Constructions of Autism in Education: 
Towards a Radical Inclusivity

by

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ABSTRACT

Inclusion of children with autism in public education has become a pressing issue. As more and more children are diagnosed, schools are increasingly unable to provide individualized educational services and one to one aides for each of these children. In this master's thesis, the author describes the ways in which discourses around public education and the ideal neoliberal worker have in turn shaped discourses around students and workers with autism. Reimagining inclusion of students with autism pushes us to reimagine "autism" and "school" itself. Through discussions of the paradoxes of autistic speech and self determination, and the relationship between discourses of autism and discourses of education, the author suggests a new way to imagine autism, inclusion, and education.
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Chapter One
“All I want to know is, where does it come from?”

At the beginning of a workshop that I did for Quaker Sunday school educators about better inclusion practices of children with autism, a woman came up to me to ask a question. She looked straight at me and said, “All I want to know is, where does it come from?” She stood there waiting for an answer even though I had given no sign that I had heard her. I was busy straightening out handouts and looking for agendas, and I was irritated after having driven around Cambridge, MA looking for the meeting house. Where does it come from? Is she really expecting an answer from me? Right now? Where to start? Flustered, all I could answer in response was a clipped, “Don’t think I’m going to get into that here, but we’ll see, OK?”

Where does autism come from? Activists, scholars, geneticists, parents, teachers, students, children - we’ve all been asking this question for as long as “autism” has been a thing that we are aware of. Various people have attempted to address this concern from multiple angles. I can tell you right now that this project does not answer that question. In fact, I’m not sure that this project answers any questions at all. Here, I present an understanding of autism as it is that arises out of complex and specific historical and economic settings. Going beyond “awareness” as a device by which one raises money for a cause, I would like to invite us to develop an awareness of the circumstances that allow us to even ask the question, “Where does autism come from?”

In the early 1990's, Hans Aspergers’ groundbreaking paper describing what would become known as Asperger’s Syndrome, was translated from German to English by Uta Frith. Lorna Wing, another prominent autism researcher, proposed adding it to the growing “autism spectrum” (Feinstein, 2010). Children diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome were more verbal than those diagnosed with autism. They could read quite well, though writing was more difficult, and they seemed especially skilled with computers. And although this was not the first time
when autism had been described, or a child had been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, it was the moment when the present understanding of what autism is and the meaning behind it was understood, as a unified condition, a thing. This is the way in which autism is socially constructed; not solely in the body of an individual gone wrong, but in the way that society comes to know itself through interacting with that thing identified as autistic.

A better way of understanding this might be through thinking about the way that technology, metaphor, and the functioning of the brain have been imagined together in a specific place and time. The 1980’s and 1990’s were an important time technologically. Computers in the decades previous were industrial machines that took up entire buildings and required huge amounts of power. Computers only communicated via punch cards, that could perform some mathematical functions, but were nothing like the personal computers that we have today. In 1981, IBM introduced the first personal computer in a shape similar to how we know it today - a computer with a keyboard, a screen, and windows, though it wasn’t until the third incarnation of Windows in 1990 that these machines were useful or accessible to most people. How different would the future be with this new potential to meld human genius with machines?

There is nothing intrinsically wrong on it's own with comparing the brain to a computer. Metaphors are one way of making sense of concepts that are too vague or abstract to imagine on their own, and they are so entrenched in speech that it is almost impossible to avoid using them. For example, Scot Danforth (2008) describes how the way that we speak about time in English, positing a line with the future at one end, and the past behind - we imagine ourselves to be walking across that line, going forward into the future, or looking backwards into the past (Danforth, 2008). But time is not a straight line, going from the past to the future, and in fact, once we lose the structure of this metaphor, time becomes something that is much harder to
Imagine and pin down, and much less concrete. This does not mean that time does not exist, but it does mean that time itself is something that we have constructed in a way that makes it more real and concrete. The same can be said about the metaphors we use to describe the way that our minds work. These are such abstract concepts that a metaphor, like a mind being an empty vessel or anger being a hot fluid, helps us to beckon them into being through speech. These metaphors help us to make sense of reality - one could argue that they create reality itself.

Descriptions of autism borrowed from these new understandings of computers, as did descriptions of the workings of the brain generally. The assumption that “the genius of Einstein, Newton, and Bill Gates stems from an inhuman form of intelligence more specific to computers than to people,” (Nadesan, 2005: 131) suggests that autistic people, who seemed to have limited social skills but also “cognitive potentialities” (Kanner, 1943) are more like computers than people. Metaphors for describing the brain also began to take on terminology associated with computers - metaphors such as "you need more memory," "the brain is the command center of the body," "reprogram your brain." This occurs despite the fact that the human brain and the computer as we know it today (and knew it during the 1980's and beyond) have always been different devices. Our understanding of how the brain has changed due to our newfound technology metaphors, as well as advanced imaging techniques made possible by computer such as MRIs and PET scans. Instead of being a container to fill, the brain is the hard drive of the body, filled with software that runs programs that then lead to autonomous or instinctual action.

The metaphor of the brain like a computer, and autistic genius being similar to artificial intelligence, leads us to a place where certain forms of autism are “really” disability, and others are not. There is something special and exciting about a child with Asperger’s Syndrome, who may not be able to find a girlfriend, but could be the next Albert Einstein. It is almost possible to
imagine that this child is somehow redeemable, if rehabilitated properly, if reprogrammed sufficiently. This leads us even more towards what Karafyllis (2008) describes as “neuroelitism;” the preference in autism advocacy and activism for the value of the life experiences and general humanity of higher functioning people with autism. This will be discussed in more detail towards the end of this introduction.

