can be inspired and start to adjust their own goals. Research is a way of having impact on the world. Creating together and evolving to new insights intensifies this movement, these ‘cracks’ as it were.

“There is a type of cracking that is micrological, like the small imperceptible cracks in a dish” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 198).

In one of the meetings after the CB, one of the SENCOS said: *“The difference with the previous meetings is that those were overwhelming and I found myself wondering “what is the point of this?”, but now it feels much more personal and intense.”* A shared responsibility brings a more activating and activist attitude when we can come to a transfer in our (educational) practice.

Thus, taking up leadership often requires an intense way of learning, also in the personal development of the leader/researcher. When participating in an optimal way in the process, the participants show their ‘real’ self (Hendriksen en de Wit 2004). Neither the participants nor the researcher can stay on the sideline. Participative research begins with showing yourself as a researcher and taking an appropriate measure of leadership, in such a manner that shared responsibility is generated. In that sense, research can deliver a valuable contribution towards a more inclusive society.

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CHAPTER 4

Rethinking agency as an assemblage

We need methodologies that disrupt our thinking, to open up taken-for-granted ideas, such as *'agency is solely lodged in the body of an individual agent'*. In the next chapter, we took up this challenge by plugging in the Deleuzian concept of 'an assemblage' in an image of a workplace. In this way, the image was not a representation of what was there, instead by reading-the-data-while-thinking-with-theory the various connections became visible and agency emerged out of the relations between (human and non-human) agents. For example, a tablecloth actively invites encounters around the table, that in turn can become an intra-active space that leads to new possibilities and has the capacity to reconfigure the world.

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Rethinking agency as an assemblage from change management to collaborative work

Abstract

The movement towards inclusion comes together with a neoliberal audit mentality whereby individuals are held responsible for the transformations. The Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) are seen as ‘change agents’ whose task it is, to support teachers in adapting their approach to optimise the chances for children with special needs in regular schools. In this paper, we want to problematise the ‘responsibility-blame discourse’ and look differently at agency. By using a diffractive methodology based on collaborative work, in which we have used material images of the workplace of the SENCO, and read-the-data-while-thinking-with-theory, we deconstruct the individualisation of agency. The SENCOs are no longer seen as separate individual humanist subjects where agency is solely lodged in the body of an individual agent (Barad 2007) but the SENCOs are part of the intra-active entanglement of multiple agencies, of an assemblage. This re-conceptualisation of agency leads to a different approach to inclusion, in which the participants in any encounter can work as part of the assemblage to develop communities capable of re- thinking practice and transforming it into a place where children with special needs become legitimate members of the school.

Introduction

The conceptual and practical shift from segregation to inclusion entails a move towards a discourse of acceptance of many forms of humanity. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with a disability (United Nations 2006) is one such discourse. In Flanders (Belgium), a new educational policy, ‘M-decree’ (‘Measures for students with educational needs’), came into force in 2015, as a first step in meeting the expectations of that 2006 UN Convention. The ‘M-decree’ mobilises the strategy of audit, in order to document changes, where change is defined in quantitative terms as the number of children who make the transition from special to regular schools. In this case, audit strategies are in themselves seen as effective agents of change; Vanobbergen (2015, 13) observed, for example, ‘when the decree came into force the number of children enrolled in special education at the primary school level already decreased by 3%’. The audit mentality, however, cannot pay adequate attention to how the change is to be achieved, and does not define which children are involved and with what effect. The numbers take no account of who is included, and how they are included (Bansel, Davies, Gannon, Linnell, 2008). In an audit mentality inclusion is translated as a ‘placement’; the ideal of giving all children the full benefit of education is narrowed down to access to the general curriculum (Miles and Singal 2010). The work that needs to be done to enable the various players, children, teachers, Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), principals and parents, to find ways to collaboratively contribute to the event of inclusion cannot be addressed sufficiently.

In the last three decades, neoliberalism has become a global hegemonic discourse (Giroux 2014), which shapes the ‘contemporary world, its relations and institutions, its power structures and modes of subjectification’ (Foucault in Revelles-Benavente and Ramos 2017, 11). A key strategy of neoliberalism is individualisation – a relentless hyper- individualisation, through which individuals are made responsible for the success of new policies and for the problems they are confronted with. In this paper we are aware of advantages of the audit mentality and the necessity for individual responsibility, but at the same time, we want to problematise this individualisation of accountability and responsibility and the audit mentality that comes along with it (Bansel 2007).

The discourse that is mobilised in response to the M-decree is a responsibility-blame discourse: who is responsible, and what is the responsibility of each participant. Individuals become, by default, the agents who are responsible for the new policy's success. Sometimes it is the individual child who is blamed (they could not be included because they were not 'normal' enough or their presence was disruptive); sometimes it is the teacher (who have failed because they have not adapted their teaching practices appropriately), or the parent (who has not accepted the shortcomings of the child and has not prepared the child for school well enough), or the principal (who did not create the necessary conditions for inclusion to work), or the special needs coordinator (who did not provide adequate support to everyone else).

Flemish educational context: focus on individual agents

In the current educational system in Flanders children are identified by their category membership, those categories defining who is normal and who lies outside the norm. The category is given signifying power: it defines who the child is. The child who is categorised as different from the norm is then perceived as having a problem, a problem that is located in the child (De Schauwer, Van de Putte, Blockmans, Davies. 2017) rather than in the normalising discourses and practices themselves. For some privileged students, their belonging is made self-evident through the practice of categorising those 'others' who do not fit in. As Brantlinger (2006) observes:

Individuals and groups who fail to achieve dominant standards are identified (marked, labelled, branded) with stigmatizing names (e.g. failure, disabled, at-risk) and sent to separate locations (special education rooms, low tracks, vocational schools). These distinction-making processes create a binary of (dominant) insiders and (subordinate) outsiders. (Brantlinger in Annamma, Boelé, Moore, Klingner 2013, 1279)

This process of categorisation can be described as abjecting the other, placing the difference in the other. The effect of such practices is not just on those who are abjected, but also on those who remain. As Shildrick's (2002) analysis shows the abjection (or casting out) serves to both construct and protect normalised identities as being 'not-that', not that which is at risk of being cast out. It is both an epistemological and an ontological challenge for those who have been identified as normal individual entities to see the work they do to abject and thus exclude those who cannot present themselves as that generic, normalised entity (De Schauwer, Van de Putte, Claes, Verstichele, Davies 2016). The educational traditions of categorisation and segregation on the basis of ability are not based on empirical evidence, but on the normative assumptions that make segregation unobjectionable (Danforth 2015). Even under the current new policy, the M-decree, the children who have been excluded are the ones required to adapt to the very institutions that position them as not-normal, not the same and not able to be the same as others (Davies and Harré 1990, Davies 2008).

The discourses at work are multiple and entangled. Like Waitoller and Kozleski (2015,7) observe: 'Pressure is also put on individual workers through the neoliberal mentality where there is a focus on individual competence, that comes together with pushing responsibility down to low-level workers'. This is also made clear in the communiqué about the new policy from the Department of Education, which states: 'The M-decree is about children who are challenging the mastery of the teacher. You could say the M is a reference to mastery of the individual teacher to educate children with special needs' (Oral statement of administrator of Department of Education about the M-decree, 19 April 2016). On the one hand, we see how the government is trying to challenge teacher, that they are able to teach all children. On the other hand, this communiqué rests responsibility with individual teachers; their mastery of their profession is placed in question; they too become vulnerable to the audit technology and its demand for specific outcomes. Their mastery is under surveillance; responsibility and blame are mobilised with no account being taken of the complex assemblage that creates and maintains the problem of categorisation and separation.

To support teachers in changing their practices, a new layer of individual agents, also given responsibility, has been created; educational support workers (pedagogical) counsellors, therapists, and Special Educational Needs

Coordinators (a new position created in 2003). Rarely has any attention been paid to how each of these individual agents might reinforce each other's work. Audit mentality is mostly interested in whether the extra funding produces the right statistics. This study focuses, in contrast, on the collaboration that might take place among the various players, not through the allocation of individual responsibility and blame, not through the intensification of vulnerability and insecurity, but through developing communities capable of re-thinking practice.

The SENCO: from remedial teacher to change agent

The work of the SENCO evolved from being a remedial teacher, whose work was focused on closing the gap between individual categorised children and the normalised group, towards a coordination role (Forlin 2001). Rather than working with individual children, SENCOs were to coordinate the school policy on special needs, write plans and protocols, and support the professional development of teachers. In practice, however, the support of teachers received less attention, with SENCOs often taking up tasks more in line with the old function of remedial teaching, becoming an extra pair of hands, providing extra instruction, co-teaching, adapting standardised materials and so on.

Because of the current inclusion efforts, SENCOs were to create opportunities for all children. The SENCO has to act as a powerful advocate for inclusion, and as a change agent for children with special needs (Szwed 2007). They were produced as the highly individualised, responsabilised and accountable arms of management (Davies and Bansel 2007). It has become an unquestionable truth within neoliberal regimes, that there is no other way to do things, and that we do not have a choice to act differently.

In this article, we want to challenge that truth by looking differently at agency. We will not theorise agency as the work of separate entities, but as mutual entanglements of multiple forces. By focussing on the entanglement itself as productive, we hope to open up new possibilities of thought and action in working towards an inclusive practice.

From individual agent to mutual entanglements of being

Working with feminist new materialist concepts, we abandon the assumption that the world is composed of individual entities with separately attributable properties (Barad 2003). We move away from representationalism to a more performative understanding of discursive practices, and we 'challenge the 'thingification' through which ongoing, unfolding relations are reduced to "things", "entities", "relata"' (Bennett 2010, 2). New materialist Karen Barad emphasises matter in relation to discursive practices, and uses the concept 'intra-action', which refers not to the interaction between separately existing entities, but to the 'mutual constitution of entangled agencies' (Barad 2007, 33). In this conceptual framework, SENCOs are no longer separate individual humanist subjects but part of the intra-active entanglement of multiple agencies through which schools for all children might be constituted. Thinking in terms of intra-actions means giving up simple, linear, cause-effect relations, and reworking the notion of agency. Agency, in a new materialist sense, emerges from relationships in intra-action, and produces an ongoing reconfiguring of the world. It is this entanglement we want to explore in this paper. Our goal is to imagine, and thus to open up the possibility of a school where difference gets a legitimate and valued place.

The concept we adopt here, to open up thought that moves us beyond the primacy of separate organic entities, is what Deleuze and Guattari (2004) call assemblage. An assemblage is 'a whole made up from heterogeneous and self-subsistent parts (human and non human, material or nonmaterial) that gains meaning by being assembled in specific ways' (Delanda in Schoepfer and Paisiou 2016, 389). Deleuze and Guattari (2004) define heterogeneity and exteriority of components as characteristics of assemblages. An assemblage is made up from 'ad hoc groupings of diverse, heterogeneous elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts' (Bennett 2010, 23), including not

simply objects or things, but qualities, speeds, flows, and lines of force (Bansel and Davies 2014). For example, different actors, a history of exclusion, audit technologies, categorisation, negative language, habits and routines, etc.

The emphasis on exteriority of components draws attention to the fact that an assemblage ‘is not the result of the sum of its properties, but the actual exercise of its various components’ capacities to intra-act with each other’ (Schoepher and Paisiou 2016, 389). The parts of an assemblage may retain a certain autonomy from the whole; the parts are not necessarily determined by their positioning within the assemblage. This way of thinking relationally emphasises emergence, multiplicity and indeterminacy (Schoepher and Paisiou 2016). Furthermore, a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage, in which its intra-actions are quite different. So the relations may change without the terms changing (Delanda 2006); the question becomes not what an assemblage is, or what parts it contains, but rather what it connects with (Lather 2015).

The SENCO is, in this way of thinking, emergent within the entanglements s/he is caught up in, with teachers, parents, resources, curricula, etc.; what is interesting then is to explore the possibilities of what a SENCO assemblage can become and do.

Assemblages are not governed by any central head: no one of the multiple acting agents has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group. Each member of the vital assemblage has a certain force, but there is also ‘an agency of the assemblage’. (Bennett 2010, 24)

So agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation or intra-active effect of many agents (Bennett 2010). In this way, agency emerges from the entangled relationships and it has the possibility to rearrange the world through deterritorialising some aspects of it. An assemblage, like the movement to inclusion, is an event, it has agency, it can open up the possibility of transformation.

The monitoring of the transformation process of inclusion happens by measuring items that are easily documented, such as the number of children who have moved into regular schools. Such strategies do not, and cannot, take into account, the micro shifts that are always ongoing and always becoming different. Through multiple, emergent small shifts, habituated modes of thought and practice are deterritorialised and opened to the possibility of the not-yet-known. Such changes in the usual flow of events are often completely unexpected, but can also be provoked or sought out (Deleuze and Parnet 2007). At the same time, new and emergent possibilities are always vulnerable to being reterritorialised – turned back into the forms made recognisable through old habituated forms of thought. Assemblages, are unstable and are constantly being made, remade and unmade; territorialised, reterritorialised and deterritorialised (Bansel and Davies 2014).

Diffraction methodology: (re)thinking with assemblage in a collective biography

Over the last 10 years, the first author has collaborated with a group of four SENCOs in both professional development and research projects, through which we established a close working relationship. The four SENCOs work at different primary schools, two of them have a full-time position as a SENCO, and two others combine SENCO responsibilities with a teaching job. The work we focus on in this paper took place in a ‘collective biography’ workshop (Davies and Gannon 2013). Collective biography works with the collaborative telling of memory stories relevant to the topic in hand. Collective biography is not interested in whether the memory is reliable or not; nor is it interested in the individual as an essentialised subject; rather, it is interested in the discursive and intra-active practices through which people and events emerge in all their multiplicity (De Schauwer et al. 2016). In the collective biography with the SENCOs, we first worked with an image of the workplace of each participant in order to establish a relational, materialist ontology. We then moved from working together on an

exploration of those places of work, to a specific focus on memories of being responsible.

In what follows we focus in particular on the ways that SENCOs' spaces are inhabited (Castrodale 2015), and on the ways in which those spaces become, themselves, agentic. We focused on the space of the workplace, where the concept of space denotes and con- notes all possible spaces, whether abstract or material, mental or social (Lefebvre 1991, 299). We came to see the workplace as an active agent among the entangled, multiple, intra-acting agents that made up the assemblage of inclusive practice.

To engage themselves in the collective biography workshop, the first author of this paper and four SENCOs gathered together in a cozy house in the countryside for three days. Because of the distance from everybody's daily workplace, the participants could commit themselves to the long and complex process of collective work. Through the images of the workplace that each participant had brought with them, they told their stories and listened, asked questions and wondered out-loud in intra-action with those stories (Davies and Gannon 2013). The collective method breaks up the privatised and individualised model of interviewing or storytelling (Lather 2015) and goes against the grain of phenomenology's liberal-humanist subject, whose life unfolds in a more or less rational way (Gannon 2001). This collective work involved us in moving 'from an ontological unit of the individual to the forces at work producing voice as an entanglement' (Mazzei 2016, 153).

The new materialist analysis we adopted abandons representational thinking; rather, by plugging in the concept of assemblage, we sought new connections and new knowledge (Jackson and Mazzei 2012). The images of the workplace were not taken to be reflections or reproductions of what was already there, separate from us, but provocations to open up the practices of diffractive thinking; our work thus involved us in a mapping of interference (Barad 2007). A practice of diffraction is 'reading/ analysing diffractively for patterns of difference that make a difference' (Dolfijn and Van der Tuin 2012, 49). Through 'reading-the-data-while-thinking-with-theory', we sought to 'identify assembled relations and the affects and the capacities produced in bodies that together make an assemblage work' (Fox and Alldred 2015, 407).

In writing this paper, we pull the threads of our analysis out of the images of one SENCO's workplace, and out of the memories of her practice as a responsible SENCO. We choose this one place to present what we found through our collaborative work because it was the one that provoked the most lively flows of telling and listening among the participants. The work with the images that we elaborate in this paper was thus generated in an intra-active mo(ve)ment among the workshop participants. Through that work, all the SENCOs made visible to themselves the complex flows of the assemblage of inclusion as they had each experienced it in their own workplaces. It was through the collaborative focus on all the workplaces, over the three days of the workshop, and the focus on the memories each participant told about being responsible, that the co-constructed analysis we present here became possible.

A workplace assemblage

The SENCO, whose images we work with here, worked in an urban school with children from 2.5 years to 6 years ; she worked across three different locations, with a total population of 400 children. For the last 10 years, she had been the SENCO, and before that she was a teacher. In the beginning, the SENCO's workspace had consisted of three closets in the staffroom. That location had given her the feeling that her work and the participants (teachers, parents, students and herself) weren't taken seriously. There was no space for private, confidential one-on-one discussions. As her work was transforming itself from remedial teaching to professional guidance of regular teachers, it became evident she needed a different space; and with the support of the principal, she lobbied for a space in which the work of collaboratively developing different ways of thinking about difference might take place.

One of the significant elements of that re-thinking was the Deleuzian move away from difference understood

as categorical difference, towards difference as a continuous process of becoming different, of differentiation (Deleuze 1994). Differentiation does not fix subjects in static, binary categories, where difference is other (or less) than normal. The SENCO's new place opened up space where creative energies were mobilised (Davies 2009) and old practices and beliefs were able to be de-territorialised (Figure 1).

A former classroom

The current workplace is a former classroom. It is a spacious room with two large desks, a number of sorting trays and a large table. The improvisation that was necessary to create an office in a former classroom is still visible (the loose wires, exposed electrical outlets, the old printer, and so on) In the first image, it looks like a regular office (two computer screens, schedules, checklist, a classification system, etc.), nothing suggests its location in a



Figure 1. Desk.

kindergarten/infants school, where hundreds of children are going to school. Much more prominent, visually, is the discourse and power of technologies of management (administration, reports, follow-up measurements, and so on).

While there is no linear causal relationship between having a spacious office and the school creating space for children with special needs, the office has agency within the inclusion entanglement. The room is located in the middle of the school near the staff-room – the meeting place of the school. The central placement, and the open door policy makes this place approachable, and it opens up the possibility of establishing

relationships with teachers before there are difficulties rather than after. But the downside of that approachability is that people may interrupt the SENCO too easily. She decided not to have a coffee maker in her office because otherwise, no moment of rest or time for contemplation would remain.

While open access is very important in the work of SENCOs, there is always a risk that a SENCO will be seen as the sole expert, who knows everything, and who therefore takes overall responsibility. The most usual response to teachers' fears about not knowing what to do with children who are different, is to provide professional development for teachers, training them in the range of children's deficits with 'recipes to fix' each one (Allan 2007). The SENCO's experience of such training is that it makes it more likely, rather than less, that teachers will pass their questions to 'the expert' in the new discourse, and they will be more likely to 'hand over' children, or else help to exclude them from their regular classrooms and schools. Lessons in categorisation involve re-territorialising the spaces of schools and classrooms, and do not open up new ways of thinking about difference that goes beyond normal–abnormal and us–them binaries.

Before this classroom space was made available, the SENCO-in-the-closets found that her colleagues were critical of her work, seeing her as an arm of management. Her new location and her openness and transparency enabled them to appreciate her work differently. She commented: *'Now they know what I'm doing and that I'm not a second principal.'* These perceptions of her work mattered; if she is recognisable to her colleagues, if she is seen as one of the teachers, they are better able to be open to seeing her as a partner. In her new space, she is able to position herself, and she is positioned as multiple: devoted teacher, loyal colleague, a person who is advocating and negotiating the place of children with special needs, etc. *'Therefore I do tasks such as organising the annual school party, doing duties, etc. this means I cannot do all my work within office hours but I think it's important that they (teachers) see I do things like them.'* These multiple tasks are externalised by the many yellow post-its all over the office.

Being the same as teachers helps avoid the risk, inherent in the SENCO's position, of being either marginalised along with the children with special needs, or given all responsibility for their care.

The new space is powerful, but it is not able to hold the de-territorialising movements in place. The changes require a continuous openness to difference as it unfolds in all its multiplicity. There is always the risk of re-territorialisation, where old ways of thinking and being reassert themselves. That is most likely to happen when the workplace is seen as an exclusive place for the SENCO, the exclusivity interpreted as a signal of her superiority/difference. When read this way, space itself becomes loaded with normative control and power (Lefebvre 1991), positioning the SENCO as outside the team, isolated, a specialist whose job is to provide solutions (Figure 2).

Sharing the office/mutual entanglement

Much of what happens in the life of a SENCO is a product of serendipity; not a product of an orderly plan, but responding to the emergence of possibilities. When the childcare and the kindergarten were integrated into



Figure 2. Shared desk.

one institution, for example, the principal of the school did not want to share his office with the manager of childcare. The SENCO offered to share her place, and their subsequent collaboration has been productive. The arrangement of the desks –face-to-face – provoked more dialogue between them, as they de-territorialised the space together. New support networks, beyond the boundaries of school, and connections with other assemblages, became available. By working intensively together communication could flow from school to home and otherwise. For example, when parents could not pay their school fees and/or childcare bills, a different rate could be negotiated. Their cooperation also opened

new possibilities, such as childcare workers doing activities with the children while a teacher attended meetings. The players in the inclusion assemblage thus rapidly multiplied and diversified; multiple agencies were interconnected making the assemblage more powerful and more resourceful in facing the multiple challenges.

The manager of childcare was an unexpected companion who made the SENCO's job more do-able. For example, in the past, the SENCO felt powerless when she had the difficult and demanding task of testifying on behalf of students to the youth welfare committee. Within the new assemblage, she could discuss the meeting in a way that opened up new ideas for action. At the same time, she could give background, that navigated her new colleague through the school bureaucracy and its rules, because of her long history there. He in turn offered strategies for ordering, structuring and cutting down the number of tasks she took on so that energy was left for life beyond school. This mutual entanglement made their assemblage more powerful; their relationship was one in which they found they could 'continually transform themselves into each other, cross over into each other. Becoming and multiplicity are the same thing' (Deleuze and Guattari cited in Davies 2014, 9). So they are no longer the persons they were before but are produced through intra-actions with each other, in relation to the space, the school, their colleagues, the children and the wider community. The development of those alliances through which a shared responsibility for special needs can emerge requires encounters in which there is a possibility for new thoughts and actions.

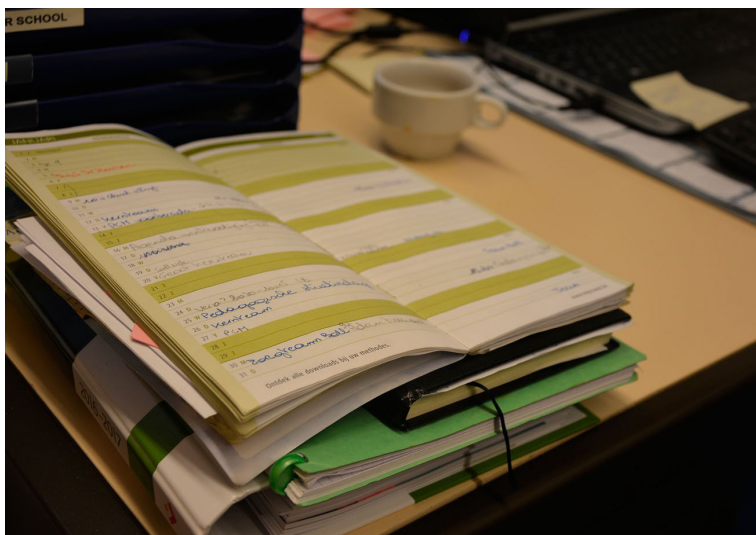


Figure 3. The diary

The diary

The diary of the SENCO had a central place on her desk, visible and continuously open to spontaneous appointment-making. The diary took on a life of its own and intra-acted with the SENCO who became, via the open diary, a subject who was accessible. At the same time, it took away her time, with commitments to meetings with teachers but also meetings with agendas concerning procedures, rules and formalisation. In responding to the needs of others through the open diary, inviting itself to be filled, the SENCO had no means to defend her own time and priorities.

The open door and the open diary were

important, but there was also a downside: *'I want to be very approachable but it's like I don't have a door. They just come inside and ask their question or tell their story.'* New strategies were needed to generate encounters that disrupted the old patterns of positioning the SENCO as an expert with answers, filling up her day with providing 'solutions'. 'An encounter is an intensity, a becoming that takes you outside the habitual practices of the already-known: it's intra-active, and corresponds to the power to affect and be affected' (Deleuze and Parnet in Davies 2014, 10) (Figure 3).

In such encounters the SENCO, together with the teachers, made spaces full of potentialities where new forms of belonging for children with special needs became imaginable, and possible: *'Some teachers like to show material, want to sit down where the child is sitting, show the art work. Being in their environment helps them and me to picture how it is to be this child in this classroom, with this teacher and these classmates.'*

In such moments the excitement, the struggle, and the doubts of the teachers became the excitement, the struggle, and the doubts of the SENCO. In these micro-moments of being, the world was reconfigured, and there was openness to difference and to the new. The regular practice of requiring every child to achieve the same standards was de-territorialised. In moving away from standardised outcome-driven teaching, the participants eventually found themselves up against the teachers in the primary school, who complained that the children were not prepared for the transition into primary school. The force of the dominant discourse re-territorialised the teachers and the SENCO, pulling their attention back to producing standardised 'outcomes'.

One of the locations the SENCO worked in had many children from low-socioeconomic and diverse cultural backgrounds. This location had fewer resources and had a 'bad' reputation. The other two locations had a 'better' reputation and had parents who were very involved. The SENCO divided her time, as she moved between the different locations, as evenly as possible. By taking up a nomadic position, she was able to resist hegemonic structures and categories (Braidotti 2011) and to give recognition to everyone, no matter their background. To this end, she made her attendance visible by sending everyone (principal, school/child personnel, administrators and cleaning staff) her weekly schedule. But this could work back upon her, regulating and controlling her, her transparency making her more accountable for, more open to surveillance of, her hours and her work. By being visibly present in each location, the SENCO not only initiated encounters that opened up new thought, but as an expert, she invited repeated citations of the old refrains: *'The more I walk in the hallway the more problems there are.'* (Figure 4).

Spaces that enable intra-active encounters

In order to avoid material being stored on the table, the SENCO provided a tablecloth, which might actively invite encounters around the table. The colourful tablecloth had a softening effect on the room and created a relaxed atmosphere around the table. The adult-sized chairs around the table stated: this is not a place for



Figure 4. The Table.

this child/ parent/ etc.?’ That question served to positively transform and de-territorialise categories and the limitations that came along with them: *‘Muhammed is not only the child that disturbs the classical moments but also a boy with a lot of humour’*. In those encounters, the SENCO momentarily disrupted the teachers’ reliance on categories. The SENCO analysed the construction of categories and teaching because this has an impact on the boundary between inclusion and exclusion (Hamilton and Kecskemeti 2015). It is a constant search for ways to bring difference into standardised lines. In these encounters, a culture of formalising and documenting is also integral to the assemblage; the SENCO expects that teachers are prepared for a meeting that they already thought about the situation, put their questions together, made an observation, brought a drawing to the meeting, etc. *‘Otherwise it’s small talk and then teachers start very easily talking in labels; he has ADD, instead of showing his work where you see he colours one thing and then another piece but none of his drawings are finished.’* If they are not prepared she postpones the meeting. *‘They don’t like it but I’m very strict, there is no negotiation, I will explain why I ask for the preparation, but the meeting is rescheduled.’* There is, at the same time, a risk in the insistence on preparation. The danger is that it slips into a managerial practice – a requirement that over-rides the teacher’s need. If the SENCO’s strategy becomes routine, habituated managerialism, it will undermine the environment of collegiality and the fostering of supportive relationships. In such a routinisation, the space of the SENCO’s work may be re-territorialised with teachers feeling dictated to and controlled in relation to how they should think and act. It is a delicate balance; the creative lines of thought and action can be lost (Davies 2014), and the collaborative space is experienced as disciplinary. If this happens, new thought is closed down.

Including parents

We said earlier that encounters with parents were made more accessible through the collegial relationship with the manager of childcare. The SENCO learned to see the parents as vital participants in the inclusion assemblage; they became potential catalysts of new thought; they potentially de-territorialised normative assumptions

children but for adults. Around the table, it became more common to discuss practices together with teachers, parents and other stakeholders, though at the same time concepts of testing, labelling and categorisation would still territorialise the space, being used to hold everything in place (Barton 2003). The increased measurement of performance has become more frequent and sophisticated in schools (Waitoller and Kozleski 2015), this brings into the conversation labels (ADHD, autism), stigma (failure, disabled, at-risk) and students’ scores, with a big focus on the students’ abilities, on comparisons among students, and on benchmarks of what will count as normal. These repeated citations or modes of enunciation reduced the capacity for, and the possibility of, generating new ways of thinking.

Because of the power of the deficit discourse and the normative assumptions made about the acceptability of segregation, a lot of work had to be done by the SENCO to acknowledge the multiplicity of identities (Davies 2014). She found that normally at the beginning of her meetings with teachers, the teacher would begin by pointing out the problem, defined in terms of test results and categorisations. To counteract this closing down of creativity, she would start the meetings with the question: *‘Can you first tell me how your relationship is with*

and practices. Although it required a lot of energy and organisation from the SENCO to establish an encounter with all the different parties around the table, the encounters produced energy and intensity: *'When we all sit together the process comes in a flow, not one person has the simple answer, not the parent, not the teacher, not the speech therapist, not me as a SENCO. When we meet each other, there is more respect for each other. It's not the lazy teacher anymore, it's not the terrible child ... other words are used, how we speak, how we judge, etc.'* Listening was central in those encounters; they were not focused on governing the other, or on telling the parent what to do, or managing and controlling the teachers (Davies 2015). All participants entered into a 'process of transformation where you lose absolutely the possibility of controlling the final result' (Rinaldi in Davies 2014). The moments around the table were a line of flight from the orderly striations, and they produced a space that refused the norms of power relations and expertise. They were about taking up other positions, about letting go of taken-for-granted discourses, and they were about generating an openness to being affected. The possibility was there in such encounters for transformation; the SENCO's office became a place where different ways of knowing and thinking about difference could arise. The SENCO described these de-territorialising moments as magical moments, *'Sometimes you get goose bumps, suddenly other possibilities and other approaches for difficulties are seen.'* Intra-actions such as these are movements of de-stratification, where dominant discourses are crossed over, where roles and positions change. Yet, as we have said now several times, the potency of the striated lines of force, the tendency for the SENCO to position herself as an expert and to be so positioned, is an ever-present dilemma. The ontological–epistemological accomplishment of self as belonging in whatever categories one has been assigned becomes real very quickly (Davies 2015) and re-territorialisation takes place.

In(conclusion)

The current movement toward inclusion comes together with the neoliberal audit strategy of monitoring, controlling and managing the changes. This brings with it a problematic individualisation of accountability and responsibility. The underlying assumption is that agency is solely lodged in an individual agent, who is working alone and intentionally. In this paper, we have sought to disrupt that taken-for-granted, humanist assumption, by using a diffractive methodology based on collaborative work, in which we have used material images, and read-the-data-while-thinking-with-theory. We have argued that individual agency is entangled with multiple enlivening agencies that are simultaneously at play and that affect each other. There are assemblages of intra-acting agents, human and non-human (SENCOs, teachers, children, parents, processes of normalisation, offices, open doors, diaries, the M-decree, neoliberalism, processes of differentiation), that have agency, and can open up new possibilities for children with special needs.

In this paper, we have focused on the entanglement of agencies, instead of on individual effectiveness and individual responsibility and accountability. Each SENCO must work with teachers and parents with a focus on collaboration and emancipation, forming alliances, setting up networks, creating a collaborative learning community – all of this in order to make the inclusion assemblage more powerful. The entanglements and collaborations will be different for every assemblage. This openness to (unpredictable) intra-actions is always under pressure from professional management logic, which emphasises efficiency, effectiveness and outcomes. So thinking outside territorialising lines is vital work to be undertaken, it involves critical thinking about what education we want, and 'everybody involved needs to consider how their own actions create barriers to inclusion' (Allan 2003).

We have shown in this article that re-conceptualising agency leads to a different approach to inclusion, in which the participants in any encounter (human and non-human) can work as parts of an assemblage to open the capacity for thought and the capacity to reconfigure the world. In this way, inclusion is not reduced to a discussion about placement but is an assemblage that opens up the possibility of becoming different, a work in progress that is never completed.

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CHAPTER 5

Rethinking responsibility

Using diffractive methodologies does not imply that we are not vulnerable to being caught up in reflexivity and representation. This happened with a story that came out of the collective biography workshop. Instead of putting the story aside, we reworked, ‘re-turned’, the story in a script. In the following chapter we describe the process of moving from the story to performing the script. The performative arts carried diffractive possibilities and helped us to become aware of our own thinking and acting and broke habitual, normative ways of thinking.

We invite the reader to listen to the audioplay while reading the memory story or the script (<https://lifeinclusive-classroom.weebly.com/classroom-of-teacher-ida.html>). The whole script is included (see p. 177). In this chapter, we materialised the discursive practice in a Greek choir, in line with the material turn in poststructuralism/new materialism that has been addressed several times throughout this PhD. We did not only give voice to the various personages in the script but also to the discursive practices working on and through us. The intra-action became visible and enabled us to rethink collaboration and shared responsibility.