When we think about autism, it is sometimes tempting to imagine that despite our understanding of disability as a social construction, there is something about autism, and in particular low functioning autism, that "really" is disability. It is tempting to see a twelve-year-old smearing his feces on the floor, or a nineteen year old repeatedly banging her head against a radiator, and understand that as real suffering, as opposed to the socially imposed suffering against people with high functioning autism (HFA) or Asperger's syndrome. Disability is not here, among children of color labeled emotionally disturbed and plopped automatically into special education classes. Disability is over there, where that ten year old is urinating on the carpet. It is tempting in the face of what we understand as "severe" autism to feel confident in putting aside our notions of disability as a social construction, if only to attend more completely to the suffering of the really disabled.

However, disability studies asks us to hang onto the notion of disability as a social construct, even when confronted with the knowledge of the suffering of those diagnosed with low-functioning autism. Majia Nadesan (2008) urges us to stay attuned to a social construction of disability, even as we understand that what we describe as autism has biological causes, explaining that we need to understand, "how various institutional relationships, expert authorities, and bodies of knowledge have sought to represent, divide, understand and act on biologically based but socially shaped and expressed, behavioral and cognitive differences such
as autism" (Nadesan, 2008: 79). Even though autism as we currently understand it may be caused by gene expressions, harmful effects stemming from the environment, or other biological causes, those causes themselves did not give birth to what we understand as autism today. In fact, the word "autism" was not used until 1919, and was not applied in a way that makes sense today until 1945 (Feinstein, 2010). If autism has existed as something that originates from biology for as long as we have existed as people, why is it that our understanding of autism did not begin until so recently? What can we understand about society today based on the way that we talk about and understand autism? And what is the effect of autism on society - not the effect of the boy smearing his feces on the floor, but the effect of how images are imagined, reimagined, described, redescribed, and invoked over and over again? And what of the boy himself? Where does his humanity lie?

To argue that autism is a social construction does not negate the fact that there are people who are diagnosed with autism. It does not downplay the oppression and fear that they experience because of their diagnosis. And it does not argue that there is no individual suffering due to autism, or that parents and siblings of autistic children do not also endure suffering. However, imagining autism as a social construction does allow us a momentary glimpse into a different world. What would the world be like if we had imagined autism differently, or not at all? What is it about autism that appears as noticeable? In particular, imagining autism as a social construction will help us to understand how our own understandings of normalcy, childhood, and what society is for stems from other social constructions. By understanding the history behind the social construction of autism, we can imagine a better world in which being autistic does not necessarily equal being a victim. Specifically for the purposes of this project, understanding autism as a social construction opens new possibilities for “truly” inclusive education.
It is important to realize when utilizing the language of social construction that the act of social construction by society is not intentional, and it is not possible to think one's way out of one's own complicity in it. For example, race is a social construction; anthropologists have debunked the persistent and powerful myth that there is more difference between people of different races than between people of the same race. Insofar as we experience race by looking at someone's skin color and physical traits, it has no effect on one's intelligence or potential. That said, although racial difference and race itself is a social construction, the reality of racism is a very real presence in our lives. As Alan Goodman (1997) writes, “race-as-bad-biology has nothing to do with race-as-lived-experience. Social policy does not need a biological basis, especially when a dark-skinned American is still roughly twice as likely to be denied a mortgage as is a light-skinned person with an equivalent income” (Goodman, 1997: 21-22). To be able to construct oneself without race is a huge privilege available to only those with white skin. By recognizing race as a social construction, as a white person, I do not free myself from accountability for the ways that I continue to benefit from the privileges bestowed on me by the ideology of racism, and my understanding that there is nothing simply real about race does not mean that I no longer participate in racism in society.

Similarly, a social construction of disability cannot lead us to the conclusion that "every child is a special needs child" or "we are all disabled." These are statements that I have encountered both working in schools and while doing the workshop that I describe at the beginning of this introduction. It is a similar construction of equally problematic phrases like “learning differedenced” or “differently abled” that separate the social experience of being disabled from the things about disability that stand out as different. For example, many people benefit from accessible buildings, though people who use wheelchairs rely on them. Ramps to front
doors allow people using wheelchairs to access the space, as well as making the building more accessible to parents pushing strollers, delivery people using dollies to carry heavy boxes, and people moving furniture in and out of the building. A ramp in front of a building is a good thing for many people, but the difference between the parent with the stroller and the person using a wheelchair is that a wheelchair user has no access to the space at all without the ramp, while the parent could find another way in (taking the child from the stroller and carrying them, bumping the stroller up the steps, etc). A ramp makes that space convenient for many people, but possible for some others. Better classroom practices, constructed with the needs of autistic students in mind make that space possible for them to access, may also serve to make it more convenient for neurotypical students. This does not lead us to conclude that everyone is autistic or that everyone is disabled - it does reveal the ways in which our socially constructed practices (and physically constructed buildings) determine the experience of space for everyone. As Michael Oliver (2009, 38) writes, “the social model is not an attempt to deal with the personal restrictions of impairment but the social barriers of disability.”

In the following pages I describe different ways of understanding autism socially. My particular interest and focus is on autism in educational settings. I came to this project after having worked as a paraprofessional (one-to-one aide) in a self-contained classroom for students identified with moderate to low functioning autism. Our classroom was a place where students between kindergarten and second grade were placed if they were determined to be so severely disabled that they could not participate in or benefit from regular classes. Our class was not unique - there are thousands of them all across North America, and many more students who attend classes like ours part time, and mainstream classes for the rest of the day. Our classroom was developed after it was determined that our students’ inability to fit into regular classes was a
result of a central deficit of their bodies and brains, rather than a problem with the mainstream classes themselves, or with the assumptions implicit in public education generally. Like many segregated classrooms, our was justified as a place where students would be given the “type” of education they require, where they would find “protection” from the attitudes of people outside the classroom, and where their teachers would have “those special qualities of patience, dedication and love” (Slee, 2004: 178, emphasis original).

Our classroom was seen as a good thing, and much of the time I agreed with this. I saw how our students were treated by teachers who didn’t think they belonged in their mainstreamed classrooms, and I know what a huge problem bullying is for kids perceived as “different” in any way. Still, the continued maintenance of segregated classrooms for students with autism continues to reinforce a “custodial” (Timmons, 2007) model of disability, in which only qualified caregivers are able to interact with disabled students, whose differences are so extreme that they cannot attend school with the normal population. In criticising the practice of segregated schooling for children diagnosed with disabilities, I do not question the individual motives of those involved in these segregated classrooms and experiences. I do, however, ask that those reading who may be involved in these practices take this analysis into consideration, especially as those practices help to construct autism.

I have a particular interest in school and inclusive pedagogy, but I do not want to imply here that all people diagnosed with autism are children, or that school is the only sphere where full inclusion of disabled people matters. Such thinking has done great violence to disabled people in the past, and continues to work to silence adults with disabilities in the public sphere, the ramifications of which I discuss in the next chapter. Following critical pedagogy, I imagine school to be one of many social sites where real justice and change can happen. School has the
potential to become a place where we can better understand privilege and oppression, and a place where we begin to live out a world of unity, community, and love together. To teach, writes William Ayers and Ryan Alexander-Tanner, "to live with one foot in the muck of the world as we find it - with its conventional patterns and received wisdom - and the other foot striding toward a world that could be but isn't yet."(Ayers & Alexander-Tanner, 2011: 11) My work asks us to focus on the muck of this world as we find it, while keeping in mind the possibility of that world that could be but isn't yet. Here I am focusing my argument on inclusive pedagogy, but I believe that it has ramifications outside of the world of school as well - ramifications that stretch to all of the numerous communities and potential communities that we find ourselves in together every day.

In her essay, "Oneself as another? Autism and Emotional Intelligence as Pop Science" Nicole C. Karafyllis (2008) identifies "neuroelitism" as a growing problem with the way that we think and theorize about autism (Karafyllis, 2008: 254). Neuroelitism, which derives from the word "neurotypical" as a way to describe people who are not autistic, is the way that public interest in autism is often directed towards those diagnosed as high functioning or Asperger's Syndrome. Asperger's Syndrome, which has historically described autistic people with higher than normal IQ and the ability to read early and well, presents genius alongside tragedy (Karafyllis, 2008). Because of public interest in the myth of the autistic savant, coupled with a cultural interest in genius, people with high functioning autism and Asperger's Syndrome are able to claim more space to speak in public and determine the discourse around their disabilities. People with low functioning autism, who are often incredibly limited in the amount of useful communication that they acquire, are not as represented in the neurodiversity movement and their parents and caretakers need different kinds of support and do not always receive it.
In terms of education discourse, I can say confidently that most calls for inclusion of children with autism into mainstream classrooms imagine these HFA rather than those diagnosed with LFA. In this project, I am trying very consciously to keep in mind both metaphorical ends of the metaphorical autism spectrum. I truly believe that there is nothing intrinsic about “low-functioning autism” that demands the segregation of people diagnosed with this disability from their peers for all activities all the time. In this late stage of capitalism coupled with liberal humanism, our worth as people is often explained by how productive we can and cannot be in society (Erevelles, 2005). People with HFA and Asperger's Syndrome are seen as more potentially productive in today's economy because of their apparently firm grasp of technology, and essentialist language about the genius of autism just as dangerous as language about the uselessness of autism. We need to keep in mind the economic system that we live in and the extent to which it dictates our understanding of the reality of the world.

Finally, a word - or rather, five hundred and thirty-two words - about language. Readers may have noticed that I do not consistently make the choice to employ what is known as “person first” language throughout this document. This is not an editing mistake, or a clumsy and insensitive oversight (although I am sometimes guilty of those). The purpose of person first language is to “put the person before the label.” (Jones, Fauske, & Carr, 2011: 3). An example of this linguistic device is to describe someone as “a person with autism” rather than “an autistic person.” Ever since person first language has become the mandated way of speaking about disability in legal documents, education related documents, general bureaucracy and through activism (not to mention the American Psychological Association style manual by which I am trying to write this paper), there have also been groups of disabled people arguing against it. Michael Oliver writes, “This liberal and humanist view flies in the face of reality as it is
experienced by disabled people themselves who argue that far from being an appendage, disability is an essential part of the self” (Oliver, 1990: xiii). Titchkosky continues the critique, writing that person first language as utilized by the Canadian government, “does not regard disability as a proper or expected aspect of personhood, but instead as a danger to personhood” (Titchkosky, 2011: 54).

There are also some people with disabilities (sometimes initialized as PWD) who prefer person first language, for a variety of reasons. I have done my best in this document to remember the politics and ideology behind the language that I use. When referring to individual people, I do the best I can to use what appears to be their preference. When citing sources, I cite directly and do not “[sic]” when person first language is or is not in use. As for language that is (barely) in my own control, I find that I move back and forth. I have not found a way to sit easily with either interpretation of person-first language, and as someone who is temporarily able-bodied, I feel it is my responsibility to alert readers to the fact that there is a controversy over the use of person-first language, and that it should not be up to a majority to set standards for how to refer to a minority. If nothing else, the differing viewpoints about person first and non-person first language illustrate the investment in language and ideology so important to anyone within a society.

In the Quaker community with which I am involved, we have a way of describing when we are unsure of what we are to do next, and rather than doing something, we need to sit with our unsure feelings and see where they take us. We can say, “I have not found clarity.” In this tradition, I am stating “I have not found clarity,” about the use of person first language, because it is clear that clarity does not exist. I refuse to consistently utilize language mandated by government bureaucracy when so many disabled people are voicing, problems with that
language, loudly and persistently, and I want to remain cognizant of the fact that some people with disabilities find that that kind of language is more useful for them.