Based on: Van de Putte, I., De Schauwer, E., Van Hove, G. Davies, B. (2017). Violent Life in an Inclusive Classroom. Come on read Peter! Moving from moral judgment to an onto-epistemological ethics. *Qualitative Inquiry*. (submitted)

Violent life in an inclusive classroom: Come on read Peter! Moving from moral judgment to an onto-epistemological ethics.

Abstract

In this paper, we begin with a story in which a teacher is perceived as cruel, a boy experiences abuse and exclusion, and a support worker feels guilty for not responding. We have written a play script that explores the entangled intra-active perceptions of the various players. The script was used in the professional development of educators as a means of exploring the diffractive movements through which differences are made in inclusive classrooms (Davies 2014). The performance of the play by the participant educators challenged our habitual, normative readings of such events in an entangled manner of knowing-being -doing. We suggest that using performative arts carries diffractive possibilities in professional development for educators, by generating a different set of questions, and opening a space to rethink collaboration and shared responsibility in classrooms. It opens the possibility of moving away from thinking in terms of individual accountability, responsibility, moralism and judgment, toward an intra-active exploration of the ethics of such encounters.

Introduction

The four authors of this paper have worked collaboratively for several years in the field of disability studies in education (Davies et al. 2013, Van Hove, De Schauwer, Van de Putte 2015). Three of us have used the methodology of collective biography to extend our thinking about disability and difference (for example, De Schauwer, Van de Putte, Blockmans, Davies 2016). In the work discussed in this paper, the first author has extended that collaborative work into the field of professional development. In the post-structural methodology of collective biography (Davies and Gannon 2013), knowledge emerges through collectively working with memories, (re)telling, (re)listening, (re)writing and reading them out loud. The process of emergent listening is crucial to collective biography work; it is a mode of listening that is without moralistic judgments and in which the listener is open to hearing what they do not already know. The collective biography does not just reveal individualized memories; the collective work also enables us to explore the intra-active practices through which people and events emerge in all their multiplicity (De Schauwer et al. 2016). When the first author ran a collective biography with a group of four Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs)²⁶, on the topic of taking and not taking up responsibility, she told one of her memories that had had a strong impact on her, and bothered her for over a decade because she believed she had not acted responsibly. The participants found themselves rushing to moral judgment of the teacher in the story, and determined to defend the story-teller, saying she could not have acted differently. Their impulse to defend her from her interpretation of having acted irresponsibly was linked to their own memories of the impossibility of escaping such difficult situations in their own work. As a result, their collective biography workshop became mired in concepts of individual accountability, responsibility, moralism and judgment, and the move toward new ways of thinking was foreclosed (Mazzei 2016).

The first author's (Inge's) memory story: (The story can be found in audio format - <https://lifeinclusiveclassroom.weebly.com/classroom-of-teacher-ida.html>, the reader is invited to listen to the audio play while reading the memory story).

²⁶ Special Educational Needs Coordinator is a function in Flemish school to create equal opportunities for all children.

We are in Teacher Ida's class. She is the teacher of the first grade. The school is located in a rural area. It's a class of 18 students, of which Kobe and Peter are two. Inge is also there, she's Kobe's support worker.

(Sounds of the playground.)

(School bell.)

Inge sits at the back of the classroom. She is sitting on a chair with a stack of workbooks on her lap. As she corrects each book of mathematical exercises, she puts it on a pile on the ground. In the background you can hear the buzzing noise of children.

Kobe begins to read: "*An and... (pause).*"

Inge stops correcting and raises her head.

Kobe: "*An and Tom go to... go to... (big pause) the moon.*"

"*Very well, Kobe!*" says Ida. She gives two thumbs up.

Inge smiles and continues to correct the exercises. Suddenly it occurs to Inge how quiet the classroom is. The teacher is seated behind her desk and says: "*Come on, read, Peter.*"

Peter looks down, staring at his book.

Teacher Ida: "*You can sleep at home. Here, you have to work. Come on, read.*"

The silence remains. The teacher pushes her chair back (sound of a chair scraping on the floor) and walks up to Peter. She picks up his book and drops it loudly on his desk. (Sound of the book hitting the desk.)

Ida (raised voice): "*Come on, read!*"

It is so quiet in the classroom, you could hear a pin drop.

Teacher Ida: "*If you are in the first grade, you have to read.*"

Peter is still looking at his book. Inge feels glued to her chair. The clock on the wall indicates that it is 10 o'clock – time for lunch break. The bell rings. (Sound of the bell.)

Teacher Ida takes Peter by his sweater and pulls him next to her. His head is down.

None of the other children is standing straight behind their chairs.

Teacher Ida: "*Everyone, take your snack and go quietly to the playground.*"

The children get up. Teacher Ida turns to Peter and pulls on his sweater even more strongly.

She pushes him to his knees. He kneels with his face towards the wall.

Inge is still sitting at the back of the classroom. She does not move.

Kobe calls her: "*Inge, Inge!*"

Inge stands up and walks towards Kobe, with her eyes down so she cannot see Peter. With clenched fists Inge stands next to Kobe. She takes a deep breath and helps Kobe take the bottles of milk. Out of the corner of her eye, she can see Peter kneeling with his head down.

The door closes. (Sound of the door closing.) The noise of the children fades away.

Inge asks as cheerfully as possible: "*Come Peter, will you help us? I'll call a name and you and Kobe can put the milk on the right desk.*"

He turns his head up and looks surprised. Then he smiles, stands up and walks over to Inge. Together they put the milk on the children's desks. Inge keeps an eye on the door.

In the discussion that followed, teacher Ida was portrayed as someone who was not capable of showing empathy, and who had a lot of power. Peter was abjected, and was subjected to 'an act of terror' because he challenged the teacher's authority. Ida used her disciplinary power to make everyone aware of its presence (Foucault 1980). In this way authority resided in one person, and the violence that came with it, was seen by the participants as both 'normal' and 'inevitable'. Such events were part of everyday school life. Yet Peter's fear -which was captured in the different bodies of the support worker and his classmates – had a great impact on the participants in the workshop. They turned their focus to discussing who was right, or at fault, and who was to blame. In judging the situation, the group adopted a superior vantage point, reiterating norms and values, and making the moral judgment that teacher Ida had no moral awareness and needed to develop empathy and a conscience (Davies

2017). The solution lay in teacher Ida's hands; it was her individual responsibility to address such a situation in a competent manner. It was not the support worker's responsibility because she was there for Kobe, the child with a disability, and thus had no mandate to interfere with the teacher's actions. With this interpretation of the event, she could not be blamed for her response. Above all she should be praised for humanizing Peter when she had the chance, making a coalition with him and Kobe when teacher Ida left the classroom. When Ida returned, they agreed, the support worker would have no other option than to reterritorialize Ida's order and so place him back in his position of torture and humiliation. In this version of the event, Peter became the victim because he had no strategies to cope with the teacher's violence. As researchers the group were caught up in moral judgments and along with those judgments, the individualization of accountability and responsibility (Bansel 2007). As Foucault said: "We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social worker-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it, his body, his gestures, his behavior, his attitudes, his achievements" (Foucault 1979, 304).

The challenge that the four authors of this paper took up, began with a discussion over dinner about this particular memory, and how the discussion had become mired in judgment. We discussed how we might put this "research to work in order to think differently" (Mazzei 2016). We were not interested in perpetuating the normative moral judgments, but in 'liberating thought from the dogmatic image that imprisons it' (Lenz Taguchi 2010, 58). The idea of writing the play was born, as a means of multiplying the perspectives, and showing the entangled agencies of the participants in the memory. We wanted to open up lines of flight that made the normalizing forces visible, but were not limited by them. We turned to Barad for inspiration on how this might be done. Barad is not interested in critiquing a person or a situation, but in thinking diffractively, reading insights through one another in order to build new insights. A diffractive analysis does not individualize or pathologize a problem but instead explores the lines of force that are at work in any particular situation (Barad 2007). The concept of diffraction is a 'tool' to highlight the entanglement of material-discursive phenomena in the world (Bozalek and Zembylas 2016).

Instead of letting go of this memory and categorizing it as "data that does not yield the desired result", the four authors, over dinner, treated the memory, and the response on it in the collective biography, as a "possible opening onto wonder" (Maclure 2011). We looked at it as a 'liminal hotspot', as an in-between-situation, in which Peter is part of the class group but at the same time excluded, and the support worker is in the class but her responsibility is focused on one individual. We were interested in highlighting the different, contrasting feelings, such as pride, shame, and humiliation, and in contesting the binaries such as good/bad support worker (Kofoed and Stenner 2017).

Our discussion – helped by sushi and wine – became more and more animated, and our ideas flowed as we started thinking about what was possible. We came up with the idea of recounting the memory through a 'performative ethnography' (Goldstein 2010), modelled in the fashion of a script that can be read aloud by a group of participants. We wanted to explore what could happen if we worked with a diffractive script that contained the multiple voices, the desires, the histories, the ambiguities, and so on. Could this take us beyond what we thought we already knew?

Creating the diffractive script

The script is based on data from the collective biography with the four Special Educational Needs Coordinators (both the memory and the discussion afterwards). It also draws on the field notes of the first author from 16 years ago, when she was a support worker in that particular classroom; on our research in the context of the professionalization of teachers in inclusive education, and the advocacy of parents and children with special needs who seek an inclusive life. The different voices were with us when we tried to materialize them in the script,

but they were also based on imagination. We used fiction to animate the multiple characters and to make their multiplicity more visible.

Relational ontology

To incorporate “an intra-active relationship between all living organisms and the material environment such as artefacts, spaces and place that we occupy and use in our daily practice” (Lenz Taguchi 2010, 10), a Greek choir – as it was used in ancient Greek theatre – was included in the script. The Greek choir is an essential element of Greek drama, and acts as the ideal observer, reacting and sympathizing with what happens on stage. It provides comments and expresses feelings. In contrast to the heroic and extreme personalities of the main characters, the Greek choir often plays the role of mediocrity, offers complaints and represents mainstream thoughts, and makes the discourses that are working on us and through us visible.

One way of understanding the educational arena today is that there are two strong contradictory movements at work, marked by a dichotomization between regular and special education/disability studies (Done, Murphy, Knowler 2015). The paradigm of regular education is about facilitating the learning processes of all children and entails a responsibility to teach children so that they end up with qualifications and certifications. The paradigm of special education is grounded in a medical model through which disability is seen as an individual problem that needs specialist knowledge (Connor and Ferri 2007). A contra-movement is disability studies, whereby disability is a socially and culturally constructed identity (Longmore and Umansky 2001, 19). The support, in this model, is focused on the students’ participation and collaboration within the students’ networks. The recent interventions in disability studies education, is influenced by neoliberal ideology, and require learners to demonstrate their normalcy if they are to gain access, or to remain in, the educational system. The point of neoliberal-inspired education policy is that students are to be made into a productive part of the capitalist marketplace (Goodley 2017). Hence, in the educational arena different repeated citations of regular education, special education/disability studies and neoliberal ideology are at work, and the Greek choir in the script play materializes these different discourses.

Collaboration with students and educators

A collaboration with four students²⁷ from the Department of Special Needs Education helped us to open up our thinking about all the different discourses that could possibly be at work in the story of Peter. We included neoliberal discourses and practices, processes and practices of normalization, how a regular school system operates, governmental (educational) policy, globally shifting value systems, transformation in teachers’ practices and teacher education, disability discourses, etc. (Van de Putte, De Schauwer, Van Hove, Davies 2017). At the same time it was an opportunity to involve the students in a new materialist way of doing research, which contrasted with the qualitative inquiry they were familiar with. They were used to following carefully laid out steps of a particular, conventional and well known qualitative method, such as conducting focus groups and semi-structured interviews, and using triangulation, in the hope that ‘the research question is approached from different sides so their conclusion must be true’ (Davies and Gannon 2009, 12).

Together with the students, we held different performances of the script, with every performance providing input for reworking the script and the way we worked with it. Nine different experimental performances were held, one with students in the teacher training course, three with teachers in the context of professional development courses, three with special educational needs coordinators and support teachers in the context of professional development, one with the academics in the disability studies group where three of us work, and one at the Disability Studies Conference in Education in Minneapolis. We can see the experimental performances as forms of professional development because they are collective assemblages through which knowledge is constructed collaboratively with the participants.

²⁷ Many thanks to the students (Barbara Sanders, Louise Mostaert, Rien Borgmans and Karen De Coster) for giving us the opportunity to work with them and elaborate upon the script and this way of working.

Through each of the different performances the script evolved as we read it and worked with it toward new ways of thinking. Three research strategies we used in the collaborative, experimental performances were: connecting with participants' memories, using the audio play, and setting up a 'social atom'.

Connecting with participants' memories

Research is often viewed as something that happens at university, where ideas are developed and can later be put into the minds of educators, who will put the ideas into practice if they can. In this project our participants were not recipients of already-formed ideas, but co-researchers/ co-learners (Lenz Taguchi 2010). We began with a memory that each participant had of their time at school. We asked them to go back in time and capture such a memory, which they then exchanged with the other participants. As co-researchers they were actively engaged in their own professional development. They encountered multiple characters in classroom situations, they thought with new concepts, they were connected within different assemblages as they collectively listened to and thought with each other's memories. As a researcher together with the students, we joined in and became part of the assemblages of the experimental performance in the context of professional development. We put the memory of teacher Ida and Peter at the forefront; and by doing so we brought our own vulnerabilities into the encounter, and deterritorialized the university as 'the space of experts'.

Using the audio play

To bring in materiality and to de-center the human subject we audio recorded the class situation. The story in itself was agentic, having the capacity to affect and be affected (Davies 2014), and was made even more vivid with the addition of sounds (the school bell, the book that falls, the silence, etc). One of the participants said afterwards: *"It was brilliant to start with the audio play, it gave the feeling I was IN the situation. The sound of the book that falls and then the silence... it made me shiver and touched me deeply. It appealed to me to be involved."*

The audio play created a strong link with the classroom context and resonated with the memories and experiences of each participant. It tended to produce a strong identification with one of the characters – the teacher (recognizing the feeling of frustration when things do not work out as you had hoped), the support worker (identifying the feelings of powerlessness), or Peter (feeling humiliation to have such an experience in front of a group).

Social atom

In the conversations after hearing the audio play it became clear that the world can be viewed from the perspective of multiple characters, not in isolation from what is going on around them, but as intricately embedded in the social worlds they experience: "We are positioned and position ourselves moment by moment as we make our way through the everyday world" (Davies 2008, 2)

Participants searched at first for the essential, independent entities/identities, and there was always the temptation to find the truth. At first it was difficult to take into account the different lines of force that worked on the characters/the school/the education system and also on each of the participants. There was a temptation to take a position and interpret the event from that one positioning: *'Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts that are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned.'* (Davies and Harré 1990, 89)

We looked at how we could disrupt this tendency by setting up a 'social atom', which made it possible to think in terms of relations and positioning. To do this, we encouraged the participants to visualize the different positions of the different agents in the class situation with material (dolls, toy animals and other material that was present in the space). The materiality had agency and added a different layer (St. Pierre, Jackson, Mazzei 2016). The

discussions that came along with it provided access to the ideas and discourses of the participants.

As the image below shows, for example, teacher Ida was put in a higher, hierarchical position. Significantly the participants chose to use a 'police officer' to represent her, and the discursive practice of 'the teacher as expert in charge of the classroom' became visible. Her responsibility lies with the whole class group, and her face is turned towards Kobe because he fits into the regular classroom with the support of Inge. Kobe wears a helmet because he has to be protected because of his special needs. Peter is lying down, his legs in the air, in a precarious situation, with his head turned away from teacher Ida.



In thinking through the challenges of creating a script we thought with different diffractive concepts. This material and collaborative way of working with the students and the participants was important in taking up the challenge of reading and 'thinking with theory' (Jacksons and Mazzei 2012). To do this we had to make the theory and concepts accessible. Inspired by new materialist thinking we searched for different, creative sources, which could help each of the participating groups to understand the concepts. We watched, for example, a three minute YouTube film where intra-action was explained and visualized: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v0SnstJoEec>). We contested the separation of theory and action by setting up a 'community of inquiry' (Bozalek and Zembylas 2016).

Undertaking a diffractive analysis requires not knowing where you are going beforehand, even as you take the continuous interference of intra-actions seriously (Davies 2014). Allowing this openness is challenging. We sought to facilitate the dialogical spaces during the experimental performances, ensuring that we did not end up in a judgmental moralistic framework that dictated how people should think and act. Working in this way required trust: "trust in another way of thinking, a more rhizomatic thinking instead of linear and aborescent thinking, and it involved us in trusting in our capacity to collectively increase the power of life" (Lenz Taguchi 2010, xii).

Extract of the script play: intra-acting voices

The whole script is to be found in text and audio format at <https://lifeinclusiveclassroom.weebly.com/script-ii.html> It can thus be used in further professional development contexts.

Teacher Ida: *I can still remember how it was with Jason. His third grade teacher said: "He can't do anything. That boy cannot count and cannot read." But he wasn't stupid, so for three months during lunch break he came to my classroom. I started at the beginning – repeating letters again. I had made a reading board – children should be able to see that words consist of letters. And yes, he could do it. He became one of the better readers in his class.*

Kobe: *"D for dad, dog... d for dad...
ddddddd from dad, dog, day.*

Inge: *I remember when Kobe started at this school, both the teachers and the principal had warned us: "You can't easily work with Ida. She has a very controversial teaching style." Well, that's the least they could say. In the beginning she had a very clear opinion: "With someone with autism you must be very strict and use a clear set of rules". But this does not work for Kobe. We actually managed to coach her on how to build a relationship and how to deal with the strictness of the rules. I can still hear her say: "He is rewarded for his disturbing behavior or not wanting to work." She really thought that all the adaptations were unfair. We had to say over and over again that it's not the same as rewarding him.*

Greek Choir: *One with autism, one with ADHD, three with dyslexia ... as a teacher you must also be a psychologist and speech therapist. Actually everything and everyone at once.*

Kobe: *Tap, tap, tap... My watch...
My previous one was more beautiful. It was bigger and had a light. Inge has no watch. Teacher Ida has one made of gold, just a little one.*

Peter: *You can close your eyes. Can you also close your ears? I don't hear anything. Nothing nothing nothing nothing nothing nothing nothing nothing nothing nothing... No, I still hear her.*

Teacher Ida: *Do you know the wonder in their eyes when they make the connection between letters and words? Then they start playing around with them. That's why you teach. Sometimes in the supermarket I meet an old student and then they say, "Ah, Teacher Ida, you taught me to read."*

Peter: *Teacher Ida is stupid. Teacher Susan is sweet.*

Inge: *She is also so much older. It's still a matter of being polite. How can I say something when she is so experienced? She has many, many years of experience.*

Greek Choir: *Many years of experience! Many years of experience! In teaching, you learn the most by doing and experimenting.*

Kobe: *There is no 1 or 2 on my watch! I'll have to tell mum. Oh no, a number's gone, a number's gone!*

Peter: *At lunch break I'll be the goalkeeper. Logan is not capable. How many goals were there yesterday? One from Jason, one from Vince, one from Emma... three goals. I will be the goalkeeper!*

Greek Choir: *It starts with not reading but where does that end? Behavioral problems, difficult students, aggressive students... It really challenges our resilience. Sometimes it's depressing that you give so much with so few results. It's never good enough.*

Teacher Ida: *I don't want to go to another class! I still know that the principal proposed I teach another grade. But I said, "thanks but no thanks". Who would let them read? I know the in and outs of the first grade. They come in my class after kindergarten, and at that age they can't do much. They really need to learn everything from the start. But I do not take them by the hand. They have to immediately jump into the swimming pool, while I stay on the side ready to rescue them if they need it.*

Kobe: *Inge, psst, psst... she's not looking.*

Mapping differences: Process of moving from story to script

Encounters with the script

In the process of moving from the story to performing the diffractive script, the identities of the characters were enlarged, and the multiplicity of the different actors came to the foreground. It was an exploration in space-time-mattering (De Schauwer et al., 2017). The script, as it emerged, carried diffractive possibilities. Teacher Ida's desire to teach Peter, and all the other students, how to read became one of the visible lines of force. She was very passionate about introducing them to the world of reading, where reading was not simply the mastery of a specific skill, but a basis to becoming an agent in the world, who can change the world (Freire 2000). What at first could only be interpreted as cruelty and a display of power, also, then, held an emancipatory line of force. The domination and the emancipation can run together, or apart—against each other. Her actions can be seen as passionate, and they can be seen as obsessive. And standing in another position, it is possible to see the force of the expectation that teachers will ensure all children can read by the end of the first year of primary school. It has become a requirement that teachers take up responsibility for making sure children become regular school students who can be measured as successful. The demand that differently abled students be included in regular school is in tension with this requirement. The measurement and audit strategies used to determine whether the children's accomplishments are normative and normalized and generate the fear that an individual is not good enough (Bansel and Davies 2007). That fear is relevant both to students and to teachers. Teacher Ida's identity is built on her history of success, and Peter gives her the terrifying feeling that she is failing. When teachers think of involving students in educational practices they assume students are productive, skilled and accountable individuals who are ready and willing to learn (Gabel and Peters 2004). Peter is not that normative child. Kobe is similar to Peter in this regard, but teacher Ida is protected from his failure, because he is regulated through his labels and the support he receives from the support worker. The script also shows that individual identities intra-act with time in how and when they come to matter (Davies 2017; De Schauwer et al., 2017). When Teacher Ida was trained, teachers were positioned with a high status, and were seen as the experts in their classrooms. The expert discourse works on her and through her in didactics and management, and it cements her position as superior in the educational hierarchy. History is working through the past, present and the future (Davies 2017).

The diffractive intra-active methodology shifted the focus from exploring the situation through the eyes of the support worker towards a larger engagement with material and discursive forces (Claiborne 2017). The Greek Choir materialized the multiple different discourses about labeling, support and the responsibility for special needs, audit and blame mentality. It became possible to recognize that non-human elements are always present (Ulmer 2017) and to see how material realities can be understood as having agency (the school building, the classroom space, the assumptions that are made). There are statements and unwritten rules that arise during meetings in schools and represent the tension between intersecting spaces, whereby the multiplicity of and entanglements with different agents, assemblages, places, discourses, historicities etc. become visible. The diffractive script makes it possible to set the "subject free of the repetitive, constitutive discursive practices that would pin the characters down as an entity with clearly defined boundaries existing independent of others" (Davies 2017, 267). The teacher is not narrowed down to the 'bad teacher', nor is the child that does not behave seen as the 'bad student'. The support worker that does not respond does not have to be seen as irresponsible; rather, there is space for ambiguities – space for the complexities of every agent in the assemblage .

Positioning

By performing the script the participants and researchers explored the lines of force that ran through the bodies of the teacher, the support worker, Peter, Kobe, the other teachers, the school, the educational system, their own bodies and other assemblages. For example the person who performed teacher Ida feels the loneliness and isolation. She was seen by her colleagues, as somebody who is hard to work with and who is singled out. This script highlights the isolation of her position, and we see how she is put in the position of the outsider. However, at the same time she has put herself in that position. The complex and ambiguous movements become visible by performing the script. For example even though she was seen as a weird, authoritarian teacher who is difficult to collaborate with, she stays in the grade she prefers to. It is as if she is ‘untouchable’, and together with the assumption ‘what you do yourself, you do best’, this leads to her seeking less cooperation. Through this embodied experience of performing the script the participants experience the connections and relations with human and non-human agents, whereby they (re)think agency and responsibility. One principal said: *“I have a teacher Ida in my team. She’s poorly appreciated by the other teachers, parents but also by me. This performance makes me think what can I do as a principal to ensure she is not put in the corner of the school like Teacher Ida”*

In the encounters with the participants we wanted to explore an immanent truth in the moment, in which we are ontologically and epistemologically not separate from each other (Davies 2014). Knowledge emerged in the intra-active spaces in which we developed strategies for rethinking and contesting some normative ideas that usually go unquestioned. Such collaborative work deterritorializes the static and fixed structures of thought, and creates creativity and flow, in which taken-for-granted practices are questioned. One participant said: *“I found setting up the social atom an eye opener. I want to integrate this during our consultation with different agents. The arrangement with the material makes the relationships, positions and assumptions visible. It could help our discussions and open up our thinking.”*

The script and the performance are creative interventions that come along with a strong intra-action of each participant’s own memories, own history, own space-time-mattering. Assumptions, fears, and ideas become visible, as does the possibility of a new line of action. Like one teacher said: *“By performing the support worker, and feeling how she struggles with being responsible for one child and how Kobe also claims her to get her whole attention,... it makes you think there must be other ways for doing that.”*

This shows that we come to know through being and doing in the world. One major challenge in an (inclusive) classroom is the mind-shift in accountability toward more formal collaborative activities and responsibilities. This would imply ‘a support worker should want to teach all students, and a classroom teacher should want to teach all students, including the high fliers and the most struggling of learners, and all of those in between’ (Morgan 2016).

At times, in the discussions, category and binary thinking slipped in again and judgment lay just around the corner, for example older traditional teachers versus young innovative teachers. The discussions made visible how easy it is to be trapped in specific normative modes, and how important it is to be attentive at all times to how research can create (unintended) binaries. The diffractive methodology troubles the taken for granted deficit-based models and brings out other voices, such as those of Peter and Kobe. From a disability studies perspective we also noticed that Kobe’s perspective was not often taken into account – he was forgotten. An intra-active pedagogy can break up the normative dominant discourses, but at moments it reterritorializes them again. It’s important that research takes into account this complexity, tries to open up to the not-yet-known, and brings forth new understandings of what it means to feel connected in an ongoing, emergent way.

Ethics

Rather than simply judging and dismissing the teacher's behavior as unethical, we took up a Deleuzian ethics to ask of each character 'what is it to be this?' (Deleuze 1994). As Deleuze states, ethics can open up: *'the creative forces that enable us to evolve beyond the fixities and limitations of the present moment (...) Deleuze invites us to open ourselves to multiplicity, to openness of the other and the possibility of oneself becoming different of coming to know and to be differently'* (Deleuze 1994, 106).

Experiencing the entangled relation of knowing, being and doing through research, is significant, especially through an enlarged vision whereby we make a difference in the world with ethics as an integral part (Mazzei 2014, 743). As one of the students said: *"In my practical training I work with teachers. They are always searching for the 'toolbox' – 'the tips and tricks'. When during the experimental performance I heard the teachers asked such profound and fundamental questions, it became clear to me that something else was triggered here. I'm really convinced that the teachers will look differently and make a difference for some children. And this also applies to me – things will also be different."*

The intra-active performances challenge discourses about good teaching, how a good student should act and what is expected from support workers (Lenz Taguchi and Palmer 2013). Seeing the multiplicity of the different actors and the intra-actions between the entangled agents makes different thoughts and actions possible. As one of the teachers said after performing the script: *"After working with the script I cannot say I have answers but one question comes to mind: 'Which position do I take up and let myself be put into to encourage togetherness at school – a school where students and teacher belong?'"*

The discussion shifts from moral judgment to a way of questioning the individual's position in the world – as part of the world. Diffractive thinking holds great potential to ask different, fundamental, ethical questions as to how we can transform schools. Another teacher said: *"Working with the script makes me realize that we are not almighty and this helps to be empathetic to the various agents and that opens up different possibilities."*

And another one: *"In a multidisciplinary meeting, I'm always very empathic with all the different people around the table, but it paralyzes me so I can't act. The script shows how you can act from everybody's position. Everybody can do something. For example how can we appreciate somebody like teacher Ida with so much experience. "*

The experimental performance shows how "we are completely entangled with the world,(...) and then we are responsible to and for the world and all our relations of becoming with it" (St. Pierre et.al. 2016, 101). So the ability to respond comes to the foreground, and can be used to approach the neoliberal abled school ethically and make us go away 'from making judgments in terms of deviations from the norm and thus from the point of negativity' (Lenz-Taguchi 2010, 58). Instead, it makes us think about 'social bonds that make it more difficult to marginalize others and convinces us of the need to engage in the world in the struggle for social justice' (Taylor 2000, 60).

(In)conclusion

This article started with a critical incident that was perceived as a static moment with fixed identities, but which evolved through the diffractive methodology in a mo(ve)ment of transforming normative ideas. The collective work of listening to the story, performing the script and reflecting upon it in mutual entanglement with other agents helped us to become aware of our own thinking and acting and broke up habitual modes of thinking.

The diffractive method made the multiplicity of the different agents, and the repeated citations, visible, and it destabilized them, reconstructing and deterritorialising ideas and thoughts about responsibility, education and teaching to develop a new understanding of the relational work that needs to be done by the various players in the (inclusive) classroom. Individual entities are not seen as separate from everything but as constituents in never-ending space-time entanglements. The diffractive intra-active pedagogy enables a move away from guilt and individual responsibility, to ethics. The intra-active pedagogy brings in an ethics of openness to difference and asks us to think about ‘what and who comes to matter’. It enables participants to ask and explore different questions, such as: can we question the social reality, the power relations between teachers, supporters, children, discourses, etc.? Can we question how we might see teachers as powerful and capable beings and not as novices who need to learn the same things over and over again? Can we question the way teachers, children, support workers and parents embody the pressure that is driven up/increased by the neoliberal ideology imposed on current-day regular schools? Can we question what it means to be singled out and to not belong?

Thinking about these questions offers no certainties and no predetermined outcomes but questions our own position in the world – as part of the world – in the struggle for social justice. We are all constituted and constitute ourselves through discursive practices, of which nobody is free. The collaborative work with students intra-acted with the participants in the experimental professional development, and with the authors of this paper, setting up a community of inquiry. The process of engaging with diffractive thought and practice was important in breaking up habitual modes of thinking. We have worked toward collective response-ability as a means of disrupting the neoliberal lines of force that have the potential to make abled schools into ethical places (Revelles Benavente – Gonzalez 2017).

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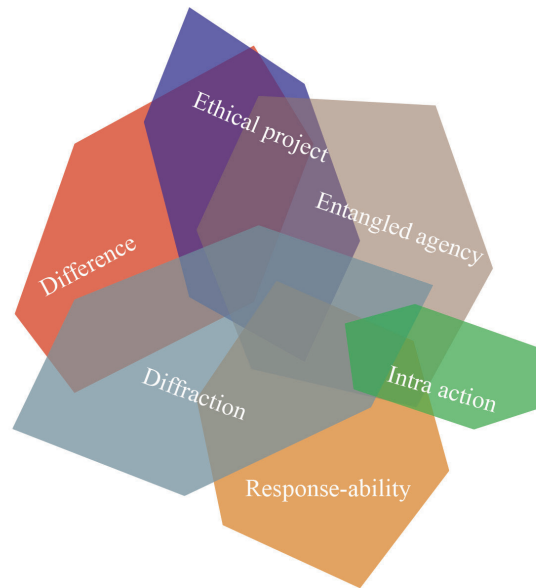
CHAPTER 6

(In)conclusions

Collective work runs as a thread through this PhD research. I have taken the reader into the collective work in order to show how the assemblages of co(laborative) learners are intertwined and (de)(re)territorialize each other. In the next part I bring together what came out of the co(laborative) groups; the rethinking and the reconceptualisation of difference/disability in the collective biography group, the work with the SENCO's, my own experiences with my son and the work with my colleagues in the Disability Studies Group. I weave the different stories together and discuss some concepts, not to produce a step-by-step plan, but rather to keep the conclusion comprehensible and accessible.

The following concepts come to the foreground: *difference, inclusion as an ethical project, entangled agency, intra-action, diffraction, and response-ability*. A word of caution must be given, the different concepts are mutually entangled and intertwined. They can't be separated from one another neither are they hierarchical. They affect each other and the boundaries of the one cannot be thoroughly distinguished from the other boundaries (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). It's about reading them diffractively, reading them inside through one another to build new insights (Barad 2007). In this way the conclusion provides openness and the research assemblage comes to a temporary end point, in order to open up thought to reconfigure the world we live in. The following visual²⁸ highlights the main concepts and shows the entanglement and dynamic.

28 Adapted from Raphael, J. (2013).



The job is not done...

“The job is not done”, these were the first words of this PhD research. In the first chapter I discussed the strong and negative comments made at the information evening regarding the new support model. These remarks demonstrated how inclusion is put in the corner of the impossible (Allan 2007). I also discussed how my own experience, as a parent of a child who is perceived as different from the norm, showed the difficult path of ensuring that each child can both belong and participate in meaningful activities throughout their education. My research makes it clear that the implementation of inclusion remains troubling and difficult. My struggle to advocate inclusion will not change with the ending of this PhD research; it is undoubtedly part of my future. Thirty years of practice have taught us that inclusive practices are hard, messy, always contested and unfinished (Ferguson in Naraian 2017, viii). I could become very pessimistic, cynical, militant, angry, or helpless, but instead, by mobilising a **poststructuralist/new materialist** framework, I have found a positive way to rethink the current practices, which can make the inclusion assemblage more powerful.