One of the slogans of disability rights movements worldwide has been, “Nothing about us without us.” By describing the controversy here and providing some sources to go to for more information, I hope that I am being more inclusive in my narrative, inviting more voices in, and listening a little harder. I urge readers - teachers, parents, students, friends, colleagues, disabled, with disability, or temporarily able bodied, autistic, with autism, or neurotypical - to sit with me, without clarity, on this or many other seemingly straightforward topics, like autism and education. In our current political world, where binary oppositions polarize our opinions and pit us against each other, the willingness to sit together without clarity is a radical act.
Chapter Three
Autism and Education

Autism is a disability that is often characterized by a certain performance of language. The word itself is derived from the Greek word “autos” meaning “self,” and was coined in the 1940's to describe a symptom of childhood schizophrenia - the extreme absorption into the self that autistic children seem to inhabit (Biklen, 2005). Autistic children are said to not communicate in even the most basic ways such as reaching up to signal the desire to be held by an adult as babies (Frith, 1991). Because of these constructions of normal child development, autistic children have often been described as people who do not have a desire for communication (despite having the physical ability required to communicate that desire). (Murray, 2008).

A major signifier of success in the world of autism education is the accomplishment of coaxing children towards speech and communication. There is a practical need for speech and language expression that I do not want to argue against. It is important for people to be able to express their unique needs in such a way that they can receive the things that they need in society, and much of the apparent suffering that takes place in descriptions of autism come from an inability to speak or be heard. Most autistic adults do not learn enough language to get by in the world, and this is a problem, both for them and for the people that they live with and who provide them with care.

In school, speech by students can be an important aspect of student empowerment and self determination. How can we enter into one of Freire’s dialogues without speech, or share and make sense of our experience or even experience the world without language?

There is not an inherent problem in wanting to encourage students to speak. However, I worry that the insistence on speech without reflection or clarification, or understanding how “speech” itself is a social construction, might render some people permanently silent. And while
I have noticed a vague “need for the voices of the disabled,” in disability studies texts, as well as in critical pedagogy that addresses special education, I have rarely come across any other disability singled out as the one where we need to encourage speech by those diagnosed with it. Who has ever heard of “Cerebral Palsy Speaks,” for example? My question here is deceptively simple - how can we understand the problem of autistic speech through autism awareness campaigns?

I address this question by first turning to Foucault’s idea (1978) about the privilege given to the act of confession. Bearing in mind that confession is not necessarily a liberatory act, I discuss a recent public awareness campaign by the advocacy group Autism Speaks. This campaign to locates and establishes the most hegemonic form of discourse produced about autistic speech. I then turn more in depth to another current Autism Speaks campaign, an advertisement produced with Allstate Insurance, promising consumers that if they obtain a free insurance quote from Allstate, Allstate will donate ten dollars to Autism Speaks. By knowing autistic speech as one thing, I suggest that we come to know non-autistic speech as something else. It is important not to critique only the most shocking or clearly offensive advertisements by groups like Autism Speaks, but to look into the ones that are more mundane, that more easily slip under the radar, as they clearly construct the taken-for-grantedness of the way that we construct autistic speech.

In The History of Sexuality (1978) Foucault discusses the privilege in Western society given to the act of confession. He writes, “the obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer feel it as a sense of power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, ‘demands’ only to surface” (Foucault, 1978: 66). In the Middle Ages, confession becomes an
exercise of the power of the church over the "sexual deviants" of society, and Foucault argues that even as confession itself has been connected to liberation, the nature of the obligation to confess still empowers those already in power, even as it produces a feeling of liberation to the confessor. The terms of confession are dictated not by the confessor, but by the priest being confessed to; there are only certain things that one is able to confess to, and certain redeeming actions that may follow. Confession can serve to turn a speech act that has the potential to be socially radical and challenging to existing regimes of power and domination into something that is located within the individual and can be remedied by the individual’s promise to "work" on himself or herself.

Confession also refers to relationships beyond that of the sinner and the priest. In fact, confession is something that we do over and over again in popular media in society. We can see the act of confession clearly in the genre of memoir writing, and in particular, memoirs about autism. Through many memoirs, writers confess to audiences their shortcomings, and emerge at the end of the story redeemed in some way. Memoirs by parents of children with autism are no different in this respect, and the present popularity of memoir as a genre generally may have contributed to the growing numbers of parental memoirs produced. In his essay, “No search? No subject?,” James Fisher (2008) writes about what he describes as the “Autism Conversion Narrative” as it appears in autism memoir. This idea comes from the understanding of the “classic American conversion narrative,” a trope used throughout much American literature. The “classic American conversion narrative,” Fisher writes, is characterized by the “human being before God and nature, striving for redemption in a distinctly Protestant idiom.” Particularly pertinent to this discussion is the role speech plays in this narrative. He remarks, “the subject was
expected to speak in his or her own true voice,” through the conversion narrative (Fisher, 2008: 55).

Fisher suggests that the growing number of memoirs and movies that feature ambiguously autistic characters could fit into what he terms an “autism conversion narrative,” in which autism is present but rarely invoked by name (maybe once or twice through the whole book) and in which the autistic character serves to bring realization and self awareness to a non-autistic character. Similarly, Osteen’s (2008) analysis of popular films about autism and autistic-like character suggests that this self-awareness is experienced by parents. He suggests that the title “How I Saved My Child from Autism and Became a Better Person” could easily stand in for the actual titles on a number of parental memoirs about autism. Autism here becomes the symbol through which the non-autistic become aware of and confess their personal failings, and then through the redemption of the child through intensive behavior therapy and speech training, the neurotypical main character him or herself becomes saved. Confession works to locate autism once again in the body of one individual, and the responsibility for that individual in the bodies of one or two people in his life. Through the redemption granted by this self-realization, the individual becomes saved from autism, and the parent becomes a better person more generally.

There is nothing naturally liberatory about the act of confession. In fact, confession can serve to further support those in power by focusing on individual situations and actions rather than on society as a whole. In the examples by Osteen and Fisher, parental confession via autism does not place accountability in schools which need to become more flexible places open to lots of different people, nor does it place accountability in the state which needs to be prioritizing funding for support services for people with autism and their families. It also does not place accountability in a society that is becoming increasingly intolerant of those constructed as
nonproductive under neoliberalism, where one’s worth is attributed to one’s ability to participate in the economy. Rather, it places accountability in the bodies of parents, both those of children with and without autism, and expects them to be responsible for the acceptable development of their children. Similarly, parents become responsible also for “raising awareness” of autism both as it affects their children and families and those of others.

In addition to the role of confession in literature about autism, and the close relationship enjoyed between confession and speech, the idea of speech figures prominently in discourse about autism awareness. Awareness forces a linguistic definition of a problem or state to be aware of. One becomes aware of “autism” and the meaning of “autism” as uttered in speech. In many of these campaigns, there does not seem to be a clear connection between awareness and preventative action: go on a walk, raise money, wear a ribbon for autism. The language of awareness is language that does not separate between the thing itself that one needs to be aware of, and the way that it is being addressed. The proceeds go to “autism,” one is told, not, “the proceeds go to an organization that provides teacher in-service training so that they are better able to reach autistic students”. Awareness does not force us to imagine the world as it could be, or to recognize autism as a description of a certain type of person who has been described in various ways through history (see the next chapter for an in-depth discussion of different ways autism has been categorized).

There is a whole industry of fundraising around the topic of “autism awareness” as it connects to the idea of autistic speech. Autism Speaks is the largest and best known autism awareness organization in North America. Every year on the night of April 1, cities all over the world "light it up blue," shining blue lights on buildings and sculpting blue skylines against the black sky. These cities are geographically diverse; Toronto, Chicago, London, and Dubai all
"light it up blue" on this night. "Light it Up Blue," is meant to be a kick off to Autism Awareness Month all over the world. The month of April is officially declared "autism awareness month" in the United States. After a campaign by the same organization, on December 18, 2007, the United Nations declared April 2 as "World Autism Awareness day," making autism one of three "health related" conditions that receive World Awareness days by the organization. (Autism Speaks, 2012)

But Autism Speaks is also known for creating controversy. While the often purport to “speak for” autism, they do not have any vocal members who themselves are diagnosed as autistic. Autism Speaks is a parent and teacher resource - not a place for autistic people themselves to speak. (Autism Self Advocacy Network, 2012) Over 60% of the money that they raise goes to overhead costs, and 44% is provided for “research” which is mostly focused on “causation” and “prevention” rather than improving the lives of autistic people themselves. (Autism Self Advocacy Network, 2012)

Autism Speaks is also behind some of the more controversial autism public service announcements, including the “I Am Autism” video that featured a malicious, robotic voice threatening, “I am autism...I speak your language fluently, and with every voice I take away, I acquire yet another language...I work faster than pediatric AIDS, cancer, and diabetes combined. And if you are happily married, I will make sure that your marriage fails.” (McGuire, 2011) The organization also came under criticism for their documentary, Autism Every Day, in which a parent of an autistic child admitted to wishing to murder her child and then commit suicide. (Murray, 2008)

Currently, Autism Speaks’ “odds campaign” feature pictures of children doing things that they enjoy, with odds presented about their chances of growing up to be what it is they are
pretending to be, versus how likely they are to have autism. For example, in a magazine ad featuring a little boy skiing, the text reads “Odds of a child becoming an Olympic athlete: 1 in 29,000. Odds of a child being diagnosed with autism: 1 in 110.” The ad then lists “some things to look for,” which include, “No big smiles or other joyful expressions by 6 months,” “No babbling by 12 months,” and “No words by 16 months.” In this magazine advertisement, autism is defined as a disorder recognizable primarily by a lack of speech, even though some autistic children are hyperlexic, and some can speak fluently at much earlier ages than normal children, and some autistic children speak almost constantly, repeating words they’ve heard on TV or in songs. Autism is also seen as a much more credible outcome for the particular child depicted than his chances of becoming the subject of his fantasies. The ad suggests that when you see your four-year-old learning how to ski, you should be focusing not on the distant chance that he will grow up to become an Olympic skier, or even that he's having fun, but instead on searching for the signs that would lead to a much more statistically likely autism diagnosis.

In a different advertisement that ran in November and December of 2011, this one on television (Autism Speaks, 2011), a adult’s voice reads copy over still images of children, some of whom are grinning and interacting with the camera, others who look distant and stereotypically autistic. Overlaid over the pictures are quotation marks, framing the children as they play, look off into the distance, laugh, and interact with adult caregivers. In the background plays a somber piano and string quartet. The voice says:

*Autism affects one in every one hundred ten children.*

*And one in seventy boys.*

*Often, those with autism have trouble communicating, but now, a simple insurance quote can help give autism a stronger voice.*
Just get any Allstate quote, now through December 14th, and they'll give ten dollars to Autism Speaks to help fund autism research. Up to 500,000 dollars. Every quote makes a difference.

The voice then changes, to that of an adult man:

I have twin sons with autism, so this is a cause that is close to my heart.

The image of the speaking man, who turns out to be Allstate CEO Mark LaNeve, fades up over a picture of him and his family during a Light it Up Blue event, as he continues:

By getting an Allstate quote today you're helping Autism Speaks turn up the volume on autism research, advocacy and outreach. With this easy act, you can put your family in good hands, and help support a great cause. That's my quote.

Now, please, it's time to get yours. For every quote, ten dollars goes to Autism Speaks. On behalf of those who can't say it for themselves, thank you.

The viewer then sees a blue screen, with contact information for both Allstate Insurance and Autism Speaks, as the piano music ends.

This ad is interesting for several reasons. It is not the most shocking advertisement about autism, and it did not garner as much attention from autism activists as other Autism Speaks campaigns, like the I Am Autism advertisement. It is not its outrageousness but its ordinariness that merits mention here. Titchkosky (2008) writes that focusing on “ordinary talk” shows us how “unexamined conceptions of disability” proliferate as something taken for granted, something that is “obvious” or “common sense.” There is nothing different about the way that it uses music, the stock photo pictures of children, the way the text overlays over the images on the screen. And the talking, balding, white man at the end hardly stands out. This advertisement
functions within various discourses - the use of the “Ken Burns effect”\(^1\) in videotaping still photographs, the multicultural pictures of children, the language used to tie a corporate head to the intimate life of the viewer's families - and similarly, it utilizes the discourse of “autism as the condition of not speaking” in order to tie obtaining free insurance quotes to rendering voice to autistic people.