If I reflect on the meeting about the educational trajectory of my son, what I experienced was the force of ‘categorical difference’ as it plays itself out in the dominant modes of thought in education. Categorical difference is focussed on lack, it locates a problem within him, and positions him in such a way that he becomes coincident with his category. The ability based foundations of the regular classroom are kept intact by the intervention of separating him from the common curriculum. As a parent I had to stay outside the boundaries of school and be informed what was best for my son. In this dominant model the teacher is pressured to produce the normal subject. The principal, as an agent of the micromanagement of the school, became an extra witness whose task was to validate the agreements that were made, in which the SENCO was required to offer straightforward choices and solutions. This deficit approach results in normalisation, abjection and exclusion. Inclusion is thus reduced to a technical matter about resources and expertise the focus of which is to minimise difference and to maintain normalised schooling. This tradition of categorisation and segregation is deeply imbedded in our Flemish educational system and makes segregation unobjectionable (Danforth 2015).

In the work that is done in the collective biography group we found that a constructive way out is to think of difference in terms of differentiation, that is, being open to the other and not to see him as a fixed subject, but as an emergent, intra-corporal multiplicity, always becoming (De Schauwer et al. 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b). This openness to difference means giving up the status quo, it involves thinking in terms of constant movement, and

it creates opportunities to challenge stratification and categorisation (De Schauwer 2001). Thinking in terms of differentiation is transgressive, and opens up possibilities for inclusion and participation. So the way in which ***difference is conceptualised*** is important for inclusion (Thomas and Loxley 2007). Being open to difference, and to new thought, generates a new set of questions:

- How do we create an environment that is responsive to many different learners?
- How can we establish relationships with children, parents and supporters to strengthen the assemblage?
- How do we take up a framework of inclusion in a classroom where there is a dominance/focus on remediation and abjection of difference?
- How can we create a space where different ways of thinking about difference might take place?
- How do we move beyond the obvious solution of demanding more resources to achieve the mythical normal curve?
- How do we create spaces for experimentation and failure in a time where students, teachers, supporters, parents are held accountable?
- How do we create a vision of inclusion in an era of standardization and micro-management?
- How can we think about what and who comes to matter in our classrooms/schools?

These are questions not about managing the difference, but about creating a school community that is open and responsive to difference. Inclusion is not about including a certain group of children, who are categorized as other-than-normal, in a different group. It is not about the responsibility to manage a discrete population of children, but rather it is something we must do to ourselves (Allan 2005). This reconceptualization of ***inclusion as an ethical project*** generates new thinking about what kind of school/world we want, and how we can contribute to that. In this way inclusion moves beyond the physical integration of students into the regular classroom, to rethinking the ‘core of educational practice’ (Ferguson in Naraian 2017). It is about how we collaborate, divide groups, and create an atmosphere of learning for all those participating in the inclusive assemblage.

Inclusion as an ethical project **starts with ourselves**; it starts with thinking about our own role in shaping the world we live in and the world we prefer (Slee 2001 in Messiou 2017). In Chapter 2 I rethought the concept of agency and it became clear that no single person is in control. **There was not one person around the table in the meeting about my son who had the agency to establish an inclusive trajectory and shape the world as he/she wished.** It was presumed that agency is lodged solely in an individual agent and this led to the misconception that, for example, the SENCO has distributive agency to transform the situation. We saw in my research that individual ***agency is entangled*** with multiple intra-active agencies (human and non-human). **The fact that my son’s school was new and located in a neighborhood that was very diverse, meant, for the school, that from the start they had to deal with very complex challenges. Added to this was a team that still had to get to know each other, and still had to set up the school’s day-to-day routines. The fact that it was a new school in a ‘problematic’ neighborhood produced an energy and motivation for teachers, the principal, parents, and supporters to ensure that the school could make a difference for children and create opportunities.** The school assemblage is made up of intra-active agents that have the possibility to open up and create opportunities to strengthen the assemblage and the openness to difference. The SENCO is not a passive subject waiting for the ideal assemblage. The SENCO can also be responsive to make inclusion work in an environment that is dominated by difference, standardization and testing (Naraian 2017).

In my research I have come to understand that SENCOs do not exist independently from their context: they are

subjects – in – relation. They emerge through ongoing relationality, and they are one of the intra-active agents who are part of the assemblage. This means that every assemblage produces a SENCO that is unique to that particular assemblage. As a result, the function of a SENCO is not a standard package of tasks detached from the context, the history, the space/time/mattering of the different agents. The dominant model of individualisation and decontextualisation positions the SENCO as a solo designer of the support system in the school. Instead, I have argued, it is a process of becoming. It's a doing, a practice.

“I often say ‘I do care coordination’ and not ‘I am the care coordinator’. It says more when I describe what I do than to describe who I am. That feels better, it reflects the dynamics.” (SENCO 19.12.2017)

Becoming a SENCO is an active process, and takes a lot of work. The process of subjectification as a SENCO is a constant struggle and could lead to the misconception that there is no room for experiencing ourselves as anything other than the category and position we are assigned to (Laws 2011). The current legislation offers an open job description of the SENCO with a clear goal: *‘creating equal opportunities for all children in the context of regular preschools and primary schools’*. This allows for the possibility of the **assemblage specific SENCO** with a lot of flexibility, transparency and adaptability.

I have argued that the various positions of the SENCO emerge through the multiple intra-active entanglements with other agents. Some positions maintain the social order and some disrupt those habitual, citational practices. *When the SENCO of my son is involved in testing every mile-stone to abject children who do not accomplish the norm, then they are working against inclusion. At the same time, when the SENCO, together with the teacher, breaks up the linear conception of time that determines what my son has to learn in a certain period, there is movement and openness to difference.* Throughout the research I have come to understand that the processes of normalisation and abjection are strong forces, and are working on and through us. It is important that the SENCO has an awareness of the fact that none of us, including the SENCO, cannot put themselves outside the hegemony of normativity. Instead, at some moments the SENCO operates as a justification of this abjection process. We all struggle with these strong and not conscious processes. So, it is important that the SENCO has an awareness of the multiple intra-active forces that are at work, and takes up **the responsibility to modify the effect of normalisation and difference** within routine schooling practice as well as in their own way of working. It can be confusing to work within these challenging and sometimes contradictory forces, where, for example, *in the trajectory of my son we want to create space for experimentation with no predetermined outcomes, but at the same time, we want to prepare him to be successful in standardized testing to make the transition to secondary school.*

It's in this complex practice with persistent, complementary, contradictory forces, that a SENCO and all the other agents need to operate. It requires the ability to take up the practice within these multiple forces and to look for possibilities and a positive way forward. It comes together with **the ability to tune oneself to any environment** (Naraian 2017, 33). It's a continuing process of escaping binary and fixed positions. The fluent and nomadic position requires a lot of flexibility that is crucial if one is to resist hegemonic structures and to tackle boundaries and barriers (Braidotti 2011). At certain moments this is hard, messy and confusing and requires a lot of energy, but it also creates space to respond creatively to different situations. It's not about good or bad choices, but it is about careful consideration as to which intervention is most suitable, because every situation, with its own ambiguity, has to be addressed differently. It requires **a constant balancing** within a framework where inclusion is more than an issue of accessibility. The current legislative efforts, like the M-decree and the new support model, rely much more on notions of accessibility than *‘being connected in an assemblage that stimulates growth and flourishing’* (Vandenbussche and De Schauwer 2017). *In the trajectory of my son, for example, it was not only about mechanical adaptations like bringing a computer device into the classroom, but also about looking how to achieve a sense of connectedness and how to respond to his educational needs by thinking out of the box and give space to experimentation in the daily search.* Every action is an ethical matter (Davies 2014), in which it is vital to have a critical understanding of those practices and structures that privilege a few and oppress others (Cosier and Ashby 2016).

“At our school it’s clear that who shouts the loudest gets attention, but there is no response to the mother of Aicha and Kimberly. Then I look for solutions, so I have registered our school for free computer technology; a colleague has set up a buddy system with the teachers college to support students with their homework, but I also address this issue with the school team. This is not about this one child, this is about a system, a group of children that systematically falls out of the boat, a group of parents that are not heard.” (SENCO 19.12.2017)

Moving to a more inclusive setting is not the work of an individual agent. To change this complex practice from within is about developing partnerships and working in more open and exploratory ways (Raphael 2013). This means that the SENCO must work together with different participants, form and strengthen alliances, set up collaborative learning communities and be aware of opportunities that are present in the assemblage (Van de Putte, De Schauwer, Van Hove, Davies 2017) because agency depends on **collaboration, connection and interference** (Bennet 2010). In these collaborations it’s about affect and being affected (Davies 2014). In the meeting about my son, none of the participants were engaged in an encounter in which each is open to being affected by the other. There could be no openness from the teacher, the principal, the SENCO or myself. None of us were open for (other) experiences and perspectives. *The decision about his leaving the common curriculum was already fixed.* In contrast, I have argued here, encounters need to be focused on what we don’t know, with no idea where we are heading. This openness can interfere with taken-for-granted clichés and perspectives on what can be seen as normal and true. An encounter can open up the space to imagine things differently and expand our capacity for thought and action (Davies 2014). This openness and focus on what we don’t know comes together with vulnerability.

“I have become less combative, that doesn’t mean I’m not fighting for social justice. But I see much more the different perspectives. I can now go for the connection, instead of fighting for my point, to get it ‘right’. If I push it and those parents are leaving the school, or that teacher drops out, where do you stand, what did you get? But working in terms of connections requires confidence in others and yourself.” (SENCO 19.12.2017)

The realization of such encounters asks for a community where difference, creativity, relationality and interdependency are valued (Graby and Greenstein 2016). Each of us can contribute to this, it’s about being open to others and establishing strong connections. An important partner of the SENCO is the principal; in their position, working alongside colleagues, they can detect the needs of the assemblage and facilitate the process of becoming open to difference. Principals taking up their position in this way can counteract the strong focus on the needs of the individual agent (child, teacher, parent, supporter) and the associated deficit approach. The principal can facilitate a shared vision about support and equal opportunities, this is important to give direction to the decisions that different agents have to take (Struyf et al. 2012).

Placing collaborations and connections at the center will enable SENCOs to take up a more consultative, collaborative and facilitative position, and to move from an expert model toward a **more collaborative model** (Jorgensen et al. 2006). The SENCO has the agency, the power to engage with others in a way that open up the capacity for thought and being (Davies 2014, 9), the SENCO negotiates and co-creates with others the support that meets the needs of the assemblage in order to make the assemblage more powerful. Support is moving away from kindness, goodness and caring relationships, where the other is positioned as dependent and not-knowing, to *intra-actions* where individuals emerge through their encounters and their intra-actions with each other (Barad 2007). I have established that it is important for SENCOs to start from a position that presumes the competence of the teacher, otherwise they fall very easily back into the SENCO-as-expert-model, where a one dimensional way of support hinders openness to engage, to listen and to respond creatively. Collaboration also implies the notion of voice, whose voice is heard, and how is it made to matter? (Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2014). Partnerships with children and parents help to deconstruct habitual practices and repetitive thinking.

The possibility of other readings comes together with the ability to make the discursive practices visible. In my own meeting about my son's trajectory, the desire for normalcy and thinking in terms of essentialised, fixed entities ran as a stream through the meeting. My son should perform according to the norm; the teacher's competence demands it; the SENCO must produce the answers; the parent must bow to the experts. The discursive practices through which normalcy and professionalism are established were dominant. Such discourses inevitably trap everyone in reductionist, simplistic, one-dimensional observations of those who are categorised as different/disabled, and of the events that involve them (De Schauwer et al. 2016), leading the talk inevitably toward correction, adaptation, rehabilitation, treatment and normalisation (Vandenbussche and De Schauwer 2017).

“In a professional development session we were told about an interesting positive gossiping method – always looking for ways to turn something or someone around in a positive way. That is really necessary to use in education – because when I ask for something positive about a child, then I sometimes get the comment: ‘come to my classroom and you will immediately see why I cannot answer this question.’” (SENCO 19.12.2017)

A lot of work has to be done to acknowledge **the multiplicity of identities**. Multiplicity helps us to escape the grasp of categories (Foucault 1977, 190 in Allan 2005) and makes it possible to transcend the constraints. However, there is always the possibility of being reincorporated into the repetitive lines of forces (Davies 2015). The collaboration and openness to (unpredictable) intra-actions that I am recommending are always under pressure from neoliberal management logic (Davies and Bansel 2007). Throughout the research we could see how the administrative work takes over in the formal procedures related to documentation. It's an enormous distraction from the creative work of thinking together, of co-creating (Lenz Taguchi 2010).

In chapter 2 I showed how the SENCO's work is defined by an almost overwhelming repertoire of multiple and sometimes conflicting responsibilities. We live in an era where responsibility is recast in instrumental terms; each individual is responsabilised, and carries the weight of the institutions' goals (McLeod 2017). In the situation of my son all of the agents could easily get caught up in individualisation, responsabilisation and accountability. It is the teacher who's not competent enough, it is my son who's not willing enough to participate and adjust, it's the SENCO who's not involved enough, it's the parent who pushes too hard, it is the M-decree that does not provide sufficient resources, it is the neoliberal governmentality that puts us under pressure. In this way responsibility is backward looking to reflect on who's responsible for the success or who's blamed for its failure, rather than looking forward (McLeod 2017, 47). It can lead to **response-inability**, that is, the idea that we are unable to undertake action, that life is out of control and that we do not matter (McLeod 2014). As a consequence the nature of the ethical relation between intra-active agents disappears and makes us all vulnerable. My research asks the SENCO and all the other agents to have an awareness of this process of individualisation and to recognize the damaging effects of it for working collaboratively.

“Our common monster is blaming others and leaving the responsibility to the others, ... it's because the children didn't learn in kindergarten how to use a scissors, it's because they didn't get proper toilet training, it's because the pedagogical counselor is too slow, and so on.” (SENCO 19.12.2017)

It is important to understand the negative impacts of this process and we must find alternative ways to work both inside and outside the system (Revelles-Benavente and Gonzalez Ramos 2017). With this I do not mean a call for a greater personal responsibility – what Tronto calls an embodiment of neoliberal ideology (McLeod 2014, 47), but rather, a reframing of responsibility. In chapter 5 I introduced the ethics of Deleuze, **onto-epistemological ethics**, that helped us to move away from a technical, procedural responsibility with its judgment and moralism.

An onto-epistemological ethics is about being open and being responsive to the other, who is not entirely separate from what we call the self (Wyatt et al. 2011). It decentralises the individual, and moves to multiplicities and entanglements between intra-active agents. An onto-epistemological ethics holds the possibility to escape from fixed positions and practices and lets us reconfigure the onto-epistemological foundations of the world. It draws attention to how we are constituted and intra-act with each other and invites us to shape the classroom,

the school, the world we live in, and to find provisional re/actions to urgent problems (Harraway 1988). This response-ability is an intra-action in which no one/no thing is given in advance or ever remains the same (Barad 2007, 264), and where we pay attention to the ways in which thought and action affect others results in making each individual all the more responsible for the impact of their words and actions (Davies 2014, 11).

In this way responsibility becomes transformative, affective, productive and releases us from the paralysing idea of response-inability. It enables us to experience ourselves as capable of finding a way through (Revelles-Benavente and Gonzalez Ramos: 2017). We make time for such responsibility because is vital in order to live and flourish and to accomplish social change. The onto-epistemology ethics is a tool to free the subject from the dominant thinking about neoliberalised schooling for the abled; it enriches our pedagogy and revalues the affective, ethical and relational dimensions of education (Zembylas, Bozalek, Shefer 2014). In that sense pedagogy harbours a logic of contextuality, complexity and relationality (Vandenbroeck et al. 2017, ix).

This ethical and complex practice asks every partner to think and act *diffractively* in order to trouble the taken for granted humanist assumptions, the deficit modes of thought and binary thinking. Throughout the research I have demonstrated possibilities for working diffractively. Collective biography, the diffractive script and thinking with theory all carry diffractive possibilities, to read various inside through one another and to produce something new (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012). Acting diffractively helps us to move away from the expert model and solution oriented approaches that simplify reality to one hegemonic truth, towards a position in which the starting point is that reality is multiple (Latour 2004). I also showed that in order to engage in thinking differently and expanding our thinking it is important to make the discursive and material practices visible because the agential forces of human and non-humans are entangled and intra-act.

“In a meeting the pedagogical counselor reminded me that I cannot act because I’m at the wrong level. After a while I understood she was referring to the care continuum. It’s a pyramid where a distinction is made according to the needs of children. Apparently supporters are linked to a certain level. I never thought that a drawing of a pyramid could have so much power.” (SENCO 19.12.2017)

Throughout the research I experienced that working collaboratively helped me to think outside the territorializing lines and prevented me from doing things the same. Repetitive thinking can be contested by setting up a community of inquiry to investigate our own positionality and space/time/mattering. It’s about learning how to intra-act responsibly as part of the world, while understanding that we are not the only active beings (Barad 2007, 390). None of us is almighty, but also, none of us is helpless; we all have the ability to respond and this starts with not individualising responsibility and accountability and not putting blame on other agents (human and non-human). I’m very aware that this PhD has not provided a preconceived plan with a set of steps to follow, but I hope that I have opened up the idea that inclusion starts with ourselves, and that it is necessary to think about what we can do to take up *response-ability*, which is far more than offering a child a chair in a classroom.

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PAPERS COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY GROUP

Shildrick's monster: exploring a new approach to difference/disability through collective biography

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Abstract

Working with memories generated in a collective biography workshop on difference/disability and drawing in particular on Shildrick's (2002) analysis of monstrosity, this paper analyses the ambivalent processes through which difference is othered and abjected. It argues that through the process of abjection we disown for ourselves whatever qualities are being categorised as monstrous, with negative effects not just on the other, but also on the self. We look at the ambivalence of 'reclaiming the monster'. The paper opens up an alternative of expanding the possibilities of being by focusing not on difference as categorical otherness, but rather difference as movement, as differentiation, or becoming.

Introduction

People who are categorised as different/disabled²⁹, and their families, frequently encounter rejection in education settings, in workplaces, and in other social spaces. Sometimes the rejection is subtle and sometimes less subtle. Perhaps even more oppressive than those overt rejections, are the workings of power that are illegible. Those illegible workings of power, as Butler points out, are generally not something anyone consciously chooses; indeed their power in part lies in their illegibility: the ‘normative exercise of power is rarely acknowledged as an operation of power at all. Indeed we may classify it among the most implicit forms of power, one that works through its illegibility’ (Butler 1997, 134). ‘Compulsory able-bodiedness’ for example, ‘functions by covering over, with the appearance of choice, a system in which there actually is no choice’ (McRuer 2006, 8).

Neoliberal discourses and practices have created a pervasive form of governmentality through which individuals are no longer social beings but economic beings. Implicitly, in what has become ordinary everyday discourse and practice, you have no value if you are not economically productive; or to put it another way, any form of value, other than the economic, has become more or less unimaginable. That shift in which human subjects have been transformed into *homo economicus* has taken place without anyone necessarily noticing that what is taken to be common-sense in everyday thinking and practice has changed, leading to automatic exclusions of those who are not able to be seen as potentially (economically) productive (Davies and Bansel 2007; Morissens et al 2007).

Not being aware of how discourses work on you and through you does not, however, let you off the hook of ethical responsibility. In this paper we ask, with Barad (2007 x), if we are interested in justice how we are to ‘understand our role in helping constitute who and what come to matter?’ Justice entails, Barad argues:

The ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly. The world and its possibilities for becoming are remade in each meeting. How then shall we understand our role in helping constitute who and what come to matter? (Barad 2007, x)

Not being aware of how exclusions matter in the lives of those categorised and perceived to be different/disabled does not absolve anyone of responsibility. In this study of encounters with difference/disability, or what Shildrick provocatively refers to as monstrosity, we explore the processes through which difference/disability is made to matter in order to ‘breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly’ (Barad 2007, x).

Embodying the monster

To analyse the processes through which disability is othered and abjected, we draw on Shildrick’s (2002) theorizing of *monstrosity*. At first the naming of difference/disability as monstrosity seemed quite shocking to us, but Shildrick provides a fascinating insight into the way that the onto-epistemological construction of normalised identities involves the normalised subject in abjecting difference/disability. Shildrick invites those who identify themselves as normal, not only to make visible the processes whereby they *abject* the so-called monstrous other, but to find, as well, ways to *re-claim* that monstrosity as *integral to their own humanity*.

29 Throughout this paper we have adopted the linguistic device of joining difference with disability in this way. We cannot abandon the category ‘disability’ as it is still necessary for the political work that needs to be done to establish the rights of people with disabilities, we nevertheless would like to continually combine that necessity of the category, with all its essentialising dangers, with ‘difference’ and so flag the poststructuralist move toward multiplicity that moves beyond binary thinking.

The 'abject' is the term Kristeva uses 'for all those things which a subject must disavow in the attempt to secure the self's clean and proper body' (Kristeva 1982, 71). The monstrous other is abjected in the ongoing project of making the normalised self into an identity that can be recognised as normal--through which, in Shildrick's terms, we create an illusion of being both normal and distinct from others. This process she argues requires the construction of boundaries that are necessarily leaky, and that require constant defence (Shildrick 2002). She questions that process of abjection, not by following the more usual moralising argument that we *should* see the abjected ones more positively, but by understanding the complex relationality through which our humanity is accomplished: 'The issue is not one of revaluing differently embodied others, but of rethinking the nature of embodiment itself' (Shildrick 2002, 2). She invites normalised subjects to examine their fears in encounters with difference, fears based on the use of monstrous others, and the abjection of them, to shore up a sense of their own normality.

The challenge we set ourselves in this paper was to examine our own normalising identity-making, in all its ambivalent complexity. Through working with our own memories in a collective biography workshop we opened up the possibility of exploring our own co-implication in the entangled onto-epistemological processes of normalisation and thus also of abjection. Our project is not one of normalising and condoning abjection through finding it in our own everyday practices, but of making the workings of power legible and thus open to deconstruction. In place of abjection we seek openness to the encounter with difference that enlarges what it is to be human. It enlarges our humanity. Our project is one of opening up to the ways 'we are different and multiple in ourselves' (Gregoriou 2001, 146). We circled around this project in several collective biographies (Davies et al. 2013, De Schauwer et al. 2016, De Schauwer et al, forthcoming) and our engagement with poststructural and new materialist theories.

The hegemony of normativity

In the work with people categorised as different/disabled that several of the authors of this paper engage in as part of their everyday work, we observe dismissal, a profound lack of information, and often focus on treatment and rehabilitation. This is only possible if those who are categorised as different are regarded as less than human—or at the very least as existing outside humanity as we understand it (Goodley & Runswick Cole 2014). These everyday encounters can be understood as a manifestation of ableism—of the common-sense assumption that an able-bodied/able-minded identity is what anybody would want (McRuer 2006). Ableism is a set of discourses and practices through which anyone who does not accomplish that able body/able mind is pathologised (Campbell 2009). At the same time, Bolt (2014) argues that the metanarrative of disability itself is integral to the production of normativity. It is a complex illegible entanglement of taken-for-granted discourses and practices that we hope to go some way to making more legible through our work with memories generated in our collective biography workshop.

It is through what Shildrick calls the ruse of identity-making that normative subjects become what they ought to be according to the subject positions that are available. Butler argues that this ruse is linked to the desire for recognition: 'Our very sense of personhood is linked to the desire for recognition, and that desire places us outside ourselves, in a realm of social norms that we do not fully choose, but that provide the horizon and the resource for any sense of choice that we may have' (Butler 2004, 33).

In taking up those terms of recognition, normalised subjects take on 'bodily configurations' along with the 'cultural capital they assume', enabling themselves to 'step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them' (Garland-Thomson 1997, 8). Normativity is thus intricately linked with the working of power and 'is less a condition of human nature than it is a feature of a certain kind of society' (Davis 1995, 14).

As researchers, and as workers in the field of disability studies, we did not want to set ourselves above the ruse of identity or outside the processes of normalisation. Although we see their dire effects in our everyday work

life, our best chance of making it legible, we decided, was to use the strategies of collective biography to look at these processes from inside themselves. This is not to condone them because we too do them, but to take up a position of responsibility by examining more closely how ‘the world and its possibilities for becoming are remade in each meeting’ and to ask how we might better ‘understand our role in helping constitute who and what come to matter?’ (Barad 2007, x). To get inside those processes is no simple matter.

In ways that are not legible to us, as McRuer (2006, 151) points out:

The institutions in our culture (...) work to secure an able-bodied identity. Fundamentally structured in ways that limit access for people with disabilities, such institutions perpetuate able-bodied hegemony, figuratively and literally constructing a world that always and everywhere privileges very narrow (and ever-narrowing) conceptions of ability.

Despite our own commitment to working otherwise in the practical and political work in our everyday lives we are not immune from being positioned within able-bodied/able minded hegemony. We are in this sense well positioned to examine its workings in our own encounters with difference. Like Bolt we understand that despite our best intentions the language we use may be ‘institutionally ableist, from the etymology to the most sophisticated of metaphorical applications’ (Bolt 2014, 16). Our passionate commitment to activist work, deterritorializing ableist discourse, forms one rhizome (to take up a Deleuzian metaphor) and everyday ableist thought and practice, reterritorializes thought, in a quite separate rhizome. These rhizomes in some ways are entirely different and separate from each other and in other ways together they form a new rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 10) ask: ‘How could movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another?’ Working at the interface of these entangled rhizomes is vital in understanding how difference/disability is practiced:

The rhizomatic model of disability produces an abundance of meanings that do not juxtapose pain and pleasure or pride and shame, but allow for an imminent transformation, a coming into being of a state of life in this world, one that is constantly shifting and productive of new subject/individual positions. This rhizomatic model of disability is only useful when used. It cannot have truth status, for it is empty of specific meaning. It is a movement rather than a definition (Kuppers 2009, 223).

Methodology of collective biography

The five authors of this paper gathered together for four days in a rented house in Chicago in May 2013. We had read, in preparation, Shildrick’s (2002) *Embodying the Monster. Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*, and we had looked for children’s stories about monsters that might open up different ways of thinking about monstrosity.

Inspired by Shildrick’s work and by the children’s stories that we read together, we worked on our own encounters with monstrosity. Our days were spent at first sitting on the roof terrace under the Chicago sun, telling our memories of those encounters. We listened to each other’s stories in order to know them, in a Deleuzian sense, from *inside* themselves, not as individuals but in terms of the mode of being the memories unfolded. As Wyatt et al., (2011, 3-4) explain:

Deleuze does not deny the existence of individuals and their experience; they are ontologically real. But their engagement in being, in univocal being, in all its complexity and divergence, opens up not the usual question who are you in particular (what is your identity that I might judge you and thereby judge myself), but *how is this possible?* Deleuze asks, in relation to experience, “how is that possible? How is this possible in an internal way? [Engaging with someone’s experience] you relate the thing or the statement to the mode of existence that it implies, that it envelops in itself. How must it be in order to say that? Which manner of Being does this imply?” (Deleuze, 1980: np). How might I comprehend Being in new ways through listening to you inside the fold of your experience.

In order to listen in this way we questioned each other closely to ensure that we grasped for ourselves what it was to be embodied inside each of the memory stories that were told, then we wrote our stories, and read them out loud to each other, again listening in order to know the embodied moment – entering the space of each story not just as an epistemological event, but also, in Barad’s (2007) terms, as an ontological and ethical event. In the telling and the writing of our memories we sought language that would ring true to the time and space and people in the memory. We sought to write in an embodied way, not resorting to clichés or explanations and not engaging in moral judgment (Davies and Gannon 2006 & 2009), but opening up the fold of experience from inside itself.

The memory stories generated in collective biography workshops are thus not objects of reflection that pre-exist their telling. They are mobile, and the work with them is *diffractive*; the stories affect each other, and we (singular and plural) affected them and they affected us, and affected and who we took ourselves to be (Davies and Gannon 2013). In arguing for a diffractive methodology Barad suggests that reflexivity is not adequate to capture the emergent intra-corporeal multiplicities of life (Fritsch 2015). We need the concept of diffraction, she says, to open ourselves up to the ways in which difference is not something that can be fixed in already-known categories, but is a process of ongoing differentiation or becoming: ‘Diffraction involves reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences *as they emerge*: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how these exclusions matter’ (Barad 2007, 30, our emphasis).

After our days of storytelling/writing/reading/listening/questioning we went back to our computers to rewrite our stories, editing out any remnants or clichés or explanations or moral judgement, or words that evoked the present day narrator rather than the person in the memory at the time and place of that memory. Further, we generated ‘after-thoughts’ or diffractive readings of our stories we had told and listened to, as well as the discussions of each story, and the conceptual possibilities opened up in our readings. The process we engaged in opened up from inside themselves those folds of experience that made Being visible, audible, palpable, not in the sense of capture and holding it still in order to examine it, but opening it to change:

The discursive and material practice of collective biography can make visible, palpable, hearable, the constitutive effects of dominant discourses. (...) In examining how discourse and practice work on us, we open both ourselves and discourse to the possibility of change. (Davies & Gannon 2006, 5)

The after-thoughts were brought together with the stories after the workshop as the collaborative writing process on this and other papers went on over many ensuing months. Each of us took turns to write and re-write this paper and with each re-writing further shifts in thought were accomplished. Each contribution enabled us to work further on our collective emergent understanding as we re-configured our understanding of our entanglement in processes of normalisation and our encounters with monstrosity.

Memory stories of monstrosity

In what follows we tell three of our memory stories, which were triggered by the question: “What is your (first) memory on an encounter with a monster?” The three stories we have chosen to explore, successively, are about the processes of abjecting the monster, the ambivalent process of reclaiming the monster, and the powerful impact of embracing difference in an affirmative way.

Our first story is told from the point of view of a nine-year-old child:

In the days after the King's death all the news on radio and television focuses on the unexpected death. Extra editions of journals are published. One of the front pages is filled with the dead body of Boudewijn lying in his coffin. The Belgian tricolour flag covers his legs. A white, almost transparent veil, covers his face. Or tries to cover. I say try because – at the first and only glance – I see a clear face.

Not the face of King Boudewijn anymore. Not that gentle face of the King anymore. The face he listened with. No glasses anymore. A pale face with eyes closed and mouth shut. I shiver, feeling intensely frightened. I have never seen a dead body. I quickly turn the page. I do not want to see it again. It is too spooky. At the same time I have to prevent myself from turning the page back.

That night it is difficult to fall asleep. The image of the dead King constantly recurs. Finally, I fall asleep, but even in my nightmare, the body appears. Even closer than I could ever imagine. King Boudewijn lies in the dark brown closet in our hallway! I wake up clammy. I have to persuade myself to get up. My legs are heavy. I am full of fear. I walk into the hallway. Unsteady. I see the dark brown closet and immediately turn my head away. The closet is big, the hallway is narrow, the space in between is too tight to pass. I will go the other way, it is the only solution.

With this story we want to focus on the process of ‘monstering’ -- how multi-layered it is, and how unbelievably quickly it can come to dominate thoughts and actions like the instant decompression of a spring. For the storyteller, as a nine-year-old girl, the dead face behind the veil became the monster who lay on the other side of life, whose death must be abjected from her own body. The paleness, the sealed eyes and almost frozen mouth were intensely vivid. The picture of the dead body held more than the picture itself: ‘What is monstrous is most often the form of embodiment’ (Shildrick 2002, 9).

The girl’s response to what she experienced as monstrous involved, in Shildrick’s terms, a re-establishing and maintenance of her own (normalized) body by expelling and locking out the monster. That normalized self, Shildrick argues, is doubly vulnerable:

As postmodernist theory makes clear, the normative construct of the self’s clean and proper body is under constant threat, on the one hand from the potential of internal leakage and loss of form, and on the other, from the circulation of all those dangerous bodies – of women, or racial others, of the sick, of the monstrous – who occupy the place of the other and serve to define by difference the self’s own parameters. (Shildrick 2002, 71)

The girl was deeply afraid of the monster with its power to escape from the place in which she had confined it. Her dangerously leaky borders had to be protected and maintained. Monstering the other is work done at the expense of others who are monstered, but also at the expense of oneself. Placing the image of the dead king outside the self, and containing it there, required constant effort to maintain its position on the outside, like the effort required to keep a spring taut in order to hold back the instant moment of release and decompression:

In seeking confirmation of our own secure subjecthood in what we are not, what we see mirrored in the monster are the leaks and flows, the vulnerabilities in our own embodied being. Monsters, then, are deeply disturbing; neither good nor evil, inside nor outside, not self or other. (Shildrick 2002, 4)

For the girl the dead body was monstrous, invoking at the same time horror (turning over the page) but also fascination (the desire to turn the page back). Death, now potentially her own body's death, presents her with unbearable knowledge. She was vulnerable to the knowledge of her own mortality, but she placed that vulnerability, in an instant, in the body of the monstrous other who could be locked away, but who continues, even into adulthood, to make her afraid: 'We thus cannot finally locate the monster as wholly other. It always claims us, touches us and implicates us in its own becoming' (Shildrick 2002, 6).