The advertisement clearly positions “speech” as central to its message early on. The quotation marks that are superimposed over the pictures of children evoke the idea that someone is speaking through them. The ambiguity surrounding the children's neurostatus\(^2\) suggests both that none of these children are autistic, and all of them could be. In that way, it is evocative of the "odds of" PSAs, in which children engaged in activities that they enjoy are suggested as being possibly autistic, despite looking "normal." In any case, the children in this advertisement are not only ambiguous as to their neurostatus, none of them have an active speaking role. In fact, none of them speak, act, or even move - all are frozen in still pictures, and it is impossible for them to show any kind of voice or agency in this advertisement.

\(^1\) The Ken Burns effect is a film effect developed by filmmaker Ken Burns. In the Ken Burns effect, an element of a still photograph is slowly zoomed into or out of, focusing the visual attention of the viewer and creating an illusion of movement.

\(^2\) Without a clear way to comment on whether or not a child is autistic, and to what extent they can be constructed as to belong on the autistic spectrum I am rather clumsily constructing the idea of "neurostatus" to denote whether or not a child has been diagnosed with autism. In my own etymology of this word, I take "neuro" from the word, "neurotypical," used by the Autism Self Advocacy Network to refer to people who are not autistic, and "status" to denote that there may be a change in the way that a person is described or describes him or herself. Some potential drawbacks to this word may be how it sets up a binary of autistic/neurotypical, and how it may privilege subjectivity - how the subject is thought of constructed as to belong on the autistic spectrum I am rather clumsily constructing the idea of "neurostatus" to denote whether or not a child has been diagnosed with autism. In my own etymology of this word, I take "neuro" from the word, "neurotypical," used by the Autism Self Advocacy Network to refer to people who are not autistic, and "status" to denote that there may be a change in the way that a person is described or describes him or herself. Some potential drawbacks to this word may be how it sets up a binary of autistic/neurotypical, and how it may privilege subjectivity - how the subject is thought of by others - over identity - how the subject identifies him or herself. I think that it needs significant development by myself and others before I can suggest that it be used as a term, or a concept at all.
Ultimately, the entire advertisement is revealed to be a pun on the word "quote." A quote can be several things depending on context. A quote can be a shortened version of the word "quotation," referring to a specific thing that a person has said. In the context where most people most commonly imagine buying insurance, a "quote" refers to the estimation of how much you can expect to pay for insurance. A "quote" is often free, a customary measure so that the consumer does not have to spend money to compare quotes from different companies. In this advertisement, "quote" has both of these meanings; a quotation, as in a recorded speech act, and an insurance estimates. In this way, the play on the word “quote” can refer to the reassurance that by considering having an insurance plan with Allstate, a consumer is participating in ending the terrifying disease just alluded to, a disease characterized almost entirely by an inability to make quotes. Jacques Derrida, the French post-structuralist scholar who is best known for his attentiveness to language as the creation of reality, posits that “knowledge” is “the field of freeplay...a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble.” (Derrida, 1971 emphasis original) Speech is very much on the mind of the designers of this advertisement, and it is through this “freeplay” on the “infinite substitutions” possible in the word “quote” that the company manages to affiliate itself with speech and the privilege of making speech, as well as in bringing speech to those who have none. “Allstate,” “Autism Speaks,” and “autism” all become one through this punning, suggesting that when you think of one, you will in the future remember the others.

Judith Butler (2005), discussing Jessica Benjamin, refers to “recognition” as an act that takes place through communication. She writes, “Recognition is neither an act that one performs nor is it literalized as the event in which we each ‘see’ one another and are ‘seen.” (Butler, 2005) Rather, recognition - how we know ourselves, how we know others - is something that happens
through communication. Communication is the system by which we converse and learn about one another, but especially, about ourselves. We can imagine in this advertisement, autistic children are known by their lack of communication - they are recognized as being without such communication. On the other hand, Mark LaNeve is recognized through his communication as someone who can help, someone who can do a good thing. He is recognized as an agent of charity and change, while the children of ambiguous neurostatus are recognized as being incapable of speech and expression.

Although many autistic people experience what are known as delays in language acquisition, and may learn language as children in ways different to the ways other children learn language, there are many ways that autistic people can communicate that do not rely on the spoken word. They can use sign language, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), typing on a computer with or without assistance, and some exciting new technologies are being developed on tablet computers to assist autistic people with communication. Much of this speech does not “look like” speech in the traditional sense. Much of this speech does not involve the use of the voice at all. But if communication is how we come to recognize each other, what happens when that communication is unrecognizable as speech?

Because it cannot be recognized as rational speech, speech without voice does not seem to "count" as speech. Whatever else might be observable about autism - characteristics such as stereotypies or common dietary issues - do not constitute it in the same way that absence of communication does. What is endlessly disturbing, frustrating, and sometimes impossible to deal with is the appearance of a person who has nothing that recognizable as communication. Who are we, if there is no one there to analyze our speech and deem it rational? The third part of this advertisement that explicitly mentions speech is in the thank you message from the CEO of
Allstate, Mark LaNeve. "For every quote, ten dollars goes to Autism Speaks," he says, "On behalf of those who can't say it for themselves, thank you."