This first memory-story worked powerfully on us, enabling us to catch, vividly, the moment of abjection; a moment not wilfully chosen, nor even ignorantly enacted, but a visceral recoil from the similarity between the girl's own body and that of the deceased king. The finite mortality of all humans materialised in the image of the king was too much for the child and evoked profound fear. According to Hobbes (as cited in Frost 2010, 158) fear is 'a response to the limits of epistemology, (...) a response to the obscurity of the unknown'. For the girl, the unknown, or not-yet-known, was the appearance of, and first confrontation with, death and dead bodies. The fear evoked by the picture/the monster could thus also be read as the unbearable realisation that everyone can lose command of her or his body. The fact that the monster comes so close (from his coffin in Brussels to her home) and invades her personal space, disrupts the girl's illusion of being invulnerable.

In this interpretation the awareness of being vulnerable to and touched by death opens up a momentary recognition of the impossibility of self-sovereignty, an awareness that evokes fear, and necessitates a violent abjection of the image in order to protect her illusion of able-bodied integrity. The monstrous body must be turned into the 'absolute other' so it can, in its corporeal difference, be put 'into an oppositional category of not me' (Shildrick 2002, 2). This response is integral to the process of abjection that we set out to explore—the process whereby the binary divisions between self-with-integrity and the monstrous other are set up.

The nine-year-old girl found a very specific means of abjecting the King—locking him away in the closet. The dead body was thus made to represent much more than itself. Locked in the closet it could come to hold all the taboo elements of the self that must be separated off. What the encounter with the image of the dead body opens up for us here, with the help of Shildrick's theorizing, is the possibility of understanding that the act of abjection does not happen because the other is different, but because they are the same. Individuals' identity-making is a process of undoing that confusion and lack of singularity. That is, in a sense, identity-making's task. It fabricates certainty out of uncertainty, and thus wards off the possibility of annihilation. Locking the King up, abjecting him, was, however, no final solution, as the fear of death is now laid down affectively in ways the girl-now-a-woman cannot readily undo. The dark brown closet in which the dead body was locked, still evokes a wry feeling of fear.

In our next memory-story another child encounters the horrifying image of her dead sister. First, alone, and then with the help of her father, the little girl finds a means of managing the horror and embracing, within her family, the memory of her dead sister. This story thus enables us to extend the analysis we undertook with the first story. This time the memory is literally taken out of the cupboard.

When I come into my playroom I see the old heavy brown safe. It's big with a code system with numbers and letters and a special key. It's always closed but today the door is open. I feel excited, maybe there is some money in it, that I could use for my chocolate shop. I look behind me to make sure that my sister didn't follow me. On one of the shelves I see a white book bound in plastic. I open the book and I know it. It's a book about Catherine, my sister who died. The only thing I know about her is that she only lived for a week. I turn the pages and there I see a picture: a little cradle with a body in it. A very small body. Out of her mouth comes a tube; there are wires and tubes all over her body. I feel shocked and I put my hand before my eyes, like I do if I see the Hulk on television, especially the moment where his body changes from a person into a green monster. After a moment I spread my fingers a little bit, so I can see something. It are all black and white photos. It looks like you can see through her skin. Was it soft? Would she cry? Could she play in my chocolate shop? I look again at her face and if I look closely I can see a cleft chin... like mine... I turn the pages. The last picture is the baby with my mother. My mother holds her, no tubes, no wires. Just my mum with

the baby. At that moment I feel somebody is standing behind me. I don't move. It's my dad. I feel him going down on his knees and he touches my shoulder. He takes the book and gently closes it. He puts it into the safe and turns the switch. He closes the door with the special key and puts it in his pocket. He stands still for a moment, with his back to me. Is he crying? Is he angry? What is he thinking? There is silence. I say: "Catherine with a C is a nice name." After a while he says "Yes it is, it comes from Catharina, just like your sisters, but you also have a lovely name".

Catherine is the third daughter in this family, who only lived for one week. She is locked away in the safe. She is not mentioned, and yet the family silently circulates around her absent presence. On one hand, there is apparently no place and space for her, no pictures in the house, no stories told from the pregnancy, the birth and the short life. At the same time the pictures of the baby are put in the most secure place, a place that both hides her *and* underlines her significance. In the moment of discovering the photos, Catherine's life is ambiguous, far away, invisible, but close enough, with no escaping. Monstrosity, Shildrick says, 'arouses always the contradictory responses of denial *and* recognition, disgust *and* empathy, exclusion *and* identification' (Shildrick 2002, 17).

When the girl sees the pictures of the unrecognizable corporeality, she hides from the image. This baby does not conform to what a baby *should* look like. The process of identity-making, as the girl has experienced it, produces normality. Now she is confronted with an image that refuses that process—that is, in Shildrick's terms, monstrous. And monsters 'are always liminal, refusing to stay in place, transgressive and transformative. They disrupt both internal and external order, and overturn the distinctions that set out the limits of the human subject' (Shildrick 2002, 4). The safe, the knowable and the known are interrupted, disrupted. That disruption generates ambivalent emotions. The girl peeps through her fingers, and her horror alternates with desire—might this sister have played in her chocolate shop? If this child, this sister, is too threatening to the girl's own boundaries, she might cast her away as someone who cannot be and should not be worthy of her attention. As Shildrick says: 'What is at stake in a politics of identity and difference is the security of borders that mark out the places which are safe and which are unsafe, and who is due moral consideration and who is not' (Shildrick 2002, 5).

But the girl has discovered in her sister a point of sameness: she shares her cleft chin. In that discovery she experiences not simply otherness, but what Shildrick calls 'the trace of the other in the self' (Shildrick 2002, 129). The monster is thus a figure of ambiguity. 'It is not just abhorrent, it's also enticing, a figure that calls to us, that invites recognition' (Shildrick 2002, 5). And so for the girl, her moment of discovery holds all the ambivalence the world had for this baby when she was born. Rejection *and* recognition.

In the playroom something shifts in the space between the father and the girl. The father doesn't judge the girl for looking at the book. He is really gentle with her and with Catherine. He touches the girl's shoulder and takes the book from her with great care. The moment he closes the door of the safe and stays with his back turned to her, something new opens up. When the girl cannot see what her father is doing in this moment of silence, she wants reassurance, a return to normality. And in that same moment, everything changes in the face of her father's vulnerability. His body holds his grief; his back is turned, and he is silent; and within that silence the girl feels what the loss of her sister has meant to her family.

The girl had felt her own vulnerability looking at the pictures of her fragile sister, and she feels the powerlessness and gentle sadness of her father. His body shows the loss, his turned back, his silence. This is also a moment of humanising Catherine. She is not a scary object in a picture any more, not the daughter without a face. She is someone you can be sad for, about whom you can grieve. Catherine is not the monster outside the girl any more, she touches and is touched by the girl, two girls with a beautiful name. She experiences now, as an adult, in the telling of this story, the 'ambiguity and unpredictability of an openness towards the monstrous other [and comes to know] both vulnerability of the other, and vulnerability of the self' (Shildrick 2002, 3). She comes to know her sister as integral to her own life, even in the deep sorrow of her loss. When we listened to this story, we were all touched, not just by the loss, but by the detailed account of love for that child who lived so briefly. As we followed the story, and listened, we became witnesses to the intensity of love and respect for another human being. Each member of the family, including the child who lived and the child who died, and their father, go

on affecting each other, transforming each other, and they potentially transform those who listen to their story. Catherine is no longer someone to be abjected, no longer someone not granted humanity, but someone granted a viable place in the heart of the family. Who any of us are, or might ever have been, is never absolutely fixed. We are each, as Shildrick says, historical works in progress.

At the time of this encounter with her sister, her father's sadness *affected* the girl and humanised her. It touched her in a way that had, and goes on having, implications for her own becoming, for the desire that has become a driving force in her life. In that world, Catherine is much more than a body that inhabits the categories of 'spina bifida', 'severely disabled', and 'unviable'. The girl and her father are, through their shared affect, their shared desire, touched by and connected with Catherine as are we, now, in the process of engaging in this collective biography: 'Desire produces connections and creates belonging (...) belonging in constant movement' (Diedrich 2005, 242-243).

We are aware here of a danger that Catherine's life will be read as valuable for *our* sakes, for the sake of *our* able-bodied humanity. And while it is true that her life, and the memory of it as it is told here, do contribute to our sense of humanity, that is not our point. Our point is that life itself is mobile and intra-active. Despite all our efforts to establish ourselves as stable and separate entities, we are mutually entangled in our encounters with each other. Barad generated the neologism 'intra-action' to help her explore the ongoing '*mutual constitution of entangled agencies*'; 'intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action' (Barad 2007, 33; emphasis in original). In that openness we come to understand that the binary abled/disabled is deeply problematic; none of us exists absolutely on one or the other side of it (Goodley & Roets 2008), and none of us exists independent of our intra-actions with the other. The plenitude that circulated around Catherine, once her presence was acknowledged, was most vivid in the way the parents raised their other daughters. Catherine brought them positivity—a capacity to joyfully embrace life. Her story thus contained much more than a melancholic sense of loss; in acknowledging her the family opened itself to difference, not just Catherine's different life, but their own humanity lived differently. In embracing difference, one's own humanity is expanded and intensified (Davies 2014).

The story-teller's clearest childhood memory is the annual visit to Catherine's grave each first of November, the father with his cleaning products and the girl helping, scrubbing and cleaning. After that they would go together to drink warm chocolate. The desire to include Catherine in this family is in Olsson's terms 'an unconscious process of production: it concerns a kind of learning that it is not possible to tame, predict, supervise, control and evaluate according to already existing standards' (Olsson 2009, 185). It enables the family to discover new connections and possibilities, to construct and reconstruct themselves and their world over and over.

In our third memory the daughter lives, and her sister tells a story about daily life with her. This is a story of a family with a mission, a constant battle and an obligation to de-monster their severely disabled daughter for themselves and for the world. Their experience of intense contact with the child, means that however disabled or malformed she may appear, she is a unique and irreplaceable being, and above all a member of their family.

I look at the ticking clock in our living room. It is 2 minutes before 10 pm. I lie in the dark watching a movie. My parents are already sleeping, but I'm almost 14 and old enough to stay downstairs on my own. Actually, not alone. My sister, Margo, who is four is lying in her bed in our living room, sleeping, I think. The clock beats 10 times. I stand up and go to the kitchen. I prepare for the injection of medication, 2 milligrams of Depakine. I put on the big light to see what I'm doing. My sister opens her eyes and makes them big. She forms a sound, saying 'euh' with a big smile on her face. And again, 'euh'... I smile and look at her, my heart feels warm. She knows I will give her the medication. 'Ah, Margo, I thought you were already asleep, because you were so quiet, but you sneakily were awake.' Her eyes stay big and I smile again. I stop the machine that gives drops of liquid food and carefully inject the medicine very slowly into the tube. I do it as it should be done and almost automatically. It is not the first time. I look at my sister with that attentive look in her eyes. She trusts me with this task. I'm her big sister. At that moment my heart goes faster and for a second I'm thinking: 'What am I doing here? My friends do other things with

their brothers and sisters, teaching them to do math sums for example. I would like to do that also.' My heart goes fast and I'm shaking a little bit. How do I dare to think like that? Then I start the machine with food again. I turn down the light so she can go to sleep and give her a kiss. Her hair smells nice and fruity. She says 'eub' again and smiles. Her body is relaxed, ready to go to sleep. I smile back with tears in my eyes. I go back to the couch to watch the end of the movie.

In this memory-story we meet two girls in a familiar intra-action as sisters, enjoying each other's company and feeling a strong connection. At the same moment one of them has to perform in a way that is not usually expected of a girl of her age. When she gives the injection, she acts like a caregiver, and a nurse. She catches herself wanting to do other things with Margo: playing, running in the streets, teaching her maths... Her relationship with her sister holds this ambivalence. The girl loves her sister and is sensitive to her eyes, her smell, her touch, her body and her moods. This attitude and activity is under-pinned by desire, uncertainty, interests, and it leads to questions instead of answers. Her sister confronts her with impossible hopes and strong emotions about what is not. She is startled by her own ambivalence, by her momentary slippage in this collective biography process into thinking of Margo in terms of what she is not.

Isarin (2005) distinguishes between the 'who' and the 'what' of the child. The 'what' categorizes the child in terms of 'everything that is not expected, not planned, not hoped and not wished' (Isarin 2005, 6). It is an absence, an overwhelming negativity. A member of Margo's family captured the perception of the *what* of Margo when he said at her funeral: 'It is a good thing, for her and for you. Now she is in heaven and she is released from her impairments and sorrows. In heaven she can be whoever she wants to be. Her body can be released from pain and deformity.' But *who* is Margo? 'The 'who' is the subjective singularity of the child. It is the person, regardless, or just because of, his or her disability. The 'who' is through and through relational; it can only be recognized and acknowledged in relation with the person' (Isarin 2005, 6). In Barad's and Fritsch's terms, the 'who' is intra-active, it is an emergent, intra-corporeal, multiplicity, a mutual entanglement.

The well-meaning words at the funeral unintentionally denied the mutual entanglement the parents and sister had with Margo, and the world they had created with her, of inter-connected bodies and souls. The words denied the hard work the family had put into the de-monstering of Margo and the de-monstering of themselves as a family, and they rendered invisible, even impossible, the work of breaking out of those binary 'categories that block the unfolding of new ways of living' (Lorraine 2008, 72).

In this story the family works with the potentialities of the child and engages in an on-going battle against ableism and its binary categories and processes of abjection that reduce Margo to a unit of lesser value (Hannah & Midlarsky 2005). They defend the 'who' of Margo, and they get to know every loving detail of her, her laugh, her big eyes, her patient way of living, her moments of enjoyment, her recognition of them as family. The words of their well-meaning pious relative were wounding in their abjection of Margo as monstrous; they flew in the face of all their hard work to de-monster her, to remain open to her sameness in all of its difference.

When Margo had stayed more often in the residential care facility for children and adults with severe and multiple impairments, her father had visited her every day. He walked with her, talked to her about her family and their daily life, went to the cafeteria with her for a drink, gave her a massage, read his newspaper next to her, held her hand. They were very close. He had had to work hard to make his humanising of Margo make sense to the professional staff who took care of her. There were many discussions about what was best for Margo. The confrontation with otherness demanded a different becoming as it challenged the pre-existing order of what a child *should* be. It demanded movement from an unreflected *ought*, to what *is*, and thus a movement away from moralistic judgement toward an ethical openness to the just-thiness of Margo.

Concluding thoughts

We launched ourselves into our collective biography workshop, as five works in progress, five people committed to finding new insights into the way normative anxieties work on us and through us. We were five people who did not ‘believe in’ abjecting others, but who came to understand, that, like *anyone else*, we both succumb to *and* struggle against the forces of normalisation. We have explored difference as movement rather than something that can be categorised; and difference as a positivity that lies beyond or in-between binary differences of same/other, abled/disabled. We have explored the possibility of thinking of difference as emergent in mutually constitutive entanglements, or differentiation. We have questioned the normalising ideal of a stable identity and called for engagement in an ethics of openness to what is rather than what ought to be. What if, we have asked, we put the spotlight on our intra-active encounters instead of on disability?

The dynamic we explore here, inspired by Shildrick’s analysis, is deeply personal, working on and through individual bodies and emotions; it also works at the level of epistemologies, moralities and affects. We ask not just what is it to be this singular being, in this moment of abjecting or being abjected, but what kind of a world are we making in that moment? When we abject the other, we refuse for ourselves the possibility of knowing the richness of the other, and we repress the otherness within ourselves.

This is not a paper that dismisses those who fear and abject those who are labelled as ‘different’. It is a paper that enters into the micro-movements of that space of abjection in order to make abjection visible and all-too-human. At the same time it argues that abjection is a burden to the one who holds the abjected other at its borders. Through the collective biography we experienced these processes at work on all of us, creating our own ambivalent relation to those categorized as other and as monsters. Our task here has been to gain some conceptual purchase on the processes of abjection and to set out moments of conceptualizing ‘difference’ in an alternative, more fluid way, inspired in particular by the conceptual field that Shildrick has opened up.

The methodology of the collective biography helps us in making ‘visible and revisable the everyday discourses through which we make meanings and selves’ (Davies & Gannon 2006, 7) and in particular, here, the making of identity and otherness. Before we began this project we had imagined that we were immune to the process of abjection of difference/disability; in thinking of ourselves in that way we had created yet another binary of right-minded people like us, as opposed to those (monstrous) others who treat difference/disability as monstrous. Working with Shildrick we re-claimed the monstrous other we had created through this moralising binary that placed us in the dominant position; we looked to ourselves to discover from inside itself how the process of abjection works on us and through us. We explored through Barad’s and Deleuze’s thinking about justice and ethics a non- moralistic, non-judgmental approach. Through our collective biography processes, and through our engagement with Shildrick’s theorizing, we have opened up the possibility of an ethics that does not judge ourselves or the other, but asks, simply, with Deleuze (1980), *what is it to be this?* We hope we have shown in this paper what a profound and productive question that is.

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The intra-active Production of Normativity and Difference

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Abstract

Drawing on memory stories told in a collective biography workshop about children's encounters with schooling, this paper experiments with re-imagining the child-student-subject as an 'emergent intracorporeal multiplicity' (Fritsch 2015, 51). From the feminist new-materialist perspective that the authors work with, the child is configured not as an entity prior to, or separate from, encounters with education systems, but emergent with-in them. This paper focuses on difference in human relations, and in particular on the intersections of disability and gender. It does so not in terms of essential characteristics of individuals, but as emergent, in-the-moment, with others. In focussing on the detail of lives-in-their-making, the authors ask, with Barad (2007, x), if we are interested in justice, how we are to 'understand our role in helping constitute who and what come to matter?'

[Justice entails] the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly. The world and its possibilities for becoming are remade in each meeting. How then shall we understand our role in helping constitute who and what come to matter? (Barad 2007, x, our emphasis)

Categorisation is standard practice for managing and governing populations—of making them governable--through making the existing forms of knowledge, or rationality, seem both reasonable and inevitable (Davies et al. 2006a). We take up the categories we have been assigned to in the process that Foucault (1997) calls governmentality—the taking up of the mentality that will make us more governable. Those categories tend

to be binary categories, with one in the ascendant and one subordinated, as feminist research on gender has shown (Baker and Davies 1989). Barad (2007) invites us to extend our thinking by attending to ethics, and to the ontology and epistemology of social life. She invites us to ask of each encounter, what is being made to matter. In this spirit we turn our attention here to the practice of positioning non-normative children in terms of their subordinate category membership such that they are seen as less educable, and even as less worthy of education (Davies 2008; Davies and Harré 1990).

Positioning individuals through their subordinate category membership can be understood as a mode of linguistic marking, where the unmarked category is taken to be normal, and to be what anyone could or should be, while the marked category is that which is other to normal. Whereas boys and men may have belonged to an unmarked category, regarding themselves as simply human, or normal, girls and women have been more likely to be marked by their gender and seen as other to normative masculinity (Davies 1993; Kimmel 1990).³⁰ Marking also takes place within these categories where hegemonic masculinity, for example, may be unmarked in relation to the category of queer, or nerd, or sook. The capability/disability binary works in the same way, where those who do not have disabilities read themselves as simply human in the way anyone can and should be. One's hegemonic or ascendant positioning is read as natural and not in need of conscious attention—it can be taken for granted. A subordinate category, such as disabled, is marked and in need of remediation in order to become like those who are deemed to be capable.

While subordinate binary categories might be used effectively for political, medical or economic purposes, in educational contexts, we suggest, marking children in terms of their subordinate category, where that then justifies their exclusion from education on that basis, is ethically irresponsible and unjust. In this paper we experiment with new materialist concepts in order to explore the intra-active processes through which positioning in terms of subordinate categories is made to matter.

Currently in Flanders children may be excluded from regular school if they are categorised as disabled (Hall 2013).³¹ Such category-based decision-making, which places regular schooling outside the reach of so many, is generally accompanied by a neoliberal mode of governmentality in which responsibility is made a matter for the individual: 'People are responsible for the "production" of their own well-being and self-actualisation', and to be a member of the regular education system 'a specific kind of self-knowledge and self-mastery is required' (Masschelein and Simons 2005, 125; Claiborne et al. 2009). Children who are judged sufficiently normal to be allowed entry into regular school are generally deemed to be so to the extent that they can become 'entrepreneurs of themselves, shaping their own lives through the choices they make' (Rose 1989, 230). Each must be capable of governing him or herself to become the ideal neoliberal subject, one who is primarily a productive economic subject and capable of transforming him or herself according to the needs of the economy (Davies et al 2006b; Martin 1997).

30 We use the past tense here, because of the "what about the boys" movement, which emerged globally when the unmarked ascendancy of boys was challenged by girls' increasing success in schools. That movement was aimed at recovering boys' (assumed to be rightful) ascendant positioning.

31 5.2% of the student population in Flanders does not have access to regular/mainstream schooling, being placed instead in "special" schools. Of those children, 67% have a learning disability or mild intellectual impairment or behaviour and emotional problems. A disproportionate number of them have a diverse social, cultural and linguistic background (NESSE,2012). The UN convention article 24 (2006) asserts the right to be included in the regular schooling system; and in a hearing in September 2014 the UN Committee expressed serious concern about the current situation of inclusive education in Flanders.

That responsibilised and responsive neoliberal subject, is nevertheless still individualised and understood in liberal humanist terms as an entity; that is, as someone who exists independent of their context and who, by an act of will, can nevertheless become whatever it is deemed appropriate s/he should be. In order to address Barad's question in this context, we focus not on that will-driven entity, but on the 'emergent intracorporeal multiplicities of life' (Fritsch 2015, 51). In line with the new materialist perspective we are interested in the moment-by-moment production of possibilities among all those involved--not just humans but also discourses, values, and the spatial-material elements of schools. As Barad (2007, 396) concludes in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*:

The world and its possibilities for becoming are remade with each moment. If we hold on to the belief that the world is made of individual entities, it is hard to see how even our best, most well-intentioned calculations for right action can avoid tearing holes in the delicate tissue structure of entanglements that the lifeblood of the world runs through. Intra-acting responsibly as part of the world means taking account of the entangled phenomena that are intrinsic to the world's vitality and being responsive to the possibilities that might help us and it flourish.

It is those entangled phenomena, that the 'lifeblood of the world runs through', that we set out to explore in this paper, with the hope, on the one hand, of enabling a flourishing of lives that are currently categorised and abjected as non-normative, and on the other, of opening up a feminist new materialist perspective in the sphere of education more broadly.

In order to engage in this exploration of thinking differently, in our pursuit of Barad's question, how "shall we understand our role in helping constitute who and what come to matter?" (Barad 2007, x), we have, together, engaged in a collective biography workshop, where we have told our own stories of being school children, and of working with school children categorised as disabled³². We will draw on three of those memory stories to explore the processes of normalisation and of ab-normalisation at work in children's lives.

In challenging the categorising-as-usual through which children are excluded in current education systems, we are interested in the way that the production of some children as normative subjects is, in being unmarked, naturalised, as if it were the spontaneous expression of their intrinsic normality, an intrinsic normality that anyone could, and should, accomplish. Through our memory stories, and the concepts we put to work in relation to them, we explore the production of the imagined normative subject of neoliberalism and the emergent intracorporeal entanglements through which each of us is made, and goes on being made, in the ongoing processes of intra-active becoming (cf. Davies et al. 2001). We use Barad's (2007) term intra-active here, in contrast to interaction, to signal the conceptual movement away from separate entities engaging with each other (interaction), toward the unfolding process of becoming in relation to others, where each one is capable of affecting and being affected by the other (intra-action).

³² Two of the four authors of this paper have worked for many years as support workers, paid for by funds allocated by government to parents, so that parents can employ workers who work with the child both at home and at school. A lot of the work has involved making the environment accessible through adapting exercises and learning material and support children in their social contacts, and also working with the teachers on educational planning.

Rethinking disability as multiplicity

Despite the conceptual, practical and policy work that has been done in disability studies, the ‘problem of disability’, has been naturalised and simplified in the social/political imagination such that it has become an individualised ‘monolithic fact of the body’ (Kafer 2013, 4). A body defined as in itself disabled can be read as incomplete, lacking, or less than human, and thus as not entitled to belong in regular schools. This has some similarities to the way the female body was defined as the problem in early movements for gender inclusion. Girls could not be included, for example, because there were no female toilets, or because intellectual activity would rob girls of their reproductive powers, or girls and women were not actually human. Categorisation can mark the non-normative as being other to those who can be recognised as naturally belonging.

That naturalised belonging, Fritsch points out, is, from the point of view of those categorised as disabled, a masquerade performed by “the autonomous, rational subject that can smoothly move his body in accordance with what is considered acceptable and appropriate within the social sphere’ (Fritsch 2015, 48). From such an unmarked, autonomous position, it is easy enough to see one’s own being as normal and natural, and as being the way it should be. Normativity is thus produced as a morally ascendant and natural state of being, without normative subjects ever needing to pay attention to the way ableism, sexism, racism, and homophobia are being produced through those same processes (Hehir 2005).

Becoming an unmarked subject, however, as Davies et al. (2001) demonstrated, is never finally accomplished by anyone. It is always an emergent work in progress. Yet those who do not or cannot accomplish themselves as the unmarked subject, may be read as a threat to the normative order itself insofar as they are read as unwilling to do that work that everyone must do (Shildrick 2002). From that normative position it seems obvious that those who are different must, or at least should, want to minimise the evidence of their difference through medical and prosthetic rehabilitation, or through pedagogical interventions in special schools that enable them to become appropriate ‘entrepreneurs of themselves, shaping their own lives through the choices they make’ (Rose 1989, 230; Laws and Davies 2000).

Drawing on the memory stories, told in a collective biography workshop, about variously-abled children’s encounters with early schooling, we explore how a feminist new materialist approach can open up a new conceptual space in thinking about education and difference. In what follows, we develop a diffractive analysis of the entangled relations between ability, gender and the social imagination. We consider Fritsch’s challenge that what we need is to reconfigure ‘how disability emerges, with whom it emerges, and where’ (Fritsch 2015, 45), opening up the space of imagination to reading our encounters as ‘an intra-corporeal, non anthropocentric multiplicity that exceeds the individualized human body inscribed by neoliberal capitalism’ (Fritsch 2015, 45).

Collective biography as a diffractive methodology

Collective biography is, in Barad’s (2007) sense, a diffractive methodology, conceptually and in practice. Reflection and reflexivity have become taken-for-granted metaphors for conceptualising what we do in qualitative research, so diffraction as metaphor and practice makes for an interesting shift in thinking-as-usual³³. Whereas reflection and reflexivity might document categories of difference into which we can each be sorted, diffraction is itself implicated in the process whereby a difference is made. What a diffractive methodology sets out to do is to track the interference patterns, and discover from them the ongoing processes through which the world creates, and goes on creating itself. A diffractive approach opens up within the research an onto-epistemological space of encounter.

³³ See Hoskins 2015 for a good analysis of the concept of reflexivity.

The concept of encounter in turn focuses attention on the entangled intra-active processes through which subjects, singly and collectively, come into being (Davies 2014). The diffractive researcher's task is not to tell of something or someone that exists independent of, or prior to, the research encounter, but to access that which is becoming true, ontologically and epistemologically, in the moment of encounter. In telling, writing, reading, listening to and re-writing our memory stories, we are not accessing what was once true, but opening up a space in which the new can emerge. A research encounter is in this sense experimental—researchers working diffractively do not know in advance what onto-epistemological knowledge will emerge from it and how that knowledge will matter.

Before any collective biography workshop the participants select materials to read that will help open up the space of conceptualising the problem they are planning to focus on. For the workshop that we draw on in this paper, we read in particular Davies' (2014) *Listening to children: Being and Becoming*, focussing on her analysis of the concepts of difference and differentiation. Three of us had already written papers together, where we drew on work by Shildrick, Butler and Deleuze. In this workshop our plan was to focus on the importance of intra-active encounters with difference, where each one of us affects, and is affected by, others.

Our methodology of collective biography has emerged over the last two decades as an intra-active and emergent set of concepts and practices that de-individualise those doing the research, re-constituting them in and as an entangled emergent multiplicity. It de-individualises those subjects who emerge in the memory stories themselves (Davies and Gannon 2006c, 2009, 2013), not positioning them as entities who pre-exist the research but as beings 'mutually implicated' in their 'differential becoming' (Barad 2008, 147). It enables us to explore the entangled phenomena of those beings who emerge in our memories with their 'differential becomings', their particular 'material (re)configurings of the world' and with their 'shifting boundaries and properties that stabilize and destabilize' (Barad 2008, 136). Our mode of working was compatible with the conceptual analytic work we wanted to do in becoming aware of how subordinate categories are made to matter, and of how they might be made to matter differently.

In choosing a collective biography topic, and in the generation of memory stories, we seek not the individualised memory, whose function is to reveal who the teller or the told is as an individual, but the emergent, multiple, yet molecular and very specific memory--the memory that takes us close to the surfaces of what it is to be emergent in all the entanglements of the particular moments that come to the surface of our collective storying. By attending to those emergent entanglements we sought to move beyond epistemological individualism and also to some extent beyond categorisation.

Collective biography takes as its beginning point an understanding of being as always open, in motion, and continuous, a becoming with the being of others, and with other elements of the material world. The practices of collective biography work with the specificity of the onto-epistemological being of each subject/researcher while at the same time seeing the lines of force at play, through which being is made possible.

The emergent listening that Davies (2014, 2016 forthcoming) writes about, as integral to working with children, is also integral to the intra-actions within the processes of collective biography itself. Such listening takes us beyond moralistic judgments that trap us inside endless repetitions, and toward an ethical recognition of the other and an affective openness to emergent entangled differences. That openness to encounters with the other is not just to encounters with other humans, but also to the material world in all its manifestations—a material and social world that one is emergent with. This is a research that does not already know what is right and proper, but is experimental, courageous, open and evolving, and always mindful of the being of others, both human and non-human. That, at least, was our ambition.

For this collective biography workshop, the four authors worked together for three days in an apartment that created its own set of unexpected and sometimes hilarious challenges. We were in Chicago, in May 2015, on our way to the ICQI³⁴ conference, three of us from Belgium and one from Australia, in a down-at-heels Chicago neighbourhood, in a house that could only be described as weird, which one of us had found on Airbnb. To our collective amazement we found it was decorated with skeletons, crucifixes, screaming faces, large crowned bunnies, and lewd little pink plastic men, with the word 'thug' written in neon lights in large letters across the living room wall.

At the beginning we sat, rather uncomfortably, around a foldable table that was covered in a white sheet, and began the work of telling and listening to each other's memories. We escaped out into Chicago parkland whenever the weather permitted, or into nearby coffee shops, hyper-aware of how the space we had inadvertently found ourselves in made us uncomfortable. The task we had set ourselves for the three days of the workshop was to work with memories of how differences get made, are made to matter. Perhaps fortuitously, and without planning that it be so, we had found ourselves in a space that screamed at us that we did not belong there.

We had agreed to work with memories that were linked to both lines of ascent and descent (Bergson, 1998), to encounters with differences, to longing to belong, and to not belonging. The stories we told were not stories we planned to tell in some orderly method of 'data collection' (Lather and St Pierre, 2013). Rather they emerged in a diffractive encounter with each other's memories, with each other's embodied presence as we told and wrote and read out loud our stories, and listened to and questioned each other's stories until we could imagine being there, with-in them. The stories in turn were entangled with the place we were in, with the material we had read, the concepts we were working with, and with the other people involved in our stories. We were specifically not telling of something in language that existed somewhere/sometime else, but engaged in onto-epistemological encounters in which we were re-configuring our knowledge of difference.

After we had thus worked our way into our own and each other's stories, we each wrote our after-thoughts in relation to our own stories, exploring the links between each particular memory, the concepts, and our collective unfolding discussions in response to all of the memories. At the end of our workshop we discussed what we had come to understand through our storytelling/listening/writing/reading together, and which stories we might use to develop that understanding in the writing of this paper. We chose to include the first story, even though it is not 'about disability' because it enabled us to focus on the complex processes of normalisation at work on and through all of us. This memory reveals the work the girl had to do to find that normalised ground even while being indirectly abjected by the boys. The second story focuses on disability and masculinity and the third on disability and femininity.

Following the workshop, and drawing on both the written memories and the after-thoughts, the four of us took it in turns over a period of 6 months to draft and re-draft this exploration of how subordinate categories are made to matter, and how they might be made to matter differently.

De- and re-territorialisation or lines of ascent and descent

Having defined life as diffractive movement, it is also necessary, before we bring you our memory stories, and their analysis, to make sense of the remarkable capacity of the social order to stay the same. The autonomous and reasonable subject as a benchmark for what it means to be human, for example, has a marvellous capacity to re-assert itself in any work attempting to deconstruct it. To make sense of the way in which social change can be continually folded back into the existing social order, Bergson (1998) gave us the concepts of lines of force and in particular, lines of descent and ascent. Lines of descent he defined as made up out of citational chains that reiterate the already-known. These are more or less automatic, instantaneous repetitions. Lines of ascent, in contrast, take off into the not-yet-known. Bergson emphasises, on the one hand, the necessary interdependence of these

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two lines of force. On the other, he argues that the creative evolution of life emerges not from docile conformity to pre-conceived norms, the line of descent, but from the surprising and new, the line of ascent. Regularity and repetition, the line of descent, creates the familiar live-able world by holding things the same, making them secure and predictable. Creative lines of ascent that open up new modes of thought and ways of being, give life its energy, its creative life-force. The lines of ascent are, at one and the same time, necessary for life, sometimes dangerous, and always subject to being re-territorialised, and thus re-incorporated back into lines of descent through habitual repetitions. It is a constant movement.