Through his communication, and the attention paid to his communication, we can recognize LaNeve as someone who has a great amount of power in the world. He is white, he is dressed formally in a suit that denotes power, and he is the CEO of one of the largest insurance companies in the United States. These qualities too, can all be seen as forms of communication, or performance, in order to facilitate a certain sort of meaning making. LaNeve is able to extract speech from autistic people through his position and privilege, by virtue not only of being neurotypical, but by having access to the kind of platform that allows for an audience to recognize his speech and deem it rational. He invokes the name of an organization called "Autism Speaks," a name suggests that there is some kind of voice doing speech, and that speech is coming out of autism itself, not people diagnosed with autism. In the next sentence, LaNeve separates the people who cannot speak - autistic people - from the disability that can - autism - when he says "On behalf of those who can't say it for themselves, thank you." These two sentences construct autism as something apart from people diagnosed with it, and autistic speech as being separate from autistic people.

LaNeve is not only commenting on the literal speechlessness of autistic people; he also capitalizes on this connection to this condition through his own relationships to his twin sons with autism. Just before we see and hear LaNeve's words, we see a picture of him, his wife, and two adolescent sons at what looks to be at some sort of awareness-raising walk or march. We never hear the names of the twins, or see them in motion. There is no way to know if they are capable of speech at all, or how it is that they communicate and have relationships with family members. Do they use picture exchange? A combination of spoken words and sign? Typing on a
keyboard? Do they know that this picture of themselves is in use in this way? It is clear that in this advertisement, the sons are there to be spoken about, not to speak for themselves. Their father, recognized by his communication, helpfully speaks for them, thanking all of the people who get a free auto quote from his large insurance company so that it can donate up to $500,000 to the aforementioned organization.

The last part of this advertisement worth examining here is how it uses this construction of autism through the bodies of children - a child incapable of speech, a child that could look like any other child, a child with whom we have an intimate connection - in order to sell a product. Allstate is trying to make itself out to be the "autism aware" insurance agency, meaning that with every free quote people obtain, it will donate ten dollars to Autism Speaks. Allstate Insurance is not itself an "autism insurance company." In fact, it provides mostly home and auto insurance, not health insurance, and yet it has partnered with Autism Speaks for this specific promotion.

Autism here functions as a way for Allstate Insurance to look like a more down to earth, caring, company, who understands the ways that autism can manifest in family life. LaNeve's reference to his own autistic sons not only positions the company as one that cares about autism, but one that cares about parenthood and family life. Because autism is so conflated in this ad, and in society generally, with the condition of being a child, to the extent that sometimes families are referred to as "families with autism" even when only one child is diagnosed, Allstate can identify itself as a company that understands how complicated being a family with autism is. It is assumed that you are more willing to do business with a company that considers itself “family-oriented,” with a CEO that is so candid about speaking about himself as a father and the difficulties of raising two autistic sons. We return here to Foucault’s confession, and Fisher’s conversion narrative. Through his confession concerning his twin sons, LaNeve shares a part of
himself that reconstitutes him as someone who has known pain and trouble, and someone who is doing the right thing about it now. LaNeve’s sons have autism, but he is able to save them, not only through intensive involvement in their therapies (not alluded to in this advertisement) but by using his power and privilege in society to help them find liberation.

This advertisement also turns the act of receiving a free insurance quote from something that one does for oneself - a selfish act - into something that one does to make the world a better place for autistic children and their families. Rather than donating ten dollars of their own to Autism Speaks, people can get someone else to do it for them, and receive a free insurance quote at the same time! This creates the feeling that one is doing “the right thing,” to help alleviate the burden on families of autistic children, without having to think about autism or engage directly with autism. It allows the consumer access to the autism advocacy community without any real work. And it also gives them a reason to think about getting their next free insurance quote from Allstate rather than some other insurance agency.

So we have an advertisement, a fairly mundane, boring, ordinary combination public service announcement and corporate giveaway. We have the presentation of facts about autism, how it affects nearly 10% of children, and how many of those children are boys. We learn that people with autism have difficulty with communication. And then we find out that we can provide a voice to autistic people by donating to an organization called Autism Speaks. We learn an easy and cost-free way for consumers to do this charitable deed while getting a free insurance quote from Allstate; whether they needed one or not! We also learn that Allstate's CEO, Mark LeVene, is himself a parent of autistic children, and is able to thank you personally from them. In this description, autistic people are rendered as always children, usually boys, and lacking the
ability to communicate. Luckily, the advertisement reasons, we can all work together by getting insurance quotes to help "give autism a stronger voice."

Gayatri Spivak, in "Can the Subaltern Speak," describes the way that speech is impossible for the subaltern subject. In that argument, she suggests that the subaltern people, in her case, poor Indian widows - are rendered incapable of speech recognizable by intellectuals and academics. Should a person identified as "subaltern" find themself in a place where they can speak to an intellectual or academic, then that person is no longer subaltern, by virtue of occupying a place in society where he or she can command the attention of intellectuals.

I do not wish to compare directly the experience of Western autistic people and poor Indian widows in the 1940's. However, I would like to draw attention to a parallel between Spivak's work on the impossibility of subaltern voice, and the ways in which autistic people are effectively rendered speechless in society. Though the discourse around the cause of autism has changed slightly, as well as the description of autism and who it is said to affect, autism is still a disability mainly attributed to nonverbal children. In fact, when autistic children become able to express themselves and ask for things that they need, they are sometimes reclassified as "Asperger's Syndrome" or "high functioning autism." Some HFA’s even consider themselves, or are classified as, being in “recovery” from autism. (Nazeer, 2006)

For adults, the epistemic violence to their identity is even more profound. For example, Ari Ne’eman, the president and one of the founders of the Autism Self-Advocacy Network, was appointed by President Obama to the National Council on Disability. Ne’eman, who himself has Asperger’s syndrome, is the first person with autism to serve on that committee. His appointment was met not with widespread acknowledgement and support by Autism Speaks, Cure Autism Now, and other advocacy groups, but instead with controversy. For example, Jonathan Shestack
of the group Cure Autism Now (which later became incorporated into Autism Speaks) was quoted by the New York Times as saying that because Ne’eman is higher functioning, “he doesn’t seem to represent, understand, or have great sympathy for people for all the people who are truly, deeply affected.” (Harmon, 2010: A16). In other words, because Ne’eman is able to speak for himself and serve on a committee dedicated to considering the lives of people with disabilities, he is no longer able to represent an autistic perspective.