Schools and preschools become manageable through the lines of descent, through habituated, orderly repetition. The school can be described in terms of these lines of descent, as ‘an organization that positions and classifies people spatially in view of controlling their behaviour and purposefully organizing individual development’ (Simons and Masschelein 2008, 689), or as Foucault would have called it, governmentality. But children come to know ‘who they are’, not only through these orderly repetitions or lines of descent, habituated repetitions through which they are sorted into various categories, but also, as Claiborne et al. (2009) demonstrate, through ongoing, experimental lines of ascent.

Deleuze and Guattari (2004) extend Bergson’s thinking about lines of ascent and descent with their concepts of de- and re-territorialisation. Listening to children at play and at work, we can see the endless repetitions through which they become skilled at taking up their allocated positions within the social order. Those repetitive practices shape the normative, normalised, embodied subjects anticipated by, and required within, the social orders of (pre)schools (Davies 2014). Normative, binary modes of speech and thought work to ‘make sense’ of what will count as normal and acceptable, and they work to generate and maintain what binaries are set up within that normalised order. Normal-abnormal. Male-female. Capable-disabled.

The territorialising lines of force through which those binaries are established and maintained are not only, or not even primarily experienced as oppressive. We depend on them; and the lines of ascent also depend on them. They ‘are comforting: they enable the chaos of the world to be reduced to discrete categories of meaning and structure. They are also necessary, for they enable us to interact with the social world, to form relations with others and to have a political “voice”’ (Malins 2007, 153). At the same time they ‘reduce the range of connections a body can make with the world around it; diminishing its potential for difference and becoming-other’ (Malins 2007, 153).

Finding how to think outside territorialising lines of descent is vital work to be undertaken at this interface of inclusion and exclusion, if those who find themselves outside the meanings and structures that give comfort, and viability, are to gain access to education.

In defining difference in terms of intra-active, diffractive movements, rather than categories, we adopt the Deleuzian term differentiation here to signal the conceptual shift from discrete difference (dividing people as distinct entities into already-known categories), toward the continuously shifting intensities of emergent, multiple, entangled encounters (Davies 2009; Deleuze 1994). Categorisation divides human subjects into pre-conceived binary categories, with the ascendant category being read as normal and the subordinated category as other-to-normal. In contrast differentiation evokes a process we are all always engaged in, in the intensities of our emergent, mutually-entangled becoming.

And now to the stories themselves.

Memory stories of encounters with gender and disability

First day in preschool

Our first remembered moment of being takes us to the first day of preschool when the lines of descent, or habitual repetitions that would make up preschool life, were not yet clear to the girl, who stands on the preschool veranda wondering what she should do. This story probes the normalisation process; as the girl stands still on the veranda she observes the boys who have collectively assembled themselves as boys-playing-together-as-boys, and she knows herself as other to them, though she does not yet know how to differentiate her emergent, multiple self-as-schoolgirl:

The decision has been taken. She will be allowed to go to the preschool one year early. She feels excited. There will be children to play with, and a doll's house. When she arrives at the preschool someone shows her where she must hang her school bag with her peanut butter sandwich wrapped in greaseproof paper. She stands on the veranda watching the other children. The doll's house is on the veranda and the boys are throwing handfuls of gravel at it, seeing whose aim is the best. The gravel lands on the doll's house and on the wood of the veranda with a sharp ricocheting sound and a stale smell of dust. The veranda is covered in dust and gravel. Her shiny black shoes are covered in dust. In the distance are trees and grass. She would like to go to that cool green shade, away from the boys and the gravel hitting the doll's house, with its dirty peeling paint, but she stands still, glued to her spot on the veranda. The green grass seems very far away but her school bag is hanging just over there in the right place.

The lines of descent that would make this space predictable, habitual and comforting are not available to the girl at this moment, standing glued to the veranda, on her first day at preschool—except for her relation to her school-bag hanging where it should be, on its hook. The boys are not unfamiliar to her, as she has two brothers of her own. But what she had imagined as possible, playing with a longed for doll's house, is not possible, and she does not yet know what movement might be possible. Still, she has her schoolbag and her lunch hanging in the right place, so in that sense she exists in this space. She is dressed as a schoolgirl, too, but already her shiny shoes are dusty. She stands immobile, not knowing how to be or to become a schoolgirl (Davies 2001). Where is she supposed to be? What is she supposed to do? The place is loaded with 'danger'. Which movements will be taken as 'normal' and 'acceptable', or will mark her as 'unacceptable'? There are no obvious answers. The boys, on the other hand, seem to have found an answer for themselves, together creating a game they can play together that involves competition, laughter, throwing gravel, and the satisfying sound of gravel ricocheting in the separate rooms of the dolls' house. At the same time they successfully mark the dolls' house as abject--not for them to play dolls like girls would do and in so doing mark the girl as abject and other in that moment. Throwing gravel signifies I-am-a-boy-competing-with-the-other-boys, and I am appropriately becoming a boy who takes risks, who abjects the feminine, and fits, in this way, with other boys, appropriately, within the preschool. The boys thus collectively, and apparently spontaneously and naturally, territorialise the space with their own unmarked dominance, as 'the autonomous, rational subject that can smoothly move his body in accordance with what is considered acceptable and appropriate within the social sphere' (Fritsch, 2015, 48).

The spinning giant

Our second memory story takes us to a child that two of us have worked with as support workers when he was little. Kobe was a boy who opened us up to moments of being that are indelibly inscribed in our hearts. He was categorised as having autism spectrum disorder and having a muscle disease and being intellectually disabled, and was often alone in the playground—unlike the boys in our first story. On this particular day one of the other boys, Xander, engaged him in a game that they could play together, momentarily de-territorialising the categorisation of Kobe as one who cannot engage with others.

It's playtime. Kobe is spinning on the playground. He turns around, around and around with his arms wide open, his hair flying in the wind. When he stops, he loses his balance. He laughs with a big smile and his eyes sparkle. He starts again.

Suddenly Xander bumps into him. They both stop, lose their balance and look at each other. For a moment nothing happens, they just stare. Kobe starts spinning again. Xander comes closer and gives him a hard shove. The children who are playing nearby come closer and make a circle. They look with curiosity to discover what will happen between Xander and Kobe. Xander is totally focused on Kobe, and he pushes him again. But Kobe doesn't react, his body doesn't move. Both feet stay solidly on the ground, his arms next to his body, his face staying still.

Xander takes a step closer and gives Kobe another hard shove and runs off. Kobe wobbles, finds his balance, and follows Xander with his eyes.

Xander is almost at the other end of the playground. This looks like a signal for Kobe to gather all of his energy and start running after Xander. A second later the group of children flocks after him. Kobe runs like a clumsy, tiny giant. He makes very big slow movements and every time his feet touch the ground it makes a lot of noise. His hands reach in front of his body, as if they could reach Xander any minute. Kobe screams: 'agrrrrrr'. He can't keep up with Xander.

All of a sudden Xander turns and runs after Kobe. Kobe stops and freezes, his glasses crooked on his nose. He laughs. When Xander comes close to him, he slows down and yells: 'Run Kobe, Run Kobe!' Kobe waits a moment and then he turns and runs away from Xander. He laughs and screams loudly. The school bell rings and everybody goes to line up. Kobe is still running after nobody. He is all alone once more.

When Kobe was spinning, he created his own place, his own small world; a place where he could simply spin, a space where he could enjoy his own presence, his own body. The world of Kobe and the outside world of other people appeared to be entirely separate from each other when he was spinning. There was no visible encounter with others. His spinning, the repetition and the aloneness, were the characteristics that defined him as autistic.

Although play is usually defined as not following prescriptions and not needing to be 'productive' (Caillois 2001), Kobe's spinning was not seen as the free-flowing open-ended movement that normative children should engage in when they play. It was, instead, a marker of his individual, embodied, pathologised condition. Teachers and support staff kept an eye on him and observed his successes and failures closely. He was usually seen not as 'Kobe', but as the one categorised as 'autistic' and 'intellectually disabled' with 'impaired motor skills'. His categorisation was central to the way people looked at him.

The spinning activity could have continued for minutes, or hours. But through the encounter with Xander, Kobe was pulled in this moment of being into visible intra-action with others. We do not know if Xander initially bumped Kobe accidentally or with intent. It does not matter. What happened was that Kobe and Xander (and all the other children around) affected each other. 'Affects', in this Deleuzian sense, are surprising. They come from 'the forces that pass between the parties, which provoke a change of state and create something new in them' (Davies 2014, 61).

This intra-action between Xander and Kobe can lead us to further question our taken-for-granted ways of thinking; what do we see as play? Is this play or not? Is this tag? Or is this bullying? Xander's 'interference' was not confined to an individual body: it flowed in-between, affecting what might happen in the playground. It was not only involving Kobe and Xander but also the children around them, flocking after them, becoming one with Kobe and Xander.

Xander made contact with Kobe, searching for the possibility of opening up something new. He did not know if and how Kobe would respond, but he was open to including Kobe in his play. He did not close down the possibilities. He experimented, and through that experimentation, he intra-acts, with Kobe, that is, he affects Kobe and is affected by him, opening up the possibility that Kobe can play together with him and with the other children. He did this in a very physical way, pushing Kobe. This could also be dangerous, as any line of ascent might always be. If the teacher had seen it, it may have been disallowed, since it could easily have been read as

‘teasing’ Kobe, or Xander being too rough.

Xander was the only boys who played with Kobe, not on a regular basis but sometimes. There was little or no contact with the other boys in his class—boys who assumed themselves and each other to be normal; he was not recognisably ‘one of the boys’, though in that moment of flocking, initiated by Xander, he was. Kobe was more usually on the margins of collective boys’ playing; he was seen as a boy who could not play, or his play was not good enough, or not masculine enough. He mostly intra-acted in the classroom, and on the playground, with the girls of his class, who took care of him, finding in him another who could let them play out being good nurturing (normalised) girls.

Xander was very popular with the boys: he was physically strong and had a lot of courage; he took risks, broke the rules, and was always searching for adventure. The teachers had Xander on their radar. In the classroom, he was not the best of students, and because of his tough way of intra-acting, he received many negative comments from teachers. Yet here, in this moment of being, he opened up an encounter with Kobe that gave them both pleasure. Both appeared to feel good and happy as they opened up to this encounter with each other and with the other boys. Kobe’s body expressed pleasure in the way he ran to catch Xander, and he ‘got’ the sudden switch to running away, his whole body taken up with the pleasure of running, face lit up with smiling, the sound of pleasure and excitement spilling from his body—a pleasure he did not let go of, even when the group had disbanded; Xander and Kobe had fun, their play was dynamic, together they created an ‘emergent intracorporeal multiplicity’ (Fritsch 2015, 51).

The red pyramid

Our next story takes us to children playing together on a red pyramid in the playground. Here there is a reverse movement to the one we witnessed in the second story. Here the memory begins with the girl playing with the other girls as if she was normal and is positioned by her teacher as having behaved inappropriately:

It was playtime. My classmates and I straightaway headed towards the red pyramid. Some of my friends jumped on it, rushing towards the top or looking from above at the progress that those below were making. I put on my brakes. I was being cautious for once. I grabbed my legs, picked them up, and swung them over the lowest bar. Like a monkey I grabbed the bar above with my hands and pulled myself up without any effort. In turn, my classmates below made sure my legs were following along while I was making my way to the top of the pyramid. Sometimes my friends above or beside me would move out of the way so I could grab the bar closest to me. I enjoyed the smoothness of climbing. I felt powerful. I felt light. Fast thinking, and fast acting. I also loved the feeling of adventure. I was free to choose where to go. Not a single step, not a single wheelchair barrier was hindering me, or compromising my options. Above all, I was surrounded by my friends, having quality time.

And then suddenly: INGE! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! GET OFF THERE! NO! STAY THERE! DON'T MOVE!

Her message was clear: I was not supposed to be on the pyramid in the middle of the school's playground. It was dangerous. My heart beating, the rest of my body blocked. The feeling of guilt, of being busted. The teacher screaming. Out of nowhere. In my head, she was screaming hysterically. The fun was over. I had not reached the top yet and I was not going to anymore.

The teacher’s scream highlighted the fact that the girl was doing something extraordinary, but that was not what the girl felt at first. She had become a wrong-doer, not knowing what exactly she was doing wrong. She was behaving like her friends and they were playing in the playground. Surely there would not be things on the playground that were not to be played on? She and her friends had not climbed the pyramid to be naughty. She would not even dare to think of breaking the rules. It was simply playtime, the teacher took them to the playground to have fun, and they all wanted to play together. She and her friends all worked towards the same goal: reaching the top. And yet, the teacher seemed scared and angry at her, only at her. She was singled out, and the

only obvious difference between her and her friends was that wheelchair waiting for her down at the bottom of the pyramid. She was aware of that, even as a five-year old.

The girl thus knew she was not allowed to be with and like her friends. She sensed that the teacher did not trust her, and that the teacher assumed she was not able to act like her friends. And yet for her, climbing was effortless. Her arms were strong, and so was her insight into the structure of the pyramid. She knew which bars to grab. The only challenge was to avoid hurting her legs, and her friends were taking care of that.

This is an ambiguous moment of citational repetition; the teacher seeks to protect the child, and she violently wrests the child into the category of one who cannot be granted normality. It is interesting that the girl's friends did not share the teacher's alarm. They did not see any problem in their friend joining them – including her in climbing the pyramid was normal. Even helping her was self-explanatory. Some of them had positioned themselves strategically around and below her, ready to carry her legs for her and to take over her legs from each other. Those above made sure they opened up spaces for their friends below. Climbing the red pyramid together was fun. They did not separate her out as one who is not part of their friendship community, but opened themselves up to an encounter with the pyramid and each other – in a mutual encounter that opened them up to a line of ascent in which they could experiment with the not-yet-known of climbing the red pyramid. They had climbed together as a community of equals, intra-actively working towards the same goal. Together they had found a 'line of ascent', all taking part in the risky business of the climb. They formed an 'emergent intracorporal multiplicity' (Fritsch 2015, 51), functioning together as one organism with diverse functions, an organism that could find its way on this exciting line of ascent. Whereas boys in our first story enjoyed the pleasure of taking risks as integral to being boys-playing-together, here the girl is found to be seriously in error for having taken what the teacher regards as a risk. Risk-taking, and the associated lines of flight, become in this moment both gendered and linked to membership of the unmarked category of being-abled.

So how do gender, disability and imagination work together in each of these encounters?

Each of these stories involves a threshold (De Schauwer and Davies 2015). There is a pause before the threshold. In that pause there is an unanswerable question. Can the girl on the veranda step off the veranda and, in a line of flight into the not-yet-known, run toward the trees and the cool grass? Can Kobe engage with the other boys and play chasing with them? Can the girl on the red pyramid climb to the top after the teacher screams? Each one is locked in their moment, each one momentarily overwhelmed with the impossibility of playing, or intra-acting like a normal child. It is in their intra-actions with others—other children or caregivers-- that the possibility of stepping across the threshold can be opened up, allowing the lifeblood to flow.

The girl on the veranda finds herself locked into her moment of isolation. The girl does not bring her isolation with her to school in her own body; nor is it part of any category she has been assigned to; it is a state that emerges, taking over her body, in intra-action with the boys and their emergent masculinity, the gravel, the doll's house and the preschool veranda; there are multiple entangled players. Their embodied beings are integral to an assemblage much larger than their individual bodies. An already existing idea of gender is being materialised; it is a public space and the boys know, through throwing the gavel and laughing together, that in this space dolls are for girls and they must establish themselves as other to girls and dolls, and also other to the girl on the veranda. In displaying their noisy, competitive gravel-throwing, they emerge, in intra-action with each other's bodies, and with the beings they abject, as competent, risk-taking, masculine boys. In standing glued to the veranda, the girl emerges as passive to their active, subordinate in the face of their ascendance, and as integral to whatever it is that the boys, collectively, are abjecting. This is the emergent space opened up for her, and for the boys, in that public preschool space, a space in which there is, in that moment, no line of ascent and no creative risk-taking that she can engage in.

Kobe also finds himself alone, but he is not immobile. Unlike the girl in the first story, Kobe comes to the school with a categorisation that marks his aloneness as pathological. Yet his spinning suggests that his isolation is not a

problem for him, that he even enjoys it. Xander, a popular boy, draws Kobe into the intra-corporeal expression of collective masculinity along with other boys who form an active band that Kobe might join. Xander re-positions Kobe as one of the boys, and Kobe becomes for a wild and wonderful moment part of the assemblage of boys chasing each other, his category membership as autistic, intellectually disabled, and motor impaired momentarily left behind on the playground where he had been whirling. In this emergent encounter, Xander does not greet Kobe in terms of his category, but in terms of a shared masculinity that can be collectively expressed through their bumping, running, shouting bodies, and Kobe shouts with joy as he runs with-in the running group of boys, and then alone without them after the bell rings.

In our third story, the girl had faced a momentary threshold when she arrived in her wheelchair at the base of the pyramid. Rapidly, with her friends, that threshold was crossed when, without plan or discussion, the collective body of girls climbed, knowing exactly how to make the venture of climbing possible for all of them. The girl's strong arms and shoulders, and her capacity to read the structure of the pyramid were as integral to the collective climb as the work of lifting her legs so they did not get tangled or hurt. None of them were limited by any preconception that girls could not climb, or that differences were necessarily an impediment to their collective activity. As one emergent multiple body, they made their way to the top of the red pyramid. When the girl's category membership was wrenched to the fore in her teacher's scream, and her line of ascent with her friends and the pyramid ended, the girl's emergent intracorporeal multiplicity was halted and replaced with an individualised category membership—as one who must be protected from taking risks—as both feminine and disabled.

(In)conclusion

In the current neoliberal discourse, schools are required to produce individualised, autonomous, normative, responsabilised subjects who have become “entrepreneurial actors” across all dimensions of their lives’ (Brown 2003, 38). Schools are assessed, as are individual teachers, on the extent to which they can produce those ideal subjects who will above all contribute to the economy. When a new policy is enacted that requires inclusion of those children who may not be able to shape themselves into subjects who can fulfill that neoliberal ideal, schools are presented with a contradiction. A new set of criteria is developed to judge them by—the number of disabled children not previously included, who are now included, will be part of each school’s assessment. The same quantitative devices are mobilised to realise goals that manifestly contradict each other. Teachers are currently struggling to make their way through these contradictory imperatives.

Rather than attempt to resolve those contradictions we have approached this dilemma from a different perspective, establishing an ethical framework that asks, of each moment, who and what is being made to matter? Resisting the lines of descent of categorisation and measurement (which is, in a very real sense the lifeblood of neoliberal systems of thought and practice), we invite practitioners to consider that what any of us can be in any one moment is not bound by our category membership, however powerful that might be in the imaginations of those involved.

Who we each can become, in our emergent specificity, is not carried in static bodies bounded by categories, but in intra-active, intracorporeal encounters among the children and between children and those who work with them. We become what is possible in diffractive mobile embodied encounters with others, human and otherwise. The subject, we have argued, is neither singular nor stable; it is moving within and between categories (human/non-human, male/female, (cap)able/disabled). The diffractive thinking that the methodology of collective biography made possible enabled us to analyse the practices through which subjects are differentiated—sorted into categories—and to open up in its place an idea of justice based on differentiation, on movement, where each subject, in intra-action with others can become integral to multiple ongoing assemblages. Within that emergent, intra-active, intra-corporeal multiplicity, imagination becomes a tool to destabilise dominant ways of thinking and acting, enabling us to think differently, opening up what it is yet possible to become.

We have found gender to be at work in the emergent multiplicities we have explored, and to be entangled in both positive and negative ways with the categorisations that mark some children as disabled, and as such, not thinkable in terms of ascendant normative modes of being.

This brings us full circle to the concept of justice that we began with. We have opened up a space of responsibility and accountability, not the responsabilisation and audit mechanisms of neoliberal systems in which one must satisfy pre-conceived criteria with numerical scores, but a responsibility to think outside such systems, to listen to the emergent other, to understand one’s own intracorporeal entanglement with that other, and to be able to make an account of what it was that was being made to matter with-in the diffractive encounters in which one’s self was emergent. Our accountability is a matter of ethics—of what we have been party to making matter:

Ethics is (...) not about right responses to a radically exteriorized other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming, of which we are a part. Ethics is about mattering, about taking account of the entangled materializations of which we are part, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities. Even the smallest cuts matter. Responsibility is then a matter of the ability to respond. Listening for the response of the other and an obligation to be responsive to the other, who is not entirely separate from what we call the self. (Barad in Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, 69)

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Collective biography: using memory work to explore the space-in-between normativity and difference/disability

Based on De Schauwer, E., Van de Putte, I., Davies, B.(2017). Collective biography: using memory work to explore the space-in-between normativity and difference/disability. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 24(1), 8-19.

Abstract

This paper works with the methodology of collective biography to explore the space-in-between normativity and difference/disability. Working with the memories of the participants, collective biography explores the processes of subjectification through which individuals are made social, and through which they are discursively and intra-corporeally constituted (Davies and Gannon 2006). The authors of this article work with memories generated in a collective biography workshop in which they set out to explore the ethico-onto-epistemological nature of their own encounters with difference/disability. This methodology opens up the possibility of thinking differently about disability, and of seeing all human beings, notwithstanding the processes of categorization, as multiple and intra-active, and as always becoming in intra-action with others.

In this article, we explore the intra-actions between self and other, through which normative subjects are constituted and non-normative subjects are abjected—that is, cast out from, or made external to, normative selves. The concept of ‘intra-action’ here refers not to the interaction between separately existing entities but to “mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (Barad 2007, 33), where agencies are many more than the human participants in the workshop. Agency lies in the memories themselves that are generated in the collective biography, it lies in the others in those memories, in the workshop itself, in the place where the workshop is held, in the written memories and in the drawings of those memories—all of these agencies or intensities (human and non-human, material and non-material) are entangled with each other, affecting each other. It is a diffractive rather than a reflexive process; not a peering into a mirror to see what is reflected back from an imagined real and stable world, but an exploration of the complex mo(ve)ments through which we come to exist.

The process of abjection is central to the constitution of normative and non-normative subjects. Those who are categorized as different/disabled, are constituted within the discourses and practices of normativity as disturbing the right and proper order of things. That which needs to be abjected from the normative self is that which “disturbs identity, system and order (...) does not respect boundaries, positions, rules (...) [and is] in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 1982, 4). Without denying or ignoring the pressures of normalization, we will focus on the ambiguity that lies at the heart of this process of abjection. We explore what it might mean to be open to ambiguity—and so “to act differently because we can also think differently” (Shildrick 2002, 79). We explore the possibilities of intra-action where difference is welcome and does not need to be abjected in self or in other.

Throughout this article we adopt the linguistic device of joining difference with disability. We cannot abandon the category ‘disability’ with all its essentialising dangers, as it is still necessary for the political work that needs to be done to establish the rights of people with disabilities. At the same time we want to expand and disband the category of disability by thinking more broadly in terms of difference.

To explore both abjection and the possibility of being open to difference, we convened a collective biography workshop, in which we worked with our own memories of embodied being in intra-active encounters with different/disabled others—others whom Shildrick (2002) provocatively calls ‘monsters’. Shildrick invites her readers to examine their own fears in such encounters, fears that give rise to the abjection of those so-called ‘monstrous’ others. She suggests that abjection is integral to the usual processes of shoring up of what it is to be normal- in oneself and in the other. We undertook this work in the belief that if we are to work affirmatively with difference/disability, we need to be aware of the ways normativity is at work on us and through us. We wanted to examine our leaky boundaries and reclaim ‘monstrosity’ as integral to all humanity.

Embodying the monster and the hegemony of normativity

Shildrick (2002) argues that normative subjects reject the monstrous other in a project of self-identity-making, or the ruse of identity, through which we each create an illusion of being both normal and distinct from others. She begins with feminist theory’s critique of the normative white male body that establishes itself as having integrity by abjecting the monstrous feminine. This normalizing/abjecting process is neither rational nor consciously chosen, but the process through which those who occupy the ascendant term in any binary (male ascendant in relation to female, abled ascendant in relation to disabled) take on a normative identity that requires the abjection of the qualities of the subordinated other. As Goodley (2001, 17) observes: “Disability is a construction of culture and modes of production, in ways that provide a metaphorical crutch for the construction of ‘abled’. Disability can only be understood in relation to the ‘normate’, normalcy and ableism.”

Normative understandings and practices of gender, age, social class, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, sexual orientation and bodily ability are accomplished through binary logics dividing us into ascendant and subordinate categories. Those categorized as non-normative, in the subordinate half of whichever binary is at play, are at risk

of social exclusion—of both individuals and communities (Benincasa 2012). Crucial to Shildrick's argument is that the work of maintaining oneself as a member of a normative, ascendant category is necessitated by the fact that normative selves cannot ever guarantee their own borders, since accomplishing oneself as 'normal' involves ongoing intra-active processes.

A disability studies perspective critiques and deconstructs the binary thinking that divides abled from disabled, and normal from abnormal (Meekosha & Shuttleworth 2009). In this article we problematise the complex on-to-epistemologies through which disability is constituted as less than normal. As Sherry (2008, 75) observes: "Disability is always a sexed, gendered, racialized, ethnicized, and classed experience [that] operates within a framework of multilayered and complex patterns of inequity and identities."

One of those complex patterns arises in today's schools from the tension between the current policies and practices of inclusion and the neoliberally driven intensification of the search for perfect embodiment. Such generic perfection is increasingly sought, for example, through gene therapy, plastic surgery, personal therapy, workouts at the gym, diets and medication and is integral to the ruse of identity. None of us escapes, or can ever fully disassociate ourselves, from the press toward that generic ideal. It impacts on normative and non-normative subjects alike: "The value of a disability-free future is taken as self-evident to the [extent that] disability has been linked to a life of 'suffering', 'unhappiness', 'dependency', 'poverty', 'disadvantage' and 'incapacitation'" (Fritsch 2015, 46).

These processes we are all caught up in, on one or other side of the abled/disabled binary, are not necessarily consciously chosen, indeed their power in part lies in their illegibility. As Butler observes the "normative exercise of power is rarely acknowledged as an operation of power at all. Indeed we may classify it among the most implicit forms of power, one that works through its illegibility" (Butler 1997, 134). In normative social settings, the presence of the 'monstrous other' might be experienced as disturbing the conditions of intelligibility, and as unsettling what can count as acceptable performances of (normalized) identity. The sight and sound of the monstrous other potentially challenges the taken-for-granted search for generic perfection, and threatens, in Shildrick's words (2002, 54-55) "to expose the vulnerability at the heart of the ideal model of the body/self". Human monsters, she suggests, "both fulfill the necessary function of the binary opposite that confirms the normality and centrality of the acculturated self, and at the same time threatens to disrupt that binary by being all too human."

This disturbance has, historically, provided a motive for eliminating non-normative beings from normative social settings. As Wilton (1998, 174) observes, spatial division is "both the outcome of, and integral to the production of, social difference. Spatial separation facilitates the maintenance of social boundaries since it reifies perceived social differences between same and other". That separation cements the claims of normative subjects to their own 'moral superiority' (Davies 2008). Despite the multiple ruses of identity-making, all subjects are continually made vulnerable to those ongoing intra-active processes through which the self affects and is affected by others.

Our argument here, then, is that we require new ways of thinking and being that are open to ambiguity, and that enable us to recognize and not be threatened by our own porous boundaries in our intra-active encounters with difference/disability (both our own and that of others). It is to this end that we have engaged in the work of collective biography (collaboratively working with memories), in which we explore the space-in-between normativity and difference/disability. We thus take up "a more critical, socio-cultural orientation than the traditional 'inspiration in the face of personal tragedy' motif" (Ferguson & Sauer, 2014).

Ambiguity, categorization and ethics

When we categorize anyone as 'the other', we discursively constitute a boundary that separates us. The practices of diagnosis lend scientific validity to the processes of categorisation, making it all the more difficult to remain

open to difference; they close down openness to ambiguity and ambivalence. But openness to ambiguity and ambivalence is integral to ethical encounters with the other, where ethics “is a matter of questioning what is being made to matter and how that mattering affects what it is possible to do and to think” (Davies 2014, 10-11). This new materialist take on ethics is central to our argument here.

Ethics is not so much a matter of rule-following, according to Deleuze, but a matter of being open to difference as it emerges in encounters between one being and another, where “knowing, being and doing (epistemology, ontology and ethics) are inextricably entangled” (Davies 2014, 11). Ethics in this sense requires everyone of us to confront assumptions about difference/disability, assumptions that place limits on the lives of those who are categorized as different. Failure to question and revise those assumptions can have deleterious consequences, foreclosing on the emergence of the capacities for thinking and for being of those who have been categorized as somehow lesser beings insofar as they lie outside the norm.

Biklen and Burke (2006), in a counter move to binary thought, explores the concept of ‘presuming competence’, not a specific competence, but a presumption that persons who are categorized as intellectually disabled can and will evolve through their encounters with the world, and that they will, in open-minded encounters, demonstrate complexity of thought and action that could not necessarily have been anticipated. Difficulties in performance, or differences in performance are for Biklen not presumed as evidence of inability, or of intellectual incapacity.

At the same time, however, as we work on finding ways not to be caught in the very illegibility of our own conditions of intelligibility, we are face-to-face all the time with the use of categorization as a tool of bureaucracies. Within bureaucratic modes of intelligibility categorization is a precondition for accessing specific resources of an educational, therapeutic and medical kind. To accept the bureaucratic benefits of a diagnostic category is not, however, to deny, normalize or ignore the negative consequences. Categorization is not either helpful or harmful. It is a matter of ‘and’ rather than ‘or.’ There are politically hard-won benefits and dangerous epistemological-ontological-ethical consequences to categorization. It is the latter that we wish to explore.

The processes of categorization are both discursive and intra-active. Discursive categories pre-exist subjects but play intra-actively on the emergent intra-acting multiplicity of human subjects. Through the ruse of identity-making, normative subjects become what they ought to be according to the subject positions that are made available within the circulating conditions of possibility. One of the conditions of possibility that is relevant to our thinking here, is that produced by neoliberal discourses of productivity, which link education to the economy, implying that access to education can only be legitimated by subsequent economic productivity. Part of the necessary work in the field of difference/disability is to make legible those illegible processes of power, and to produce alternatives.

Through our work with collective biography we want to open up an alternative approach to identity, where being in the world is experienced as both multiple and mobile, with meanings circulating in multiple directions. We are interested in opening ourselves, all of ourselves, to what Fritsch (2015) calls emergent intra-corporeal multiplicity. We work with difference/disability as movement, as becoming, and as openness to ethical encounters.

None of us exist simply on one side or the other of the deeply problematic binary of abled/disabled. Our borders are much more porous than we usually imagine they are. We are interdependent on our intra-actions with each other, always affected by and affecting each other. As Barad (2008, 122) explains: “What often appears as separate entities (and separate sets of concerns) with sharp edges does not actually entail a relation of absolute exteriority at all. Like the diffraction patterns illuminating the indefinite nature of boundaries – displaying shadows in ‘light’ regions and bright spots in ‘dark’ regions”. The relations between us, she points out, are “not a static relationality but a doing – the enactment of boundaries – that always entails constitutive exclusions and therefore requisite questions of accountability”.

In the collective biographies our broader research group has participated in we have generated a variety of strategies to dismantle the the abled/disabled binary. We have generated a number of onto-epistemological and ethical strategies for analyzing our conditions of intelligibility as normative and non-normative subjects. The broader research group that has participated in several collective biographies as well as in several reading groups, includes persons categorized as disabled or who have family members similarly labeled. We locate persons with a difference/disability as central actors in the research process through their participation as members of the collective biography workshops and collaborative writing, as well as through their central role in each memory story.

Collective biography meets disability studies

Collective biography is a post-humanist, new materialist research strategy (Davies & Gannon 2006, 2009, 2013). It works with the memories of the participants, and those participants are also the authors of the analytic work that subsequently emerges. The memories are generated specifically in response to the research question that the participants set out to study, in this case the space-in-between normativity and difference/disability. Disability is often assumed to be unequivocal, and is interpreted as problematic and tragic, and as inherent in particular individuals. The further assumption is then made that the task of those positioned as normal is to counter the deficit in the disabled individuals, in order to repair, cure or solve it—that is, to bring them closer to normative modes of being. From a disability studies perspective we understand that the “category itself is an extraordinarily unstable one” (Davis 1995, xv) and our work serves in part to further de-stabilize it. This particular collective biography works at that unstable border “generating the means to see how we become subjects” (Davies & Gannon 2006) and the means to question those very processes of subjectification insofar as they mobilize the abled/disabled binary.

In the work of collective biography knowledge emerges out of multiple intra-actions: out of the memories that are generated in the collective biography workshop, out of the processes of telling, listening, writing and reading out loud, out of the researchers’ embodied selves in the workshop as they are affected by and affect each other, and out of the collaboratively written analyses of those memories (Davies and Gannon 2006).

In our research process, each participant, with the generation of each memory, works in intra-action with others toward the possibility of new understandings: “(...) bodies are the product of complicated cultural processes and practices that shape thinking about bodies (and mind) within a particular historical moment and context” (Mallett and Runswick-Cole 2014, 47). Our collective biography process thus involves a movement beyond the individual of liberal humanism. It involves not just telling individualistic memories evoked by the topic of research, but a very specific form of emergent telling/listening/writing/reading/analysis. Through this intra-active process of talking and listening, of writing and rewriting, the social and cultural forces that register themselves as bodily intensities of the collaborating researchers, become palpable and analyzable. The intra-active encounter in collective biography enables us to listen differently, and to contest moral judgments and the power of normative discourses (Davies et al. 2013).

Through the memory-work and the conceptual analysis undertaken in collective biography workshops, concepts, memories and the virtual bodies of the collective participants are brought into a diffractive relation with one another “reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge” (Barad 2007, 30). It works not so much as a method to be followed, but as a set of emergent possibilities generated first in a workshop spanning several days, followed by an intensive collaborative writing practice. In this sense it is experimental, enabling us to “move out of the grooves of the normal and self-evident’ pushing us ‘toward the new and different” (St. Pierre 2015, 84).

Our way of working

In preparation for our three-day collective biography workshop we read Shildrick's book *Embodying the Monster. Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (2002), as well as papers previously written by some of us using collective biography (Davies and Gannon, 2006; Davies et al., 2013). We used Shildrick's concept of the monstrous other to trigger questions to explore remembered encounters with difference.

In working with our memories of monstrosity, as Shildrick characterizes it, we sought to open up for analysis the process of abjection, not to judge it as a morally unacceptable practice, but to understand it. We wanted to be able to see the encounter with difference/disability in all its shifting, contradictory, multiplicity and fragility, and also to see the ongoing and constitutive force of multiple discourses and practices that come into play. But our work was not only epistemological; collective biography works ontologically, with material bodies as they are colonized by cultural discourses and practices. We agree with Danermark and Gellerstedt (2001, 17) when they write:

... injustices to disabled people can be understood neither as generated by solely cultural mechanisms (cultural reductionism) nor by socio-economic mechanisms (economic reductionism) or by biological mechanisms (biological reductionism). In sum, only by taking different levels, mechanisms and contexts into account, can disability as phenomenon be analytically approached.

The three authors of this paper lived together for the three days of the collective biography workshop. We were in Chicago on our way to the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry. Our specific project, which informs this paper, was to work with memories of encounters with Shildrick's 'monstrous other'.

Our memories were first told to each other, then written and read out loud, always avoiding clichés and seeking the fine detail of the embodied moment. That telling and writing and reading out loud involve a collective practice of emergent listening, a listening that opens each listener to others' memories ontologically, epistemologically and ethically (Davies, 2016). Each participant listens to each memory story in order to imagine the story lived out on their own bodies. Each questions the story-teller whenever they cannot quite bring the story to life in their own embodied imagination. Their questioning generates further details of the story-teller's embodied experience, and a re-examination of the words being used to evoke the embodied specificity of the moment captured in the story. The participants are thus positioned as emergent, as mobile, as multiple, and as "mutually implicated" with others in their "differential becoming" (Barad 2008, 147). It is a diffractive process with multiple intersecting movements and intensities, affecting each other.

The process of working together on memories is, in collective biography, always open to revision, and always searching for the philosophical concepts that will tease the memories open to new insights and understandings. In this particular workshop, we plugged our thinking in and out of Shildrick's (2002) conceptual framework. The encounter with those concepts enabled us to see ourselves in all our shifting, contradictory, multiplicity and fragility, and also to see the ongoing, constitutive force of the multiple discourses and practices through which we take up our existence.

At each moment in the process of working with memories, it is vital to be aware of the ethics of the encounter, both with each other and with the people who emerge in our memories. A Deleuzian (1980) approach to ethics requires of us that we remain open to difference and to multiplicity—both in ourselves and in each other in every mo(ve)ment within the emergent, unfolding encounters; it requires much more than the following of procedures for informed consent (Ellis 2007). Integral to our process is the collaborative work after the workshop, when the memories that have emerged in the collaborative work are discussed with the people whose lives are touched on in those stories. We shared the second story that we tell here with the mother of Kobe and gained her consent for its use in our research. We were unable to consult Kobe as he is no longer living. For the same reason we could not include May and her family in our process.

The collaborative process of our work continued through into the writing of this paper for publication, rather than the more usual process in other methodologies of a single author taking sole responsibility (Gannon 2001). For this paper that meant that we had different rounds in which each author worked with the insights that had emerged through the process of memory work and through the subsequent writing. More memory stories were generated in the workshop than could be used in any one paper. Each story contributed to the emergent collective understanding of our topic, though not every story makes its way into the article.³⁵

The task of choosing which stories to work with in our writing of any paper is always a difficult one, since the choice of stories inevitably has a major impact on the analysis that takes place. In choosing the two stories for this paper we decided to take two markedly different stories, one where the narrator abjects the monstrous other, and one where the narrator encounters the monstrous other as someone she loves and respects. The first story, of May, is significant insofar as it enables us to open up a historical dimension of our work. As Gilman (2014) observes assumptions about disability are not only social and cultural but also historical. The storyline of our paper thus moves from an encounter where normativity reigns to an encounter, decades later, that reveals over and over again the ambivalent pleasure (and difficulty) of being open to difference.

In order to engage in thinking differently and to develop the methodology further and to multiply the intra-active and intra-corporeal complexity of our task, some of us animated our own and each other's memories through art work. Some of that art-work we present here, and we discuss the way in which the art work enabled the story teller to bring the monstrous other to life in a non-judgmental way that had not previously been available to her. Working with materials as well as words we could enter our own stories' materiality in unexpected ways as the intra-corporeality of people and things became more vivid. In the chosen stories, we thus animate encounters with disability in all their emergent, multiplicity and intra-corporeality.

Collective biography stories

We turn now to the memories we generated in our collective biography workshop. In response to the trigger question, what is your earliest memory of a monster, participants told their own remembered stories. In what follows we have two stories with which to open up this space-in-between normativity and disability. One is of a girl growing up in the 1950s who lived next-door to a woman with an intellectual disability. This is a story about keeping the borders intact, about a normalized self who struggles with the monstrousness of the other. We include in the analysis of this story some of the drawings that became one of the workshop strategies for delving into the affective flow that kept the girl separate from the girl-woman next door. Our second memory story is of a day spent with a boy that the narrator was working with as a support worker where the with-ness of boy and young woman, along with family members, is elaborated in loving detail. In the first story the names are changed. In the second the participants have agreed to have their actual names used in the article.

The girl-woman next door

In the dreamy space between sleep and waking there is a sudden shriek next door that startles me into wakefulness. I don't sit up and look, because I know that I can't see through the rambling chaos of the vast hedge that separates us, but I know it is May Harding. She is wailing and roaring. It is a frightening sound. How can anyone make that noise? I shrink further under my bed-clothes. I hear the sound of heavy feet pounding on a board floor and someone running after her. The door slams. A sound of thumping. May Harding screams again, the door bangs again, then silence.

³⁵ The group that participated in this workshop included two others, Lien Claes and Meggie Verstichele. Together with them we wrote the first paper on monsters that arose from this workshop. That paper is forthcoming in *Disability and Society*.

After a while the wood-chopping begins, and I know it will go on for a long time. It is her way of calming down. Chop, chop, whack, the bits of chopped wood are thrown onto a pile, chop chop, whack, a steady calming rhythm. I imagine the Hardings must have a huge wood-pile, though I've never seen it.

May Harding is 21 years old. My father says she was kicked in the head by a horse when she was three years old, and she has arrested development. Why doesn't anyone help her, I wonder. It's 18 years, I calculate on my fingers, since the horse kicked her. How come they haven't figured how to teach her anything in all that time? Lying there in my warm bed, I imagine that I will leave this town, and I will go somewhere where people know things, and I will learn how to teach people like May Harding.

The child-narrator cannot imagine an engagement with May Harding other than one in which she becomes the teacher who can help May Harding and others like her to normalize themselves. She lives May Harding's rebellion in her own body, hearing the scream, the door slamming, the wood chopping, imagining them vividly as her own and abjecting them at the same time as unlivable, unbearable. The memory enables us to catch the moment of abjection, a moment not willfully chosen, nor even ignorantly enacted (De Schauwer et al, 2016b).

The narrator then recalls an earlier memory:

She sits down under the pointed tiled roof over our front gate. There is a small brick bench there where she can sit. We never use the front gate, so it's really quite private. She sits there inside our gate with her little pre-school bag and smokes her cigarettes. I don't want to approach her, but my older sister wants to see her up close. She dares me and our brother to come up close to her. It feels wrong to disturb May Harding in her safe place. But when we draw closer she opens her little bag and pulls out some coins and holds them out in her grubby hand, asking my sister, in her strange nasal voice, whether there is enough there to buy a 'packacigarettes' at the corner store. I don't understand what she says, but my sister does. She counts the money and tells her she doesn't have enough to buy them at the corner store as they are more expensive there. She should go down to the city and buy them there. I can see on May Harding's face that that is not an option open to her. Should we get some extra money I ask, but my sister's scathing look tells me this is a stupid suggestion. I don't know how my sister knows so much. I guess that when I too am 10 I will know everything. Now we are up close I stare at May Harding's bra strap falling down over her big chunky arm. Her dress is made out of the same floral material as the dresses of very old teachers at school. Her slip hangs down below her dress. Her socks and sneakers look old and worn out. I guess she must walk a lot.

In contrast to herself the girl's sister wants to see May Harding up close. She hangs back but her sister compels her and her brother to come forward. Up close the girl sees the detail of how it is that May Harding is an impossible subject. She is an adult, but she cannot count her own money, she cannot manage her clothes, she cannot go to the city even though she is fully grown. She carries a school-bag that only preschoolers carry. She sits inside her neighbor's front gate without ever being invited to do so. Although her sister can successfully interact with May, the girl cannot overcome her abjecting gaze. May cannot be made to fit inside the adult-child binary.

The workshop participants decide to extend the possibilities of this encounter with May Harding with drawings, thus letting the narrator loose from the words that hold the binaries intact. In animating the story in this way the narrator opened up the linear, causal or moral storyline by drawing. In searching for words – poetic and philosophical – with which to animate the complex intersecting emplacements in one historical moment, the narrator sought not to represent something that happened once, but to make it live. It shifted through the drawings from a single storyline, to a multiple storyline, opening up the complexity of the event, the place. The narrator made three attempts to draw May Harding and then wrote about her drawings from her position now as adult narrator:



Figure 1



Figure 2

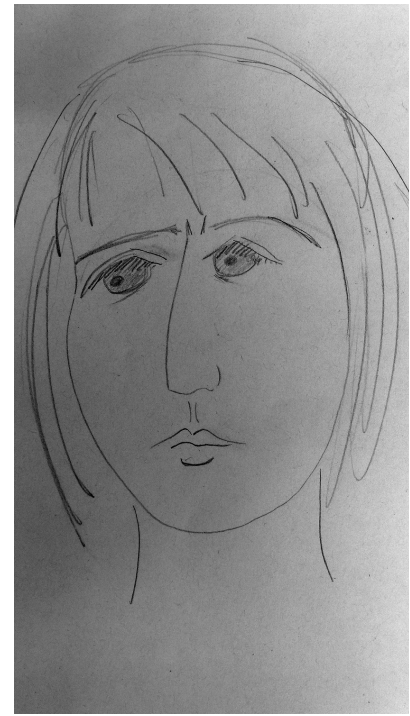


Figure 3

In the first two drawings I am still protecting my own bodily integrity, setting myself apart. In the first she is a cartoon figure. Her mouth is a downturned U. It is a childish drawing much as the child in the memory might have drawn it. In the second drawing I worked harder on her face, to give it more detail but the picture is still very taken up with the bulkiness of her as it appears in my abjecting gaze. Her face still begins with the round circle of a childish stick figure resembling the limitations of my intra-action with the memory of May: “The ways in which we affect each other, and are affected, cannot be separated from thought any more than it can be separated from bodies. Thought and action are mutually entangled” (Davies 2014, 11).

In the third drawing I let go of her body and just focus on the face. I also let go of representation of her face - of the possibility that the drawing could be a mirror-image of her. Instead I go for a diffractive reading. To help me move beyond the earlier simplistic images, I look back at the way Picasso drew faces, as I’d seen them the week before in the Art Institute, to help me in this move. I allow the face to appear on the page as a feeling of sorrow. This drawing is no longer May as other or monster. It no longer holds us separate.

This drawing is a diffractive movement among Picasso’s drawings, the story of May Harding and my ontological state as a child, then, and now, as I write the story, thinking of the helplessness and the lack of help. It is “a shift away from will, intentionality, and repetition, towards receptiveness to the not-yet-known (of self and other), and toward emergent possibilities of thought and being” (Davies 2014, 36).

Through these successive drawings, my story finds a place on the edge of an event—a global change in which it began to matter, materially and ethically, how disability/difference might be treated. As Barad says, the past, this past with May Harding, is never just the past—it is still to come. Any beginning “is always already threaded through with anticipation of where it is going but will never simply reach and of a past that has yet to come” (Barad, 2010, p. 244). You can always start and restart in order to make sense of what seemed incomprehensible before. Dwelling in this memory, and working with it collectively, I enter the space of possibility of engaging “with the different intensities that are being offered by persons with a disability and their environments. These are experiences that cannot be plotted beforehand, experiences that are unexpected, experiences that make us experience difference-in-itself” (Mercieca and Mercieca, 2010, 89).

The memory stories and the drawings generated in the collective biography workshop are not objects of reflections. Instead they are diffractive, mobile and intra-active always open to change, to new thoughts; they show that despite all our efforts to protect and defend our boundaries, we are multiply entangled in our encounters with each other.

Our second memory story takes us into of the space of being-with, enabling us as listeners, as readers, to know from inside itself the experience of difference, manifested in the being of Kobe, a boy who was eight years old.

Celebrating your birthday with green ketchup

It is a very hot day, very warm sun. When I arrive at Jan's place, Kobe's mum, Carolien is bent over a pile of paper, with Jan next to her in his motorized wheelchair. He speaks firmly, but his body is still, his hands lying on his lap. The children are running around Jan's lily pond; they are shouting and all over the place. I take them out for a walk, Kobe and Fleur on their scooters. When we come out of the door, they have their next fight about which direction to go in. Fleur wants to go to the left and tries to persuade us that she knows the way to go. Kobe is determined to go to the right and is already half a block ahead. We give in and I say: 'We'll go in that direction, but come back the other way.'

Once we are out, we get into our routines such as reading numbers on the houses; Kobe is good at finding 5s, just like on his house. They help me buy my groceries. We go and sit on the grass to pick daisies and they make sure that my attention is divided equally between them. After a while Carolien rings: 'We are finished. Let's go'. I gather everything together and we go back, from the same street as we left, but it doesn't seem to matter anymore.

We leave in what Kobe points out is a blue BMW. Kobe sits in the front, because he wants to be next to Carolien. We don't want a fight, so Fleur and I sit in the back. I talk to Carolien about the work she was doing with Jan. Sometimes the children interrupt and we get into conversation with them.

We drive out of the city to the countryside, to a farm where they have donkeys. Kobe will stay there for one week. It is his first camp, so we want him to look around, to see where he will sleep and find what this new space might be and become. We walk through the farm; it is empty; we go upstairs to the dormitory where all the beds are, and we look at a possible place to sleep. We lie on the beds trying them out. We talk to Kobe about the farm and the fact that he is coming on Monday. He will be able to ride a donkey, isn't that exciting? He remains emotionally absent and is not convinced. He just walks around, observes what we are doing and keeps his thoughts to himself.

When we come downstairs, we meet the director of the farm. She is friendly and open. It is okay that we have come to check beforehand. She asks if everything is okay or do we think she can do something more for Kobe? The children begin to run around and Carolien and the director talk about Kobe. Carolien gives an introduction to his particular way of being and gives some reassuring tips.

Suddenly Kobe comes back. There is a café at the farm! He is very excited, he jumps up and down, his eyes glow. 'A little café!' A café is such a strong and recognizable place for him. There is a café in the hospital that he loves to visit each time we are there. You can see that it pulls him out of his anxiety: farm, sleeping, donkeys... but now there is a little café! He will come. We can see that he has made up his mind. We drink something in the little café, in fact, it is just a basement with a tap and a few tables and chairs. But the idea of the café where you can drink is there and the response from Kobe is reassuring, he will come, and the sleeping over will be okay. We all leave with a good feeling.

Before he can go to his father for the weekend, Carolien will take him to the hairdresser. Kobe will be 9 in 10 days' time. He has big plans for his birthday, French fries with green and red ketchup. 'Did you know that existed' he asks me, so sure that he can teach me another surprising thing in life. He is so pre-occupied with his birthday and about how they will decorate the house for him. A pity that they cannot light the Christmas tree...

We arrive at the hairdresser. He is a man who has known Kobe and Carolien for a long time. He is very patient, he shows Kobe where he can sit. He first leaves him to experiment with the chair. But no, it is a problem that I am there, Kobe is telling me not to watch, I have to go out. He cannot sit down, he is too preoccupied with me being there. He feels that it is not appropriate. Carolien tries to divert his attention and talks about the cutting and how beautiful he will be, but no, I have to go. I do not disagree with him and try to look for a way to escape, without going outside. Maybe I can turn my chair and sit with my back towards him? 'I cannot see you now.' Yes, he stops, that will do the trick... He sits down, the hairdresser puts a cape around him and starts to cut, but stops whenever it is not okay. He asks Kobe about how he wants his hair. Kobe gets into the experience of cutting. He forgets me. I look at the hairdresser cutting his hair in the big mirror in front of me. Kobe is very interested in the razor. Suddenly he thinks of me again: 'Do not look at me...' As long as he sees my back, it is okay. Only Carolien can find such a hairdresser. She has taken him completely into her son's story. I never saw a hairdresser so gentle, not forcing, and at the same time cutting. He takes time to pull Kobe over the threshold of losing hair and gaining a different look. Kobe enjoys all the attention. The hairdresser puts gel in his hair to finish. Kobe likes that; he looks proudly at himself in the mirror. He comes and jumps in front of me. 'Look at me! Do you want to feel the spikes?' He bows his head. I have to feel and I pretend they sting. He laughs with his whole face, his mouth wide open. And it keeps on being funny.

Here the narrator is a young woman who works with children categorized as disabled. Her borders are wide open to the specificity of the boy in her story, to his humanity, to the possibility of knowing- and being-with him. This story is a tender story of listening to a child and being open to his difference. It is hard to describe those moments when you feel the joyful affect that comes from such openness when “becoming and multiplicity are the same thing” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 249), and when the immersion in the present moment moves the soul. They are encounters that take you “outside the habitual practices of the already-known” (Davies, 2014, p. 10). They are moments that give you goose bumps (even still, just by writing about them). They are moments that open up the space of an ethical encounter with the other.

Kobe is a boy with strong agency, with “the power to engage with others in ways that open up the capacity for thought and being” (Davies, 2014, p. 9). At the same time he is subjected to multiple categorizations: ‘autism’, ‘muscular disease’, ‘intellectual disability’. Each one offers strategies for interpreting why, for example, he doesn’t want the narrator at the hairdresser, why he loves repetitive jokes and rituals such as visiting the little café each time he goes to the hospital, finding number 5 on houses... The categories help us make sense of the kind of control he needs in situations in order to move forward, the predictability he needs in order to sleep in another bed for example. But “Life histories are histories of becoming, and categories can sometimes act to freeze that process of becoming” (Butler, 2004, p. 80). To enter into the space-in-between with Kobe, to escape the press of normativity and to welcome his difference involves us in listening to him, to the richness and beauty of him, with all our senses. This listening to Kobe’s story as it was told and later read by the narrator, involved:

paying attention, not just with our minds, but our whole bodies. It involved listening carefully—with care—caring enough to hear what was said; it involved asking, how is it to be this, in this moment—coming to know internally. It involved existing fully in the moment of listening, going beyond the binaries of you and me... It involved listening without judgement, giving up on moralism, giving up on the ego that seeks to defend and criticize and judge. (Davies, 2011, p. 137)

The story of Kobe opened us up as remembering beings. In the specificity of listening to Kobe, we were caught up in the totality of all being, intra-acting with Kobe, not as a separate entity, but Kobe-in-intra-action-with-others and at the same time Kobe as one who was dependent on support and on carefully constructed connections with his environment in order to have a viable life. (And here we must hasten to add we are all dependent on such connections if we are to have a viable life, but for some of us those dependencies are so taken-for-granted as to be invisible).

In listening with great care to Kobe’s affective and relational orientation towards other people, the participants in this collective biography, and now, we hope, our readers, can enter into a fuller and more complex view of the

'meshwork' that Kobe is (De Landa, 1998). Through focusing on that meshwork, including his categorizations, it is possible to see him, like any of us, in all his "emergent intra-corporeal multiplicity" (De Schauwer et al. 2013 and 2016a). The moments of asking for green ketchup, discovering the little café, being proud of his spikes and laughing at his jokes are all moments of becoming. Being-with-Kobe was "a question of mapping those moments when disability displaces itself, when it goes beyond what is expected" (Mercieca & Mercieca, 2010, p. 87). In these encounters Kobe was immersed in an intra-active becoming, a space of experimentation rich with the possibilities for action, for making something new: "When a body 'encounters' another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 19).

The narrator of this memory, along with the hairdresser, the director of the farm, his sister, his mother, all formed, together with Kobe, a strong sense of belonging in that space where he could put down roots and fly from them at the same time. This asks for response-ability and engagement from all of the persons involved, an immersion in a political act that refuses the normalizing force of abjection and opens up to difference. "To live a life politically, in relation to power, in relation to others, requires a certain openness and unknowingness; it implies becoming part of a process the outcome of which no one subject can surely predict" (Butler, 2004, p. 39). It involves a mutual entanglement. In Barad's words (2010, p. 47) the mutual entanglement of being involves a mutual indebtedness to the other and to difference itself:

Othering, the constitution of an 'Other', entails an indebtedness to the 'Other', who is irreducibly and materially bound to, threaded through, the 'self' – diffraction/dispersion of identity. Otherness' is an entangled relation of difference (*différance*).

How demanding such entanglements are, is evident in the detail of Kobe's intra-actions with the hairdresser, who has a lot of patience and does not just put Kobe in the chair and start to do his job. He knows how to cut, but at the same time we see how he takes Kobe over difficult thresholds, respecting Kobe's need to pause before he moves across the threshold from old haircut to new, finding at each pause what is needed for the next movement, the next change: "The affective flow of what (he) see(s) engages (him) materially, conceptually and ethically" (Davies, 2014, p. 19). Nothing can be taken for granted, repeated patterns are necessary because of Kobe's attachment to rituals, but every pattern can be undermined in a blink. The story-teller's presence, for example, broke the familiar pattern with the hairdresser. Intra-acting with Kobe is intriguing, and at the same time, demands a lot of energy.

Being with Kobe, opening up the possibilities of mutually entangled becoming,

depends both on the existence of and the capacity to let go the status quo. It involves working to some extent, against oneself, and against those habitual practices through which one establishes 'this is who I am'. (...) It means opening up the ongoing possibility of coming to see life, and one's relation to it, in new and surprising ways. Emergent listening might begin with what is known, but it is open to creatively evolving into something new. Emergent listening opens up the possibility of new ways of knowing and new ways of being, both for those who listen and those who are listened to. (Davies, 2014, pp. 21-22, our emphasis)

In listening and following, in experimenting and being open to the new, in giving up rigid control and becoming aware of power, we are exploring a profound ethical shift, requiring that the ruse of identity is no longer able to dictate who we are or might be or should be according to the dogmas of normativity (De Schauwer & Van Hove, 2011). No longer separate from the other, but entangled in the emergent unfolding of life in its emergent multiplicities, we are involved in the entangled enlivening of being (Barad, 2007, Davies & Gannon, 2013). Such an enlivening of being involves a commitment to life itself as movement:

Listening is about being open to being affected. It is about being open to difference and, in particular to difference in all its multiplicity as it emerges in each moment in between oneself and another. Listening is

about not being bound by what you already know. It is life as movement. Listening to children is not just a matter of good pedagogy; encounters with others, where each is open to being affected by the other, are integral, (...), to life itself. (Davies, 2014, 1)

This is so, irrespective of the categorization of the one who listens and the one who is listened to—and whether we are in ascendant or subordinate categories.

(In)conclusion

We have worked with our memories and the philosophical concepts of monstrosity, diffraction, and multiplicity to develop new ways of thinking about, and being intra-actively engaged with, disability/difference. In patient observations, in telling, retelling, writing and rewriting, and in drawing our memories out in a collective biography workshop, and in the collaborative writing of this paper we startle parents, teachers, support workers, researchers... (including ourselves) into becoming aware of how easily we get trapped in reductionist, 'simple', one-dimensional observations of people who are labeled as different/disabled. Through working with our own memories, we look at these processes from inside themselves, thus opening up the possibility of exploring how normativity works on us and through us. We are, on the one hand, looking for new ways of thinking disability/difference through our collective biography work, and on the other hand, we are making more legible the conditions of possibility that work against that opening up. Our paper has worked at the space in between policies and practices of including difference/disability on the one hand, and on the other, the neoliberally driven intensification of a generic ideal. The methodology helps researchers and practitioners reflect upon their own (past) experiences of entanglement in the normalization and abjection processes involved in exclusion of those who are constituted as potentially (economically) unproductive (Davies & Bansel 2007). The diffractive reading of the stories, and the drawings, makes it possible to engage in deconstructing binary thinking, and, in line with disability studies, opens up possibilities of inclusion and participation. This work moves us away from the researcher as individualized human subject, and puts emphasis on the collective work of telling, re-conceptualizing and writing our way into new insights that affect all of us.

We have taken up the challenge of this special issue to work with new methodologies that make visible new possibilities of becoming, where we are each "bound together in a mutual entanglement of becoming with each other" (Davies, 2014, p. 16). We have pursued the value of openness to difference, not just for the sake of the disabled other, but for the sake of our own capacity for engagement with life in all its multiplicity. We have further extended that work by, wherever possible, engaging the persons and the families of those who appear in our stories in our discussions about the ideas emerging in our thinking-being as collaborative researchers. Our collective biography methodology thus enables an inclusive, collective process of knowledge-building that works beyond the abled/disabled binary.

We have argued that research (and indeed life) lies in the capacity to affect and be affected, a capacity that enables each of us to go on reaching beyond ourselves and beyond the constraints of any given conditions of possibility. The human subject can actively crack open its own boundaries, welcoming its own vulnerability as that which makes it much larger than itself, creatively evolving, capable of taking itself beyond itself, and also capable of recognizing its own limiting practices, and modifying them. Such openness to the not-yet-known makes us vulnerable. That vulnerability is not something to be avoided, we have argued, but an embracing of the realization "that the self and the other are mutually engaged" (Shildrick, 2002, p. 78).

Being open, and being vulnerable to being affected by the other, is how we accomplish our humanity; it is how the communities, of which we are part, create and re-create themselves. We are not separate from the encounters that make up the community but, rather, emergent with them. (Davies, 2014, p. 10)

Central to our thinking in this paper is the claim that going beyond the categories and forces of normalization

that contain us cannot be accomplished alone. We can only ever emerge in relation to others:

Opening up to encounters is what thought needs – to unsettle it, to disturb it, to move it. It is hard demanding work, requiring the capacity to let go of the already-known, and of tired clichés and explanations – archaic attachments. It involves hard epistemological and ontological work to enable the not-yet-known to emerge in the spaces of encounter. (Davies, 2014, p. 5)

This post-structuralist, new materialist research creates knowledge about practices through which people emerge in all their multiplicity, where persons with a disability can be, as we all are, human beings in constant motion, emergent in our collective intra-corporeal multiplicity. Through working with the particular concepts we have mobilized here, through our close and detailed analysis of our memory stories, we have opened up a way of moving beyond the inability to deal with the ambiguous and with the not-yet-known, and beyond the tendency to abject those who are not entirely captured by the illegible forces of normativity. In this collective biography we searched for an ethical practice that would enable us to work in creative ways, to open up our stories in such a way that we could move beyond binary thought, beyond clichés, beyond judgmental thinking, and beyond abjection. We have thought our way through to dismantling the singular subject created through the ruse of identity, to welcoming our own vulnerability to the other, to recognizing our indebtedness to the other, and to opening ourselves to the diffractive entanglements through which self and other are made.

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Animating disability differently: mobilizing a heterotopian imagination

Based on De Schauwer, E. , Van de Putte, I., Van Goidsenhoven, L., Blockmans, I., Vandecasteele, M. and Davies, B. (2017). Animating disability differently : mobilizing a heterotopian imagination. *Qualitative Inquiry*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077800416684871>

Abstract

This paper takes up Goodley's (2013) challenge to explore the ways in which poststructuralist research methodologies open up new ways of thinking about encounters with disability. Working with the materiality of their own encounters with disability and the conceptual possibilities opened up in poststructuralist and new materialist thought, the six authors deconstruct the ability/disability binary through animating disability differently. They draw on memories generated in a collective biography workshop in order to explore the ways in which concepts, such as heterotopia, can be put to work in order to mobilize a humanity-in-common that is both multiple and open to differentiation, that is to continuously becoming different.

Few of us fancy being pathological so 'most of us' try to make ourselves normal, which in turn affects what is normal (Hacking 1990, 2).

In any binary there is a dominant term that works as a signifier of what will count as normal and desirable, and a subordinate term that is read as ab-normal and undesirable. Members of any subordinate category are subjected to normative pressure to become more like those who are read as normal. At the same time those who are deemed to be ‘normal’ take themselves to be so in relation, and as other to members of subordinate categories (such as female, black, gay, homeless, disabled). Deconstruction of binaries begins by reversing the hierarchy and celebrating the subordinate category. Fritsch (2015) takes up that challenge in her paper ‘Desiring disability differently’. The concept of heterotopia is central to her deconstructive work.

Inspired by Fritsch’s deconstructive move and by Chen’s (2012) use of the concept of animacy, the six authors decided to explore these concepts further through a collective biography workshop in which we set out to think disability differently. We focused on opening up, in our collective biography work, a heterotopian imagination with which to animate disability differently. We wanted to dislodge it from the abled/disabled binary, not by making the disabled more ‘normal’, or by stretching the category of abled to include the disabled, but by animating disability differently.

So what do we mean here by heterotopia? Originally, the term heterotopia (Greek for: heteros ‘another’ and topos ‘place’) was used in the medical field to refer to a particular tissue that developed in an unusual place, and which was merely dislocated, not necessarily diseased or dangerous (Johnson, 2006). Inspired by the medical meaning of the term, Foucault developed this concept, differentiating it from utopia – that ideal society that we have all inevitably failed to accomplish. Heterotopic places he defined as ‘other spaces’, spaces that were ‘out of place’ and ‘unfamiliar’, and as spaces in which the elements do not add up to a logical whole (Saldanha, 2008). Heterotopic sites are thus counter-sites that ‘have the curious property of being connected to all the other emplacements’ (Foucault [1967] 1998, 178).³⁶

Foucault ([1967] 1998) nominated six characteristics of a heterotopic place: (1) heterotopic places are everywhere; (2) in the course of history each heterotopia can operate, exist and function in different ways; (3) a heterotopic place is made up of incompatible emplacements; (4) a heterotopic place involves a break within traditional (linear) time and this discontinuity opens up heterochronies; (5) a heterotopic place assumes a system of opening and closing that isolates it and make it penetrable at the same time; and finally (6) a heterotopic place has a function in relation to the remaining places. Heterotopic places, and by extension heterotopic events, practices and relationships have something that makes them an obligatory point of passage (Hetherington 1997), which leads us not to the question of what a heterotopia is, but what it can do and what it can open up.³⁷ The concept of heterotopia is thus a vehicle that can open up disability as multiple, as always emergent, and as intra-corporeal. It effects an intervention in the normative social order and the psychic life of power (Butler 1997).

And what do we mean by animation? The methodology we have used here, of collective biography, could itself be described as an animating methodology. The participants work with language in such a way that lives might be told/lived differently through disentangling themselves from the repetitive clichés, moral judgments and familiar explanations that more usually shape the telling of personal memories. Participants tell their stories to each other, not as autobiographical ‘I’ stories, but as stories that seek to open up, in the collective space of listening, an insight into the collective life we are all part of. This shift in linguistic strategies matters; that is, it materially affects the story-tellers and listeners; it affects what can be told and what can be heard. It affects what is animated in the telling/hearing/writing of memories.

Chen says of language itself, it “is as much alive as it is dead, and it is certainly material. For humans and others, spoken and signed speech can involve the tongue, vocal tract, breath, lips, hands, eyes, and shoulders. It is a

36 Foucault mentioned heterotopia for the first time in the preface of his book *Les mots et les choses* (1966) where it mainly refers to textual spaces. In the same year he uses the concept during a radio broadcast about utopia (transcript was published in 2009 by Defert). Finally, Foucault published a text (*Des Espace Autres*) about heterotopia in 1967.

37 Different academic study fields elaborated on Foucault’s concept of heterotopia: in sociology and cultural studies, for instance, the concept of heterotopia is not only interpreted as concrete geographical places or realities, but also as social, cultural, spiritual, and relational realities marked by incompatibility, discontinuity, and difference (Hetherington, 1997; Meininger, 2013).

corporeal, sensual, embodied act. It is, by definition, animated” (Chen 2012 53). Story-telling/writing/reading in collective biography workshops is material in Chen’s sense, and its strategies are specifically designed to bring language to life. At the same time collective biography works with concepts that further animate their stories, while the stories work to animate the concepts—to make them live.

Deconstruction also involves looking at the ways language works to hold binaries in place. Understanding the way individuals are positioned in relation to categories, and the onto-epistemological effects of that emplacement is vital in deconstructive work. Being categorized within a subordinate category means that you are marked by that category (Davies 1993). Those in the dominant or ascendant half of any binary are not so marked, and can assume, without paying the matter any attention, that they are superior to those categorized as being in the subordinate category. They are simply normally and naturally human. Being marked as disabled leaves a trace on the skin, a disablist “epidermal schema” (Fanon 1993, 112; see also McRuer 2002).³⁸ Those schemas, lived in the skin, are “relics of societal discourses, emanating from expert and lay knowledge, reproduced in institutions of family, school, prison, disability service and hospital” (Goodley 2011, 103). One is made a member of what Schneider (2015) calls the precariat. The precariat, in effect, function as the outside other to “the autonomous, rational subject that can smoothly move his body in accordance with what is considered acceptable and appropriate within the social sphere” (Fritsch 2015, 48). Yet no-one wants to be pathologized, as Hacking (1990) said, and what will count as normal is open to change. In this paper we set out to use language differently to animate precarious lives, as lives that count, and as lives with epidermal schemas full of that life, and as lives integral to the humanity that we are all part of.

Last, but not least, what do we mean by differentiation and normalization?

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) identify two major lines of force that are at play in any social encounter. One is a normalizing or territorializing force, dependent on repeated citations, that works to keep everything the same. The other is a creative evolutionary or de-territorializing force that opens up the new, the not-yet-known, and the emergent possibility of becoming different, of differentiation³⁹. These two lines of force are constantly at play, affecting each other and depending on each other. The second is mobile rather than static, and it is multiple rather than singular.

Binary categories work to trap the subordinated other in the first line of force and to offer much more of the creative, experimental, mobile elements of the second force to those in the dominant unmarked group. Yet Deleuze suggests “that we are all part of the same Being, and at the same time, that we are multiple and emergent” (Wyatt et al. 2011, 2). He suggests that each being in his/her specificity is of the same matter and mattering as others, affecting and being affected by others, singly and collectively differentiating themselves, becoming other than they were before. Always and at the same time each being is at risk of being caught up in individualizing themselves, getting stuck in repeated citational chains that close down movement and close down openness to difference and to the other (Davies 2014). We suggest as well that being categorized as disabled, as other to the normative subject, can stop the fluid movements of differentiation. Those who are placed in the subordinated category “disabled”, may find themselves limited in the intra-actions through which their life might be lived, the repeated ascriptions of subordinate category membership effectively shutting down the possibilities of differentiating.⁴⁰

38 The terms ablist and disablist are both used in the literature that we draw on in this paper, where “disablist (is) (the exclusion of people with impairments) and ablist (the system by which standards of human anatomy and capability are made as key indicators of human worth)”. (Liddiard & Goodley 2016 152)

39 Differentiation refers to distinguishing multiple differences among people according to their category memberships, while differentiation refers to the ongoing emergence of difference, emphasizing continuous change.

40 We use Barad’s (2007) term intra-act, rather than the more familiar term interact. ‘Interact’ Barad argues is a relation between two separate entities, while her neologism, intra-act, looks not just at the effect of one being on another, but conceives of individual beings not as entities but as emergent, entangled, mobile multiplicities.

Normativity is a force that runs counter to differentiation.⁴¹ Habituated ideas and ideals of humanness draw everyone, irrespective of abilities or disabilities, into discursive practices that are not simply a superficial gloss on what it is to be human, but rather, constitutive of it. In those habituated spaces individuals strive to perfect themselves through normative ideals that are not of their own making, but are laid down through normative discourses and material practices (Butler, 1997; De Schauwer and Davies, 2015). This individual endeavor is so taken-for-granted that it is read as a natural process, intrinsic to individuals. Further, because the accomplishment of oneself as rightfully occupying an ascendant category is read as natural, the forms of normativity at work on bodies are made invisible: “[P]ower works on bodies so as to produce and naturalise a self-governing subject who subscribes to neoliberal individualism and economization and ableist configurations of disability” (Fritsch 2015, 47). This naturalization and invisibilizing of power, we suggest, fuels what Kafer (2013, 4) calls the “ableist failure of imagination”. It seems not possible to imagine: “Maybe there is an overwhelming sense of gloom or maybe the consequences of imagining differently would result in being ridiculed, pathologised or at best, ignored” (Campbell, 2009, 20). Further, when it is imagined to be a natural process, those who are perceived to be not appropriately striving to realize or embody normative ideals of autonomy, flexibility, beauty and self-determination are read as monstrous and alien – as not recognizable as properly human (Shildrick, 2002).

What then are the possibilities of developing a multiplicity of readings of disability (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2012) that enable us to animate disability differently and to unsettle what will count as ‘normal’ (Hacking, 1990)? The concept of heterotopia and animation can be put to work to transcend binary thinking, and heterotopic imagination can save us from being trapped in a storyline of intractable and subordinated otherness. Instead of functioning as the constitutive outside to what will count as normal and as human, we ask how might those who are disabled be recognized as being entangled, as anyone is, in both the forces of normalization and of differentiation?

One of the difficulties in deconstructive work is that those in subordinated categories have found ways to survive in their subordinated position. They do not necessarily want to lose their category membership and whatever benefits they have found that go with it. Political work has been done to gain compensation for their lesser status. Benefits of that work include the allocation of resources to assist those categorized in the enterprise of becoming more ‘normal’ and thus potentially productive. At the same time categorization can lead to the withholding of freedoms that are the prerogative of those constituted as normal – freedom to be multiple, to differentiate oneself in an emergent process of becoming other than what one was before, to be creative and experimental, and to even shift the boundaries of what will count as normal. Once categorized, the ‘disabled’ are deprived of those freedoms. Instead, they are deemed to be in need of (medical, psychological, social, educational) remediation or treatment, designed to bring them closer to the norm – that being constituted as the only thing anyone could ever want to be (De Schauwer et al., 2016).

Collective biography: methodology

Collective biography is a post-qualitative research strategy using a diffractive methodology developed by Davies and Gannon and their colleagues (2006; 2009; 2013), where a “diffractive analysis can be understood as a wave-like motion that takes into account that thinking, seeing and knowing are never done in isolation but are always affected by different forces coming together” (Lenz Taguchi and Palmer 2013, 676).

Collective biography works with the collaborative telling of stories in which a theoretical concept can be put to the fore from the outset. It is not focused on whether an individual’s stories or memories are ‘reliable’ or not, rather it is interested in creating knowledge about the discursive and intra-active practices through which people and events emerge in all their multiplicity.⁴²

41 A curious argument is mounted in Vehmas and Watson (2016) that normativity is a good thing through which humanist ideals are constituted and through which our best attitudes to disability are developed. Our analysis of normativity does not take up this cosy uncritical relation with it.

42 In contrast to collaborative autoethnography, which moves from the collaborating individuals’ accounts to an insight into some aspect of the social that is

Collective biography works with post-structural theory and new materialism and against the grain of phenomenology's liberal-humanist subject.⁴³ It has emerged over the last two decades as an intra-active and emergent set of concepts and practices that de-individualize those doing the research, re-constituting them in and as an entangled, emergent multiplicity (Davies and Gannon, 2013).

The participants in collective biographies are not positioned as entities that pre-exist the research but as beings 'mutually implicated' in their "differential becoming" (Barad, 2008, 147). They are emergent in the space of the workshop – a space-time-mattering that does not separate out past present and future. The ideas and concepts, the stories that are told, the embodied telling, hearing, writing and reading of those stories, enables the workshop participants, together, to form an entangled phenomenon of collective, embodied, biographical becoming in the space-time-mattering of the workshop.

Prior to the collective biography workshop, in which the six authors of this paper participated, and out of which this paper emerged, the authors gathered weekly for two months for reading sessions which included writings of, among others, Barad (2007), Bennett (2010), Butler (2001) and Fritsch (2015). Through our readings and discussions, heterotopic imagining emerged as the focus of the work we would do in our workshop.

In October 2015, all six authors lived together for three days in a cozy house in the Flemish countryside in order to explore heterotopic imaginings through our remembered stories, and through which we might experiment with animating disability differently. In those three days we told stories of conflict, confusion, categorization and reconciliation. Sometimes tears were shed while telling our own stories and while listening to the stories of others. As each story was told and listened to, we wondered out-loud, opening ourselves to the bodily affect and effect of each story, seeking to know what it is to be this person, or these people in this story in that space and at that time.⁴⁴ After that telling and wondering we each wrote our stories, avoiding clichés and explanations and moral judgments, and we sought words that could evoke the specific embodiment of the remembered moments. Further, in an innovative extension of the methodology, we explored the material specificity of our stories through painting and through making clay models of the characters and of the material objects in our stories⁴⁵. Using those clay models and paintings we made short animated films of each story. The moments in our stories were thus multiply animated through the words we uttered, through the sound of our voices as we spoke and listened to each other, and through the sensual engagement with paint and clay and the visual surprise of the films themselves. We then read our stories out loud to each other, and showed our animated films, all the while engaging in emergent listening,⁴⁶ intra-acting both with each story and story-teller. The cycle of telling, writing, making films, reading out loud and showing our films, listening again for feedback on the way our stories impacted on the listeners, then re-writing, meant that the intra-active presence of the group shaped what it was possible to say-feel-write-animate-read-write. This storying process is thus intra-corporeal; bodies, and their animation of selves and other, affect each other, and are affected (Chen, 2012).

In the emergent listening, the questioning, and in the subsequent re-writing, the incompatible, heterotopic elements of each story found their way onto the page. Not all of the elements could be encapsulated in one telling, or even two. The three stories that we ultimately chose to work with in this paper reflect many overlaid spaces

under investigation, collective biography works collaboratively on the memories from individual lives to shift them from being stories about individualized selves to stories about whichever aspect of the human condition is under investigation. Since both methodologies are experimental and evolving, however, it is not useful to draw a sharp line between them.

43 This research strategy assumes that knowledge not only emerges out of data, but out of the intra-action between the data and the researcher (Davies and Gannon, 2006). As a methodology, collective biography is in the first place inspired by the German scholar Frigga Haug's memory work (1987). Memory work contains the writing and subsequent analysis of remembered stories that researchers collectively use to generate their own critique of theory. In the wake of Haug's memory strategies, collective biography uses memories and stories to explore the processes of subjectification (Davies et al., 2001). However, it differs from Haug's memory work in the sense that Haug (1987) is concerned in working from the point of view of the individualised subject and is interested in therapeutic outcomes, whereas collective biography is focused on the collective, intra-active constitution of subjectivities.

44 For a discussion of the power of wonder in collaborative writing see Gale and Wyatt, 2016, *Qualitative Inquiry*

45 The technology and expertise that guided our film-making came from film-maker Marieke Vandecasteele.

46 Emergent listening might begin with what is known, but it is open to creatively evolving into something new. Emergent listening opens up the possibility of new ways of knowing and new ways of being, both for who listen and those who are listened to (Davies, 2014).

and not just one perfect space or moment in time. Through re-telling, questioning, rewriting, and animating each story, mono-chromatic and linear stories transformed themselves into stories that captured more of the heterotopic elements of the remembered event, and reflected as well the multiplicity of those others entangled in the stories. The mobilisation of heterotopic imagination worked to focus our attention on the emergent emplacements, the multiplicity of beings, and the multiple entangled forces (both ontological and epistemological) that were at play in the remembered moments of being.

Happy Birthday!

The first remembered moment takes us to the birthday of Olivia.⁴⁷ In this story Olivia was 20 years old and rented a room in the city of Ghent where she was studying some distance from home. Olivia had been told she lived on the autism spectrum (ASD). She preferred to refuse that category, although she understood and saw that there was something different when she compared herself with her two younger sisters. At the time of Olivia's 20th birthday, only one younger sister and her mother knew about her having been diagnosed and thus categorized as other to normal.

Olivia's story

Last class of the day, I hope to see my mother this evening. I run upstairs with quick pace. When I'm almost at the top I spot my little wooden desk, standing in the hallway. I stop, stare confused at my desk and start running again, but faster this time. Anger enters my body immediately. I grasp my phone and type my mother's number while I give the creaky old door of my room a hard push. Before the phone has any chance to connect, I close it down. Panic takes over the anger when I see that a new big desk is standing in the middle of my room, at the very same spot where the old one used to stand. I see colorful drawings and collages with names and birthday wishes hanging on the walls, and hundreds of brightly colored flags. I hear girlish yelling and gurgling. I run toward the walls and tear off as many drawing as I can and smash them on the ground. I hear a lot of footsteps, I feel hands and arms around me, I hear more girlish yelling and I squeeze my eyes. I furiously try to get rid of all the hands and arms around me, I cry, I stamp, I squeeze my eyes even more and I'm out of breath.

When I open my eyes, the too excited girlish yelling has disappeared. I'm alone in my room. My old desk is still in the hallway and the drawings – some of them are torn – are spread all over the place. My face feels wet. Slowly I take the drawings in my right hand and with my left one I try to hang them back on the wall. I am feeling heavy. I am tired. Once back on the wall the drawings look like drooping and withered flowers. I'm jealous of all the nice colors, jealous of all the pleasure you can see in the drawings. I feel guilty. I tremendously hope I'll see my mum this evening.

At the moment of her 20th birthday, Olivia had believed she was getting settled – away from home – where she did not have to be 'the big sister'. Away from home, she had finally found some strategies to live. When her younger sisters entered her 'safe', private room she felt confronted by her failure as the big sister at home – confronted by the things she could not do. Those confrontations made her feel that everything she had fought for had been pointless. She would never be able to manage it all, to live 'normally' like her two younger sisters.

⁴⁷ The names used in this story are all pseudonyms

When she thought about it later, drawing on the concept of heterotopia, the birthday surprise involved shifting the centerpiece of her room's order, the little old desk, out into the hallway. The desk, in this sense, was heterotopic—a dislocated tissue in the life of herself/her room. Whereas the desk had signified her smartness, her abilities, offering comfort and security, it now signified that which was to be excluded and abandoned. It was out of place like Olivia, odd, not like others, not good enough. There was danger in being singled out and excluded. Further, her noisy younger sisters, who were integral to her life at home, had become dislocated tissue in her room as they shattered its peaceful order with their ecstatic encircling of their big sister, and with their joyful paintings and flags on the walls, and the gift of the large desk. For Olivia, in that moment, the non-superposable places of home-family and room-successful student clashed in an unbearable way. Her sense of autonomy, embedded in the order of the room as it was, was shattered.

The moment of surprise was made up of different incompatible, overlapping, intersecting planes, objects and persons. The room, the drawings, the old-new desk, the surprise, each person in their multiplicity offered some different way into the story. The room was, in the first instance, a safe place for Olivia, a place where she was not constantly confronted with the unpredictability and rush of family life and home. She had made, here, her own territory with all her books, her interests, her routines. Here she was the girl with possibilities, with nice grades, with friends. Here she became the big sister admired by her little sisters, who already dreamed about having the life she had. No other space was so perfect in Olivia's eyes, although she was sometimes sad about the distance that excluded her from her family. In this manifestation of itself the room was inextricably connected with the dominant order (Topinka 2010), in which autonomy is linked to successful university study, the appropriate separation of self from family and the development of independent friendships. The orderliness of the room and its materiality – the books, the desk, the computer – were intimately linked with Olivia's successful accomplishment of a sense of herself as living a normal life. But the normative order also required Olivia to manage the movement from one place to another, and from one set of relations to another. If she was to be counted as normal, and not as a member of a subordinate category she could not depend on one form of orderliness. She could not lock herself down in a limited set of repeated citations. She must be open to the unexpected—to differentiation and thus to creative evolution. The first line of force that Deleuze and Guattari outline, of normalizing/territorializing, a force that is at play on everyone, and that we all depend on to feel safe in a predictable world necessarily intra-acts with the second force, the riskier, differentiating line of force.

After her mother and the girls were gone, there was a pause, a threshold, a liminal space, and a crossing over into embracing the drooping flowers her sisters had painted for her and a longing to see her mother (De Schauwer and Davies 2015). Olivia emerges as the one attached to her small desk and confronted by its abjection in the hallway and the one who cannot cope with the disturbance to her order and the one who longs for the capacity to cope with surprise and the bright flags and flowers that signal celebration. She enters into a heterotopic space of overlapping multiplicities.

In the workshop, in the spirit of a heterotopian exploration of multiplicity and of intra-corporeality, Olivia retold the story from the viewpoint of her mother.

The Mother's story

Unbelievable, it's almost 20 years since I gave birth to Olivia. Every year I remind her of the fact that it is a miracle we survived. But to celebrate this day with her is not always that easy. The two youngest have been making drawings for their big sister the whole week. We will surprise her with a new big desk. She will be happy with it and we will buy the same desk for her at home and maybe then she will be more able to study at home with us... Maybe.

'Okay girls, ready?! We have 30 minutes. Nora, can you take the small desk outside – put it in the hallway, yes, that's okay. And you Emma, can you help me to put all her stuff back. Do you remember how her computer was standing?'

'Mom, can we hide and surprise her when she enters her room?' Nora asks.

'Well... I think so, but be a little gentle, don't overwhelm her... OK?'

'Sssbbht, I think I hear her.... Yes, she is here ...'

Do I need to go first and prepare her, tell her we decorated the room as a surprise? No, no, she will handle it, she will be happy to see us, ... no?

'SURPRIIIIISSSE!'

'Happy Birthday little one! Come here, so I can bug you.' *'What do you think of the new desk? That's the one you wanted, no? Are we going for a drink?'*

...

'Nora and Emma, calm down!'

'Nora, sssbbht!'

Okay, this is not going well ... I need to handle it ... quick, but what do I need to do? Didn't she want to have her sisters with her?

'Listen, Olivia, I will come back ... do you hear me? It's alright, you can take the pictures down, yes, no problem, it will be fine. Look, I will bring the girls home first. Okay? Stay here and I'll come back. Okay?'

'Come on girls, back in the car. Let Olivia go.'

Maybe this was not a great idea...

In this heterotopic, multiple reading of the birthday it is possible to read Olivia as emergent and multiple – not locked into her categorization, and at the same time always connected to those other beings and those other things and places through which she comes to exist. Olivia's room was heterotopic. To begin with it was a place out of place, different from all the rest of the places, even while it was also connected to the other places such as the university. Then it became heterotopic in another sense, of containing incompatible elements. Those incompatible elements momentarily obliterated Olivia's story that she was autonomous and competent, and mobilized instead another story of her own embodied self being out of place and unacceptably different. In the first sense the heterotopic elements hold everything in the room in place; in the second sense they generate a burst of energy, of rage. The storm of emotion, and Olivia's longing to be joyful like her sisters, lies on the brink of an intra-corporeal transformation where life might be imagined and lived differently. This writing takes Olivia once more to that threshold, and catches her up in that process of differentiation, of becoming, always incomplete.

The Tattoo and the Wind: Loss and Resistance

Our second story works with the idea that a person with a disability, like any human subject, is in constant motion, always emergent and transforming the barriers of their labels. The story involves “the mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (Barad 2007, 33) on a warm afternoon among a gentle breeze, a girl, her uncle, a barbecue, and an idea. The girl and her uncle have, together, experienced massive and multiple losses. In a car accident, nearly twenty-five years ago, the uncle lost his mother, brother, and nephew, while the girl lost her grandmother, father and brother, as well as her ability to walk. The story has several overlapping non-superposable emplacements: the current place of the barbecue where the breeze blows the napkins on the table and gently lifts and whirls the falling leaves, and where she is in conflict with her beloved uncle; the place of the accident in which they both lost their family members; and the idea of a tattoo of the wind on the shoulder of the girl in the wheelchair.

The sun is setting, making me feel warm, peaceful, thankful for this beautiful moment of family time. A cool summer breeze moves the napkins.

‘I think I’d like a tattoo on my shoulder.’ My uncle turns away from the barbecue. ‘Why would you want a tattoo?’ I hear disapproval in his surprised voice. I had not expected that one coming. ‘Well, I met this girl three years ago who had a tattoo on her left hip to draw the attention away from the scar she had on the other side and I quite like the idea. I don’t like the scar on my back, and I believe a tattoo might do the trick.’ My uncle looks down, directing his gaze to a point beyond me. ‘Are you sure you want to do that?’ ‘I think so... I quite like the idea of an image of the wind on my shoulder, also as a way to remember everyone who has passed away.’ ‘But you’ll be mutilating your body,’ my uncle interrupts. I want to say ‘I feel their presence most when nature is at work, when the sun is making the tip of my nose glow, when the wind is catching leaves in their fall, lifting those beautiful creatures whirling around’. The napkins lie still. The gentle breeze has paused, bracing itself. Instead I say ‘I’m not. The accident has mutilated my body. This time I am the one who is deciding that something is happening to my body, and for once, it is going to be something good and beautiful.’ ‘You are not mutilated. And that’s different. That just happened.’ I stop talking. The crispy bacon on the grill calls for my uncle’s attention.

The girl and her uncle, both have their own grief, sorrow, memories locked in their bodies. They have an intimate history of remembering their beloved ones, the uncle sharing his memories, and the girl taking them in, in every detail, because she has no memories of her own of her grandmother, dad and brother. She was too young to be able to remember them.

For the girl the tattoo of the wind will breathe life into all the beloved ones who have passed away. The tattoo will give her something tangible that can remind her that they once existed in this world and that they can continue to inspire her. The tattoo has creative potential, her grief of lost love and traumatic loss will be carried, and will continue to be carried, acknowledged, inscribed mutely on her shoulder, like a beautiful jewel, that you can show in summer. It will create a new epidermal schema of simultaneous beauty, inspiration and loss. She is grieved by her uncle’s inability to move with her, to feel inspired by her idea.

For the girl the tattoo is a powerful means of asserting her freedom from the category of ‘disabled’ – from being defined as unworthy, inadequate, and dependent (Fritsch, 2015) and it signifies the control she still has over her own body. It represents her ability to be more than ‘disabled’ and to escape from the epidermal schemas of dependence, lack of control, lack of attractiveness and lack of self-love. The girl has found with the tattoo a graphic, embodied way to resist and take control of these dominant notions of unattractiveness/dependence/... by means of creating something beautiful for herself on her own skin.

The place of the barbecue and the place where the tattoo might be worked on her body are non-superposable in the uncle’s (utopian) thinking in which there can only be one truth. Whereas the girl had brought them together into the same space, bringing as well the lost members of the family into this space where the breeze brushed against her shoulder, her uncle needed to keep them separate.

Her uncle's words affect her, pushing her up against her non-membership of the normalized, unmarked category of the able-bodied subject. The forms of experimentation and rebellion that the normative subject is entitled to are not freedoms she can explore as far as her beloved uncle is concerned. His automatic rejection, which normative subjects might take in their rebellious stride, confronts her, and it deflates her sense of pleasure in her image of a tattoo of the wind. It becomes, instead of something beautiful, an unacceptable mutilation of an already mutilated body. The uncle's and the girl's losses are connected, but their ways of dealing with their losses are (for now) incompatible—non-superposable.

The tattoo of the wind now on the girl's shoulder makes her happy and invokes the irresistible longing to jump around whenever she sees it in the mirror; she feels nervous if she has not reassured herself of its presence. At the same time she feels deeply saddened by her uncle's opposition. The process of having the tattoo done, though, was not without pain; just as touching the saxophone that her father used to play, or seeing a picture of her brother who will never turn two, is not without pain. The intra-active space between the girl and her uncle mirrors and reflects the tensions that the forces of normalization produce. On the one hand, in her uncle's resistance to the tattoo, there is the protective positioning of her as disabled, combined with the generalized (though now less common) belief that tattoos are dangerous insofar as they signal non-normativity. On the other hand, the girl's decision to get her tattoo opens up the possibility of thinking outside the definition of herself as disabled (Hetherington, 1997).

For some time the uncle remains caught on a threshold where a normative and judgmental space-time-mattering holds him immobile, where the idea of the tattoo is heterotopic in the sense of being in the wrong place. He pauses, unable to make the leap into the other heterotopic space his niece has mobilized where incompatible elements can be brought together in an aesthetic resolution. The intra-corporeality of herself/her tattoo/her missing loved ones/and the wind on her shoulder enables her to exist differently, to no longer be identified primarily in terms of a subordinate category (De Schauwer and Davies, 2015).

Captain Simon leads the battle

Our last story takes place on a hot sunny day when water was the only thing that could help everyone to cool down. It involves Simon, a 9 year-old boy with multiple disabilities, his two support workers,⁴⁸ Yannick and the story-teller, and their friend Petra. The pond is not open to the public, although a lot of people ignore the prohibition sign, especially with the extreme heat in the summer. Yannick and Petra decide that they must make their way into the pond. To do so, they must climb over the fence, lift the wheelchair over, lift Simon over, carry the resources such as the auxiliary aid and several backpacks all the way to the water – it is quite an undertaking. Our story opens up a place-time-mattering in which Simon, a boy whom others would not think capable of swimming in a secluded pond, becomes a pirate and belongs to a playful group of friends in the water. Together with Yannick, he makes the pond unsafe as a pirate on the sea. Heterotopia, here, is a temporary passage disrupting the usual restrictions that come with the surveillance, control and protection of children who are categorized as disabled. Whenever his categorization is to the forefront, it is unthinkable that he might engage in such play.

Water is splashing. Simon is trying to hit Yannick but he misses and his hand splashes the water. Both of them have very white skin even though the sun has been out for a long time. Simon's body lies heavily on the 'horse', which supports him, but his arms are dangerously circling around. Yannick points at Petra who is peacefully dozing off in the sun, her eyes closed, enjoying the sun on her skin, her hands at the side of her mattress gently moving in the water. Simon only needs two eyes looking at Petra to understand. 'Attack!' he yells. The two boys are taking the 'horse' in the direction of the mattress. 'Here we come!' Simon enjoys the idea of what will happen and will do everything to speed up and reach Petra as soon as possible. Yannick is trying to keep him on the aid, while making all kinds of loud noises warning Petra that she will go in the water. With the front of the 'horse' they hit the mattress and destabilize

⁴⁸ A support worker is paid for by funds allocated by government to parents, so that parents can employ workers who work with the child to increase participation in society.

it. Simon grabs everything he can take hold of in order to pull Petra off. His spastic muscles make his movements big and his body is going in every direction. Yannick gives a push under another part of the mattress while using all of his strength to keep Simon on the horse. Petra is taken by surprise. 'Ob la! What are you two doing?' The next moment she goes in. While the two boys are enjoying their victory, she crawls back on her mattress and starts kicking with her feet. They have to withdraw for one moment and reorganize their troops. Simon is still shouting and his whole body wants to attack another time.

In that moment, in that space, Simon is not marked by what he is not able to do—his disabilities are not made to matter. He is part of the game in the pond. He is not on the margin of the game but at its centre, in the middle of the pond. The hot sun, the cool water, the secluded pool, the auxiliary aid which has become a 'horse', the mattress, Petra and Yannick all intra-act with Captain Simon in his becoming the gleeful and wicked pirate conspiring with Yannick, his mate, bringing laughter and joy to the whole group in the pond. The normative order, in which it would not even be imaginable to take Simon into the water, is no longer the dominant order. No longer is the focus on the failure of his body and the associated hardship for Simon and his carers. As Kafer (2013, 4) says: "There is no accounting for how a disabled person's response to impairment shifts over time or by context".

The game brings a glorious time-space-mattering of competency and escape. Together, intra-corporeally, the friends together have become participants in an intra-active space in which Simon is the pirate, the gleeful warrior who, with his mate, succeeds in attacking Petra and getting her into the water. The sense of joy, of being in control, of being able to play are senses Simon not always has access to. He is emergent in that space of becoming-pirate with Yannick.

The glorious space-time-mattering of pirates on the high seas co-exists with a non-superposable space-time-mattering of Simon the boy who is disabled. For the one to exist, attention has to be paid to the other. The place with all the fun and where he can enjoy becoming a pirate, necessitates attention to his difference; he needs a special aid in the water, he needs to be dried, three people need to take him out of the water, even with this warmth his lips turn blue after an hour. The intra-action of Simon-Yannick-water, is animated through 'the horse' – the aid to support him in the water. A medical aid becomes a warrior's tool assembled with the water, the two bodies, the warriors' sound. The horse exists in two non-superposable spaces at once; it both keeps him safe in the water and it creates a space for Simon to control what happens and to transcend his limitations through becoming pirate (McNamee, 2000).

This playful moment in the water of Simon-becoming-pirate may seem to have been too risky. But each line of flight, each de-territorializing move is risky, taking us out of the predictable safe space of the already known, repeated citations. Just as Olivia's mother took a risk with the birthday surprise, and the girl with the tattoo risked losing her warm relationship with her uncle, so Simon takes a risk in becoming pirate.

To others Simon's adventure may seem not to have changed anything very much. They might see it as only a one-time happening in a certain place at a certain moment in time, but what happens matters. Simon's life-as-pirate animates his life as live, as a life that counts, as a life with an epidermal schema full of that life, and as integral to the Being that his companions are all part of. The opening up of this space-time-mattering involves an opening up of imagination and it creates an intra-corporeal disruption of the mono-chromatic linear storyline in which most of Simon's life is entangled. In the pond Simon is not determined only by his disabilities; there is heterochronic time and space for experiment, for risks and for pleasure and play.

(In)conclusion

We have taken up Goodley's (2013) challenge to use poststructuralist research methodologies to rethink disability. We have put the concepts of heterotopia and animacy to work in a de-constructive move on the ability/disability binary. Working beyond the positioning of those with disabilities as marked by their subordinate category, and, as such, other-to-able-bodied/able-minded beings, we have sought to animate disability differently as simultaneously subjected to forces of normalization/territorialization and open to the emergence of the new.

By thinking in terms of disability as an emergent, intra-corporeal multiplicity we open up the idea that a person with a disability, like any human subject, is in constant motion, always emergent, transformable, capable of resistance, and capable of transcending the constraints that accompany their embodiment and their categorization in a subordinate category. Disability, if we think of it in this way, is emergent within the interplay of several ways of being and thinking (De Schauwer and Davies 2015): it is heterotopian.

Our heterotopic readings of our collective biography stories offer the practice of thinking differently with disability, not as other to the normatively embodied subject, but as multiple, emergent, and intra-corporeal (Fritsch, 2015). The methodology behind our story generation as well as our collective writing strategies was diffractive, that is, it opened itself up conceptually and in practice to multiple, competing and overlaid lines of force. We unsettled the production of mono-chromatic, linear reflections of what might at first be taken to be the single truth of the matter in any particular encounter with disability.

We have sought to use the concepts of heterotopia and animacy to work with collective biography stories to move beyond the binary categorizations of people with a disability. We have suggested that the abled/disabled binary itself is intra-active and mobile. Normative discursive practices work to hold those diagnosed with a disability in a static place of otherness and it is this dynamic we have sought to disrupt. While categorization is politically useful in generating necessary resources, such as a wheelchair, professional support workers, an auxiliary aid that becomes a horse, it is also dangerous in its capacity to relegate those categorized to an intractable position of other-than-normal, and other-than-human—to being someone without the right of access to humanity with all its creative evolutionary potential. These two incompatible dynamics are non-superposable, and can co-exist, not in a utopian space, but in a heterotopic space, a space that is diffractive and mobile, where “thinking, seeing and knowing are never done in isolation but are always affected by different forces coming together [...]” (Lenz Taguchi and Palmer, 2013, p. 676).

The opening up of a new space-time-mattering is not a linear causal movement that seeks to change the whole world into an (ever-receding) utopian dream. Thinking with heterotopia we can see how the moments of animating disability differently open up a momentary resolution of the incommensurabilities of encounters with disability. Each heterotopian space-time-mattering is in relation to multiple other space-time-matterings that continue to affect any resolution in contradictory ways. At the same time through animating disability differently, in all its emergent intra-corporeal multiplicity, the lived heterotopian space inevitably intra-acts with, and affects those other spaces. Animating disability differently in heterotopic moments of being has the power to affect normative space-time-mattering, we suggest, in as yet unforeseeable ways.

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Appendix

Script Intra-acting voices

Teacher Ida: For 40 years, I've taught children to read. For me it's a point of honour. I always say, when children can read, then another world opens. You can listen to stories and get a lot of information from television, and, in recent years, from the internet. But there too you have to read!

Inge: Sometimes I don't know how to behave in class. What can you do, what can you say, but especially what can't you do or say? Sometimes you can barely breathe. But I cannot make myself invisible, can I? It always requires balance. Due to the constant demand of having to provide support, there is always someone in the classroom. So I'm there during the good and bad moments.

Greek choir: This is all very well, but the support workers keep a close eye on our actions. It is also not easy to have all those people in your classroom. In theory, everything should work, but to make it work in practice, that's something different.

Inge: I really like her – somehow it's very easy to work together. No is no and yes is yes. That's different from how it is with some other teachers. I do not have to be glued to Kobe, I can walk through the class and help other children.

Greek Choir: But what's your position in class? Do you work with the group or with the child or with the teacher?

Kobe: "Teacher Ida is with Peter. Maybe he's on the wrong page. I can show him the right one. I can already find the numbers, below here, 1 and 5.

Peter: One more minute and then she's gone, then I can stay here for a while... it's still raining outside anyway.

Teacher Ida: *I can still remember how it was with Jason. His third grade teacher said: "He can't do anything. That boy cannot count and cannot read." But he wasn't stupid, so for three months during lunch break he came to my classroom. I started at the beginning – repeating letters again. I had made a reading board – children should be able to see that words consist of letters. And yes, he could do it. He became one of the better readers in his class.*

Kobe: "D for dad, dog... d for dad... ddddddd from dad, dog, day.

Inge: I remember when Kobe started at this school, both the teachers and the principal had warned us: "You can't easily work with Ida. She has a very controversial teaching style." Well, that's the least they could say. In the beginning she had a very clear opinion: "With someone with autism you must be very strict and use a clear set of rules". But this does not work for Kobe. We actually managed to coach her on how to build a relationship and how to deal with the strictness of the rules. I can still hear her saying: "He is rewarded for his disturbing behaviour or not wanting to work." She really thought that all the adaptations were unfair. We had to say over and over again that it's not the same as rewarding him.

Greek Choir: **One with autism, one with ADHD, three with dyslexia ... as a teacher you must also be a psychologist and speech therapist. Actually everything and everyone at once.**

Kobe: Tap, tap, tap... My watch... My previous one was more beautiful. It was bigger and had a light. Inge has no watch. Teacher Ida has one made of gold, just a little one.

Peter: You can close your eyes. Can you also close your ears? I don't hear anything. Nothing nothing nothing nothing nothing nothing nothing nothing nothing... No, I still hear her.

Teacher Ida: *Do you know the wonder in their eyes when they make the connection between letters and words? Then they start playing around with them. That's why you teach. Sometimes in the supermarket I meet an old student and then they say, "Ah, Teacher Ida, you taught me to read."*

Peter: Teacher Ida is stupid. Teacher Susan is sweet.

Inge: She is also so much older. It's still a matter of being polite. How can I say something when she is so experienced? She has many, many years of experience.

Greek Choir: **Many years of experience! Many years of experience! In teaching, you learn the most by doing and experimenting.**

Kobe: There is no 1 or 2 on my watch! I'll have to tell mum. Oh no, a number's gone, a number's gone!

Peter: At lunch break I'll be the goalkeeper. Logan is not capable. How many goals were there yesterday? One from Jason, one from Vince, one from Emma... three goals. I will be the goalkeeper!

Greek Choir: It starts with not reading but where does that end? Behavioural problems, difficult students, aggressive students... It really challenges our resilience. Sometimes it's depressing that you give so much with so few results. It's never good enough.

Teacher Ida: I don't want to go to another class! I still know the principal proposed I teach another grade. But I said, "thanks but no thanks". Who would let them read? I know the in and outs of the first grade. They come in my class after kindergarten, and at that age they can't do much. They really need to learn everything from the start. But I do not take them by the hand. They have to immediately jump into the swimming pool, while I stay on the side ready to rescue them if they need it.

Kobe: Inge, psst, psst... she's not looking.

Inge: She can hardly see small steps or the efforts that someone makes in their work. Kobe had made a beautiful drawing, really beautifully coloured within the lines and with so much intensity. When he was colouring, you could see the tip of his tongue poking out of his mouth. I complimented him and motivated him to go to the teacher. When he showed his drawing she answered with: "Why did you only use two colours?" I'm glad I wasn't raised like that, at home we got applause when we worked for it. Learning goes hand in hand with falling and getting back up.

Peter: Teacher Susan is stupid, Teacher Ida is sweet

Teacher Ida: Actually, everything in the later years of primary school seems annoying – they think they know things better than the teacher, and the fantasy is gone. No, I prefer to stay with the little ones. At the end of the first grade you do not recognise them anymore – they have grown, their teeth have changed, they can read, count and write. That's growing up.

Inge: Sometimes I feel embarrassed how she acts towards the children. Last week Kelly fell off her chair, and she yelled at the whole class: "It's a pity you don't have a hole in your head!" How can she act like that? They are so small."

Greek Choir: Yes how can she? But what do you actually have to say about her?

Peter: I don't know if I'm on the right page, maybe I can look at Stacy's book. But I can't see it. I better be quiet.

Greek Choir: Maybe there is something more going on – dyslexia, a mental disorder, dyspraxia or ADHD. Would we not take a test? Measuring is knowing! Measuring is knowing!

Kobe: Inge, psst, psst... she's not looking.

Teacher Ida: I see that with Kobe too. He sometimes has Inge wrapped around his little finger. According to the specialists, he shouldn't be able to read. It has been a matter of continuing and being persistent. Kobe already reads a lot of words. Especially the word 'teacher' – he knows that very well. He misleads them all.

Inge: But don't you have to look for the capabilities of all children? That's oooohh so hard. As of January, the children who can write beautifully get a ballpoint pen, and all the others will still have to write with a pencil. Kobe is no exception. Everyone is equal before the law

Greek Choir: Everyone is equal before the law! Everyone is equal before the law!

Kobe: Inge, psst, she's not looking. Inge is not allowed to go to my house anymore. I do not want to wash her car anymore. Inge cannot come to my house anymore, she may not come to my birthday party!

Peter: "Where is teacher Inge? Is she not in class?"

Inge: I sometimes feel like Teacher Ida's accomplice. I look the other way, or when they come in, I put the children back in the corner. But what, what can I do ...

Greek Choir: But Peter will understand. He knows there is no other way. He knows you cannot do anything else.

Teacher Ida: All I come across is potential reading material, so my class is really full, from the bottom to the top.

Greek Choir: A good teacher takes something out of you instead of putting it in.

Inge: Maybe I can check with the other support workers to see how they would respond, or maybe I can consult the special needs coordinator. Otherwise, maybe I can take Peter with me when I work with Kobe.

Greek Choir: But Inge, you're a good person. We all recognise those situations, and we put a hand on the child's shoulder, preferably when the teacher does not see it. You just have to learn to live with it. This is what happens at schools!

Teacher Ida: They say they don't learn much in public schools. In the early years we had to compete with the Catholic school – the elite. I always went on home visits to talk about our school because that's the best form of advertising – from person to person.

Kobe: My watch doesn't work. (He shakes his wrist with the watch on it).

Teacher Ida: I'm so tired too. Year after year, it doesn't become easier, with all the meetings and work groups. And at home with mum and dad, I also have a lot of worries ... I don't feel my legs anymore ...

Greek Choir: Being a teacher means multitasking, doing all the work. But for somebody like Teacher Ida, fin de carrière; it's unchangeable.

Peter: Teacher Ida has strange shoes –clogs... I hope she doesn't step on my toes.

Inge: She doesn't really care about the others. Like the performance she made the children do for the school party –a song from the old times that nobody knew. It didn't match with the theme of the party at all. And she really made the children practice it, again and again. No one seems to tell her this is not ok. They laugh with her. The classroom in the school corner is her territory – her domain.

Teacher Ida: They also don't ask if they can do anything. They think, Teacher Ida, she does it all and she handles things her way. If this is how it is, then it will always be my way.

Greek Choir: My way, my way! But is there only one way?

Kobe: The 1 and 2 are gone, gone away... Perhaps I have to tell Inge. Where is she? Ah, back in class.
(Kobe stands up and walks to Inge.)

Samenvatting

Dit onderzoek focust op het herdenken van de positie van de zorgcoördinator als ondersteuner van leerkrachten. De zorgcoördinator is in het Vlaamse basisonderwijs een interne ondersteuner die de opdracht heeft om *‘optimale kansen te ontwikkelen voor alle leerlingen.’* In dit onderzoek problematiseer ik het gegeven dat de zorgcoördinator wordt gepositioneerd of zichzelf positioneert als ‘change agent’. Zo lijkt het dat één individu alle *agency* heeft om verandering te bekomen. Daarnaast merk ik op dat er een evolutie plaatsvindt waarbij het individu verantwoordelijk wordt gesteld voor het slagen en/of falen van datgene wat men wil bekomen. Deze evolutie staat verbindend samenwerken en gedeelde verantwoordelijkheid dragen in de weg. Om daaruit een uitweg te vinden, herdenk ik in dit onderzoek de twee concepten ‘agency’ en ‘verantwoordelijkheid’.

In het eerste hoofdstuk maak ik duidelijk dat inclusief onderwijs een actueel topic is in Vlaanderen dat heel wat vragen en gevoelens oproept en waarbij inclusie vaak in de hoek van de onmogelijkheid belandt. Dit komt momenteel sterk tot uiting door de veranderingen met het M-decreet (Decreet betreffende maatregelen voor leerlingen met specifieke onderwijsbehoeften) en de invoering van een nieuw ondersteuningsmodel. Tegelijkertijd zijn er meer en meer kinderen en jongeren die inclusief onderwijs volgen of reeds een inclusief traject hebben afgelegd. Het is in deze uitdagende context dat inclusie in Vlaanderen geïmplementeerd moet worden. De zorgcoördinator maakt deel uit van een complexe onderwijsassemblage waarvan het ambivalente proces van normalisatie en uitsluiting onderdeel zijn.

In hoofdstuk twee beschrijf ik uitgebreid het duale Vlaamse onderwijssysteem aan de hand van het concept van Shildrick’s ‘monster’ en het proces van afstoten en aantrekken (abjecting and reclaiming). Door het monster – diegene die verschillend is van het normale – af te stoten en buiten te sluiten (exclusie) trachten we de imaginaire grenzen van ons eigen lichaam en de ‘normale’ school te bewaken. Scholen worden op die manier ‘ableist’ plaatsen waarbij de ‘normale curve’ het-subject vormgeeft en de andere positioneert als ‘abnormaal’. Tegelijkertijd trekt ‘de andere’ aan. Door een ontmoeting met ‘de andere’ wordt iedereen verschillend. Dit ambivalent proces zorgt ervoor dat we de ‘status of quo’ kunnen behouden – het verschil buitensluiten –, alsook momenten hebben waarop dit wordt verstoord – het verschil insluiten– en dan wordt wat we ‘normaal’ vinden ontwricht. Door ‘Monster’ en ‘Normalisatie’ uitvoerig te bespreken tracht ik de context van de zorgcoördinator beter te begrijpen. Verder ga ik in op wetgeving en bespreek ik de epistemologie van het woord ‘zorgcoördinator’. Hierbij valt het me op dat er veel verschillende paradigma’s op gebied van zorg invloed hebben op

de functie van een zorgcoördinator. Ik stel ook vast dat de coördinatiefunctie zich vertaalt in overwegend uitvoerende taken. De zorgcoördinator neemt desalniettemin veel verschillende verantwoordelijkheden op. Ik concretiseer dit in vijf rollen (waarbij de zorgcoördinator nooit een enkele rol opneemt en de invulling verschillend is per zorgcoördinator): Arbitrator (Inclusiebegeleider), Rescuer (Hulplijn), Auditor (Procesbegeleider), Expert, Collaborator (Verbinder).

De functie van de zorgcoördinator wordt bepaald door de verschillende discours die op hem/haar inwerken. Op bepaalde momenten schept dit meer mogelijkheden voor kinderen. Op andere momenten limiteert dit het leven van kinderen met specifieke noden. Belangrijk om hierbij op te merken is de evolutie naar een systeem waarbij de verantwoordelijkheid bij één persoon komt te liggen; het kind moet beter zijn best doen, de leerkracht moet competent worden, de vorige leerkracht moet de kinderen beter voorbereiden, de ouder moet meer/minder betrokken zijn, de zorgcoördinator moet een gepaste oplossing vinden, enz. Dit geldt voor alle betrokkenen binnen onderwijs, en dus ook voor de zorgcoördinator. Hij/zij wordt gezien als een 'change agent' met een individuele verantwoordelijkheid, die alle *agency* heeft om inclusie te verwezenlijken en daar ook de verantwoordelijkheid voor draagt. Dit is een dubbele beweging: de zorgcoördinator wordt op deze manier gepositioneerd maar positioneert zichzelf ook zo. De individualisering van verantwoordelijkheid gaat samen met een verantwoordingscultuur en een schuld-discours. Dit is nefast voor de samenwerking tussen verschillende betrokkenen. In dit onderzoek herdenk ik de concepten van 'agency' en 'verantwoordelijkheid' om andere 'subjecten' te vormen en een inclusieve praktijk te realiseren.

Het herdenken van de huidige praktijk vraagt om een diffractieve manier van onderzoek doen, waarbij men de realiteit niet wil spiegelen maar nieuwe inzichten wil bekomen door andere methodieken te gebruiken, theoretisch concepten in te pluggen, enz. In zowel het eerste als het derde hoofdstuk geef ik inzicht in hoe dit onderzoek evolueerde naar een poststructuralistisch/new materialism⁴⁹ manier van onderzoek doen. Binnen het onderzoek heb ik samengewerkt met drie groepen: Disability Studies groep, de Collective Biography groep en de groep met de zorgcoördinatoren. De Disability Studies groep is de onderzoeksgroep waar ik deel van uitmaak. In deze groep hadden we de kans om nauw samen te werken met Prof. Bronwyn Davies. Zij introduceerde ons in de diffractieve methodologie, Collective biography⁵⁰ en faciliteerde verschillende collective biography workshops over hoe we 'verschil' anders kunnen conceptualiseren. Deze groep vormde de collective biography groep. Ten slotte heb ik samengewerkt met vier zorgcoördinatoren. Dit lijken op het eerste zicht drie aparte groepen maar ze zijn veel met elkaar verweven en beïnvloeden elkaar in kennisconstructie. Het onderzoek ontwikkelde zich doorheen de verschillende ontmoetingen. In poststructuralistisch/new materialistisch onderzoek worden de onderzoeker en de participanten dicht bij elkaar gebracht. Vanuit de ontmoetingen bouwen we kennis op en wordt het mogelijk om wat we vanzelfsprekend vinden te herdenken. Dit heeft als consequentie dat je als onderzoeker betrokken bent en participeert. In hoofdstuk drie bespreek ik mijn positie als onderzoeker. De ervaring die ik heb als ouder van een kind dat wordt gepercipieerd als 'verschillend van de norm' is hierin bepalend. Daarnaast beschrijf ik het proces van het faciliteren van een collective biography workshop.

In het vierde hoofdstuk heb ik het concept 'assemblage' gebruikt om *agency* te herdenken. Assemblage is een filosofisch concept van Deleuze: *'een assemblage bestaat uit verschillende componenten – zowel mensen als het materiële en discours'*. Het gaat niet zozeer over wat er in een assemblage aanwezig is, maar eerder wat de verhoudingen zijn en wat dat produceert. Aan de hand van de foto van de werkplek van de zorgcoördinator werden verschillende verbindingen en verhoudingen zichtbaar (vb. samenwerking met verantwoordelijke kinderopvang). Hieruit kon ik besluiten dat niet enkel de mens *agency* heeft maar ook het materiële (vb. de ruimte van een werkplek, de agenda die openligt, het tafelkleed met bloemetjes,...). Zij brengen ook beweging in de assemblage.

49 Is een stroming die vertrekt vanuit diversiteit, het individu decentraliseert, aandacht heeft voor het materiële en een tegenbeweging is tegen totaliserende en reductionistische manieren van denken.

50 Collective biography is een onderzoeksmethodologie waarbij herinneringen verteld worden aan de hand van een theoretische concept- een topic dat men wil onderzoeken. Hierbij gaat het niet over de juistheid van de herinneringen maar over een gezamenlijke kennisconstructie omtrent het proces van subjectivering. De kennis vloeit voort uit de ontmoeting tussen participanten.

Hieruit concluderen we dat de individuele *agency* van een zorgcoördinator samenhangt met andere actoren en dat we niet alleen moeten kijken naar de mensen, maar ook naar het materiële en de discours die aanwezig zijn in een school/in een maatschappij. Hierbij is het van belang dat de zorgcoördinator gericht is op het aangaan van verbindingen om de assemblage sterker te maken. In de huidige context is er weinig tijd en staat verbindend werken onder druk. Toch is het belangrijk om als zorgcoördinator gericht te zijn op verbinding en vernieuwing en dus de assemblage niet tot stilstand te brengen maar in beweging te houden. Dit betekent ook dat de zorgcoördinator moet nadenken over de barrières die hij zelf installeert.

In hoofdstuk vijf beschrijf ik het proces waarbij we opschuiven van een oordelende naar een ethische houding door een diffractieve methodologie uit te werken. Vanuit de collectieve biography met de zorgcoördinatoren werkten we met herinneringen over ‘het (niet) opnemen van verantwoordelijkheid’. In de discussie werd duidelijk dat we de betrokkenen categoriseerden en een oordelende en moralistische houding aannamen. Hierdoor geraakten we niet verder in ons denken. Ik ontwikkelde een diffractief script om op een andere manier aan de slag te gaan met de herinnering, om opening te krijgen in ons denken en handelen. Het script legt de meervoudige identiteit van actoren bloot en door het script te spelen worden verbindingen zichtbaar. Het Griekse koor verwoordt bijvoorbeeld wat er allemaal op ons drukt en wat we ook opnemen. Door het script te spelen ervaren we de positionering van de verschillende actoren. Het script maakt dat we andere mogelijkheden zien dan het oordelende en het script laat ons stilstaan bij wat we kunnen-doen in een bepaalde situatie. Hierbij is er een verschuiving waar te nemen van de individuele verantwoordelijkheid naar een ethische relationele verantwoordelijkheid. Het script biedt geen concrete antwoorden maar brengt andere vragen naar boven zoals bijvoorbeeld ‘hoe willen we samenwerken?’.

In het laatste hoofdstuk breng ik de inzichten samen over het werken met verschillende groepen (Disability Studies groep, Collective biography groep, groep zorgcoördinatoren) en de inzichten vanuit mijn ouderperspectief. Ik stel een zestal concepten centraal: *difference, inclusion as an ethical project, entangled agency, intra-action, diffraction en response-ability*. De zes concepten zijn onlosmakelijk met elkaar verbonden.

Hoe verschil wordt geconceptualiseerd is van belang. Een categoriale benadering (= deficit denken) zet een persoon vast en heeft vastomlijnde uitkomsten. Deze manier van denken is nog steeds dominant binnen onderwijs. Hiertegenover staat Deleuzes invulling van ‘differentiation’ waarbij er openheid is voor verschil en waarbij de ander wordt gezien als ‘emergent intra-corporal multiplicity’. Openstaan voor verschil begint bij onszelf. We zien inclusie dan niet als het managen en reduceren van verschil maar wel als het openstaan voor en ruimte geven aan ‘differentiation’. Op die manier gaat inclusie niet over het includeren van een groep kinderen met specifieke noden, maar wordt inclusie een ethisch project dat start bij onszelf. Het onderzoek brengt naar voor dat individuele *agency* verweven is met andere intra-actieve actoren (materiële en immateriële). Dit houdt in dat een zorgcoördinator niet losstaat van zijn context, maar er juist door gevormd wordt. ‘Je bent geen zorgcoördinator’ maar ‘je wordt een zorgcoördinator’. Elke subject is deel van de assemblage en wordt geconstrueerd door de voortdurende veranderende omgeving. De functie zorgcoördinatie is geen afvinklijst van taken en is uniek voor iedere school. Hierbij is het van belang om inzicht te hebben in de processen van normalisatie en uitsluiting - waar niemand, ook niet de zorgcoördinator - zich buiten kan zetten. Een nomadische positie aannemen is van belang om te ontsnappen aan dominante discours. De zorgcoördinator moet kunnen bewegen tussen ambivalente krachten waarbinnen hij/zij voortdurend moet balanceren. Het vraagt de vaardigheid om in iedere assemblage ‘in te kunnen pluggen’ en op zoek te kunnen gaan naar verbindingen en afstemming om de assemblage te versterken. Denken in termen van verbindingen maakt dat er meer mogelijk is. In het samenwerken is het van belang dat er intra-actieve verwevenheid is. Het gaat over verbindend samenwerken, een ontmoeting met openheid naar de andere en gericht op niet-weten. Van de zorgcoördinator wordt verwacht dat hij zijn expertpositie loslaat en inzet op een positie van verbindend samenwerken. In deze samenwerking is de stem van ouders en kinderen van belang. Een relationele ethiek zorgt dat we afstappen van een procedurele verantwoordelijkheid waarbij verantwoordelijkheid en verantwoording bij één individu komen te liggen. Dit vraagt openheid voor en responsiviteit naar de andere. Om met deze ethische en complexe praktijk om te gaan is het van belang om diffractief te denken en te ageren zodat we vanzelfsprekendheden kunnen herdenken. In dit onderzoek geef ik

voorbeelden van diffractieve methoden die de complexiteit en gelaagdheid voluit laten spelen. Ze helpen ons om af te stappen van oplossingsgerichte methodes die de realiteit simplificeren en reduceren.

Niemand van ons is almachtig maar ook niemand is onmachtig. We hebben allemaal de mogelijkheid om verantwoordelijkheid en verantwoording niet te individualiseren en zo de schuld op iemand of iets anders te steken (menselijke en materiële actoren). Met dit onderzoek reik ik geen pasklaar stappenplan aan maar bied ik een open denkkader, dat toont dat inclusie start bij onszelf. We hebben immers allemaal de mogelijkheid om te (re) ageren en dat gaat verder dan een stoel aanbieden aan een kind in de klas.

Summary

This research wants to rethink the position of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in supporting teachers. The SENCO is an internal support worker whose main priority is the “*creation of equal opportunities for all children in the context of regular preschools and primary schools*”. I problematise the fact that the SENCO is positioned or positions himself/herself as a ‘change agent’ because this implies the attribution of agency to an individual. It could lead to the misconception that the individual agent has all the agency to transform the school and becomes individually responsible for success or failure. This evolution stands in the way of working collaboratively with shared responsibility. The aim of this research is to look for a positive way out through rethinking the concepts of ‘agency’ and ‘responsibility’.

In Chapter One it becomes clear that inclusive education is a pressing topic that triggers many feelings and questions, whereby inclusion is frequently put in the corner of the impossible (Allan 2007). This becomes visible through the implementation of the M-decree (Measures for students with educational needs) and the new support model. At the same time there are children, who are following or have already followed a path of inclusive education. It is within this challenging context that inclusive education must be implemented.

The SENCO is part of this complex educational assemblage. In Chapter Two I examine the current educational landscape where the ambivalent processes of abjecting as well as reclaiming the monstrous Other (Shildrick 2002) and the process of normalisation are all at work. Through abjecting and excluding the monstrous Other - the one who is different from the norm - the regular school wants to protect its imaginary boundaries in order to maintain normalised schooling. Schools have become increasingly ableist places, whereby the ‘normal-curve’ is used to create the normal subject and to position the others as abnormal, different/disabled, and monstrous. Simultaneously, the monster is reclaimed, which opens up possibilities to ‘trouble, re-shape and re-fashion’ the conventions of schooling. Being open to difference/disability means that everyone becomes different from ourselves. The two concepts of ‘monster’ and ‘normalisation’ help me to explore and understand the context in which the SENCO works and is constituted by. Further on, I explore the legislation and regulations and the epistemology of the ‘care coordinator’. The care that is given can be understood as a phenomenon that is socially constructed through a variety of cultural, professional and institutional practices (Goodley and Tregaskis 2006). I highlight some of the repetitive and habituated practices through which the SENCO is constituted. This helps me to understand the role and the position of the SENCO as history is working through past, present, and

future (Davies 2017). I also provide insight into the SENCO's everyday practice and lived experience through a subdivision of five roles that the SENCO can undertake (arbiter, rescuer, auditor, collaborator, and expert).

Through the detailed description of the SENCOs' practice I realised how the SENCO is constituted by various discourses that enables and limits the lives of children who are different/disabled. The SENCO (like every other agent in the educational assemblage) is positioned as the individual who is responsible for the transformations they need to accomplish. In this research, I want to problematise the danger of assigning all responsibility to one person, because it mobilizes a responsibility-blame discourse. Rather than being locked into the present patterns of such relentless individualisation and accountability, I want to conduct research in ways that allow for the possibility to produce, over time, different practices and different kinds of subjects. In order to do this I want to rethink the concept of agency and responsibility.

Rethinking the current practice asks for a diffractive way of doing research; it moves beyond reflection, or mirroring of what is assumed to be already there (Mitchell, 2017). Instead, I want to open new thoughts and actions. Diffraction requires us 'to read insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specifications of relations of difference and how they matter' (Barad 2007, 71). In Chapters One and Three, I describe how the PhD research evolved using a poststructuralist/new materialist approach where collaborative work was fundamental. I have worked with three co(laborative) learner groups: Disability Studies Group Ghent, the collective biography group, and the SENCO group. My roots are grounded in disability studies, and I am a member of the Disability Studies group Ghent (DSE). The DSE group embraced the opportunity to work closely with Prof. Bronwyn Davies. She introduced the Collective Biography methodology (Davies and Gannon, 2009), which works with the telling and sharing of stories around a relevant research topic to make the everyday discourses visible through which people and events emerge in all their multiplicity' (De Schauwer et al. 2017). The last collaborative assemblage is a group of four SENCOs with whom I have established a long-term working relationship. In the beginning all this projects seemed different and separate but they are intertwined and mutual entangled. There was no preconceived plan; the research emerged out of interactions and connections. In poststructuralism/new materialism, the subject and the object of the research are brought much closer together and knowledge emerges through these encounters, and opening up the possibility to reimage what we take for granted. In Chapter Three I explore how the researcher is part of the research assemblage and I discuss my position as a researcher. My experiences as a parent of a child who is perceived different from the norm is determined. Subsequently I discuss my search for ways to facilitate a collective biography workshop.

In Chapter Four I use the concept of 'assemblage' to make visible how agency emerges from relationships and becomes distributed and rearranges the world. An assemblage 'is not the result of the sum of its properties, but the actual exercise of its various components' capacities to intra-act with each other' (Schoepher and Paisiou 2016, 389). The question becomes not what an assemblage is, or what parts it contains, but rather what it connects with. By using material images of the workplace of the SENCO, and reading-the-data-while-thinking-with-theory, we deconstruct the individualisation of agency. I can conclude that individual agency is entangled with multiple enlivening agencies (human and non-human) that are simultaneously at play and that affect each other, and can open up new possibilities for children who are perceived as different. As a consequence, each SENCO must work with a focus on collaboration in order to make the inclusion assemblage more powerful. Thinking outside territorialising lines is vital work to be undertaken. This involves critical thinking about what education we want, and 'everybody involved needs to consider how their own actions create barriers to inclusion' (Allan 2003).

In Chapter Five I describe the process of moving away from individual accountability and responsibility, moralism and judgement to ethics through using diffractive methodologies. We worked with a story told in a collective biography workshop on the topic of taking and not taking up responsibility. At first we found ourselves rushing to moral judgement and the move toward new ways of thinking was foreclosed. We developed a diffractive script to explore the entangled intra-active perceptions of the various players in order to open up our thinking. The diffractive method made the multiplicity of the different agents as well as the repeated citations visible, and it

destabilized them, reconstructing and deterritorialising ideas and thoughts about responsibility, education and teaching to develop a new understanding of the relational work that needs to be done by the various players in the (inclusive) classroom.

In the final chapter I bring together what came out of the co(laborative) groups; the rethinking and the re-conceptualisation of difference/disability in the collective biography group, the work with the SENCO, my own experiences with my son, and the work with my colleagues in the Disability Studies Group. The following concepts come to the foreground: *difference, inclusion as an ethical project, entangled agency, intra-action, diffraction, and response-ability*. The different concepts are mutually entangled and intertwined.

How difference is conceptualised is important for inclusion. Categorical difference is focussed on lack, it locates a problem within the person, and sets out predetermined outcomes. I have come to the conclusion that the tradition of categorisation and segregation is deeply imbedded in our Flemish educational system and makes segregation unobjectionable (Danforth, 2015). In the work that was done in the collective biography group we found that a constructive way out is to think of difference in terms of **differenciation**, that is, being open to the other and not to see the other as a fixed subject, but as an emergent, intra-corporal multiplicity, always becoming. Being open starts with ourselves and moves away from seeing inclusion as managing the difference, towards creating a school community that is open and responsive to difference. Inclusion is not about including a certain group of children, who are categorized as other-than-normal, in a different group. Rather, it is something we must do to ourselves; **inclusion is an ethical project** (Allan, 2005).

In my research I have come to understand that **individual agency is entangled** with multiple intra-active agencies (human and non-human) and that the SENCO does not exist independently from his/her context. They are subjects-in-relation, just one of the many intra-active agents who are part of the assemblage; they emerge through ongoing relationality. I have argued that a SENCO is a process of becoming. It is a doing, a practice. As a result, the function of a SENCO is not a standard package of tasks detached from the context, the history, the space/time/mattering, etc., of the different agents.

I have also learnt that the processes of normalisation and abjection are strong forces, and are working on and through us. It is important that SENCOs are aware that none of us, including the SENCO, can put themselves outside the hegemony of normativity and that we all have to take up the responsibility to **modify the effect of normalisation and difference** within routine schooling practice as well as in our own ways of working. It is in this complex practice with persistent, complementary, contradictory forces, that a SENCO and all the other agents need to operate. It requires the ability to take up the practice within these multiple forces and to look for possibilities and a positive way forward. It comes together **with the ability to tune oneself to any environment** (Nariain 2017, 33). It is a continuing process of escaping binary and fixed positions. The fluent and nomadic position requires a lot of flexibility that is crucial if one is to resist hegemonic structures and to tackle boundaries and barriers (Braidotti 2011). To change this complex practice from within is about developing partnerships and working in more open and exploratory ways (Raphael 2013). This implies that the SENCO must work together with different participants, form alliances, set up collaborative learning communities, and be aware of opportunities that are present in the assemblage (Van de Putte, De Schauwer, Van Hove, Davies 2017), because agency depends on collaboration, connection, and interference (Bennet 2010).

In these collaborations, **intra-actions**, it is about affect and being affected and a focus on what we do not know. An encounter can open up the space to imagine things differently and expand our capacity for thought and action (Davies, 2014). Placing collaborations and connections at the center will enable SENCOs to take up a more **consultative, collaborative, and facilitative position**, and to move from an expert model toward a more collaborative model. In this collaboration, partnerships with children and parents are important because they help to deconstruct habitual practices and repetitive thinking. An **onto-epistemological ethics** holds the possibility to move away from a technical, procedural responsibility with its judgment, moralism and individualization of responsibility and accountability. An onto-epistemological ethics is about being open and being responsive to

the other and it is a tool to free the subject from the dominant thinking about neoliberalized schooling for the abled; it enriches our pedagogy and revalues the affective, ethical and relational dimensions of education (Zembylas, Bozalek, Shefer,, 2014).

This ethical and complex practice asks every partner to think and act **diffractively** in order to trouble the taken-for-granted humanist assumptions, the deficit modes of thought and binary thinking. Throughout the research I have demonstrated possibilities for working diffractively (collective biography, diffractive script, etc.). Acting diffractively helps us to move away from the expert model and solution oriented approaches that simplify reality to one hegemonic truth, towards a position that starts from the view that reality is multiple (Latour 2004).

'It is about learning how to intra-act responsibly as part of the world, while understanding that we are not the only active beings (Barad 2007, 390). None of us is almighty, but also, none of us is helpless; we all have the ability to respond and this starts with not individualizing responsibility and accountability and not putting blame on other agents (human and non-human). I am very aware that this PhD has not provided a preconceived plan with a set of steps to follow, but I hope that I have opened up the idea that inclusion starts with ourselves, and that it is necessary to think about what we can do to take up response-ability, which is much more than offering a child a chair in a classroom.'

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Data management Plan

Data Storage Fact Sheet 1

Name/identifier study: Methodology –Position of the researcher – Chapter 3- Conclusions
Author: Inge Van de Putte
Date: 6/2/2018

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Author: Inge Van de Putte

Date: 6/2/2018

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Data Storage Fact Sheet 3

Name/identifier study: Rethinking Responsibility–Chapter2 - Chapter 5- Conclusions

Author: Inge Van de Putte

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