This paradox also goes beyond just speech, and into another signifier of humanity, the Theory of Mind. Theory of Mind is the idea that people are able to “mind read” each other by imagining other people as having feelings and motivations like their own. The classic Theory of Mind test used in autism diagnosis is called the “Sally-Anne Test.” The child is told, through a story and with dolls, that Sally has a marble, which she hides in a basket and covers with a blanket. She goes out to play, and Anne (“Naughty Anne!” adds the testing authority) moves the marble into her own basket. Then Sally returns to look for her marble. The child is asked where Sally will look for her marble. If the child answers “in her basket” they are determined to have theory of mind - even though they know the marble is in the other basket, they understand that Sally does not know this. If they answer “in Anne’s basket” they obviously know where the marble is, but they do not realize that Sally does not know that.

There are enough philosophical problems with Theory of Mind that have been addressed very well by other critical researchers (see, for example, McGuire and Michalko, 2011). But there remains another problem. Uta Frith, an autism researcher who first translated the writings of Hans Asperger into English, writes in the first chapter of her book *Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome* that children with autism may still pass the test with “a different strategy which is not theory-based” (Frith, 1991). Citing one study of ten children by Simon Baron-Cohen, she
suggests that those children faking their way through theory of mind will not be able to solve other theory of mind tasks that older children can generally solve. Knowing a different strategy not based on “theory” (whatever she means by this) does not then “count” as passing the test. In this way, it is theoretically impossible for anybody with autism or Asperger’s Syndrome to have any kind of theory of mind - to do so would mean that they do not have autism, and so those that can are imagined to be “passing” (Frith, 25). Like the paradox of speech, the Theory-of-Mind paradox situates autistic people as people who by their very nature can never achieve certain marks of humanity. In the case of speech, it is the desire for communication, and in the case of Theory of Mind, it is the recognition that other people have thoughts and feeling separate from their own. Autistic people are in a bind - they are seen as powerless over their lives since they cannot communicate and do not understand that there are other people in the world. Should they learn how to communicate, and especially if they learn how to communicate as an adult, they are no longer speaking from an autistic perspective, because it does not seem possible that autistic people can speak at all. The reason why “autism speaks” and not “people with autism speak” is because autistic speech is paradoxical; to have autism is to be without speech, and to have speech is to not be autistic. LaNeve’s twins couldn’t speak in this advertisement; he needed to do it for them.

In this argument, I am not trying to make the point that Allstate Insurance is being "wrong" or "deceptive." As the father of two autistic sons, Mark LaNeve has probably spent a great deal of time dealing with autism and trying to assist his children in learning how to communicate and get around in the world. "For those who can't say it for themselves," LaNeve says, "Thank you." In these final words of the advertisement, LaNeve is suggesting that he identifies so much with autism that he has the ability to speak for it. The consumer is then
motivated to join in the fight for autistic speech by asking for a free insurance quote, a word that is used as a pun for speech throughout the advertisement. The discourse of this advertisement, including the words that it uses, but also the pictures and the way the quotation marks are arranged over the pictures of children, illustrates an understanding of autism in which those that are diagnosed with it are permanently silenced, unless they have a non-autistic adult speaking for them. This is a discourse very prevalent in society today. It is by finding it and identifying it in the moments of everyday mundaneness that we can begin to name and actually challenge it.

So how might we begin to imagine the possibility of autistic speech without falling into the paradox described above?

The first step is to refrain from thinking of speech as tied up with humanity and consciousness. The thing that makes me human is not my ability to express myself to you; rather, that is the thing that makes it possible for you to render me as human. I exist in the world whether or not you are aware of my existence, and my existence does not depend on my ability to produce meaningful language directed towards other people. Similarly, people diagnosed with lower functioning autism continue to exist in the world, even as they do not give any indication of their recognition of you or anybody else in ways that make sense socially.

Psychologist BF Skinner, the man credited with the development of the theory behind Applied Behavior Analysis as we know it today, argued that all behavior is communication. At first, this theory might seem somewhat liberating - an autistic child banging his head against a wall and humming can be constructed not as a pointless, harmful act with no meaning, but as an act of communication. Is the child trying to communicate his frustration? Is he bored and asking for different stimulation? When parents, teachers, and therapists use the techniques of Applied Behavior Analysis developed partially by Skinner, they use questionnaires to determine what the
behavior is communicating. An example of one of these questionnaires is the “Problem Behavior Questionnaire Profile.” Some of the questions on the questionnaire describe the behavior itself, and others ask the person filling out the questionnaire to infer meaning from the behavior that cannot be immediately determined by the person asked the question. “Does the problem behavior occur to get your attention when you are working with other students?,” is one example.

The immediate problem with the setup with this questionnaire is in how it assumes that the person filling it out is able to access in some way the interior state and motivations of an autistic person. The child may banging his head out of frustration. It may also be that because of his different sensory experience of the world, that child finds head banging to be pleasurable or grounding in some way. After all, one commonly remarked upon feature of autism is the different sensory experiences that people diagnosed with autism have of the world. Kristina Chew discusses how this may be related to the difficulties that autistic people sometimes have with understanding metaphors that seem to make sense to the neurotypical. “What is ‘natural’ or essential to the majority of the population is not so far a child with autism’s neurological and sensory impairments,” she writes (Chew, 2007: 140). She uses the example of a ball. A neurotypical person will see “that ‘ball’ means not just one flashcard of a beach ball but a soccer ball, a blue ball, a football, a koosh ball.” She calls this “a lesson in thinking metaphorically,” extending the metaphor of the metaphor beyond metaphor as a linguistic technique into generalization.

Again, Derrida would have been impressed by this analysis - when we say the word “ball” we use a sign to refer to a signifier that cannot exist in the same ways between you and I, and yet in saying the word “ball” I am able to convey a somewhat clear understanding of what it is that I am talking about, because we both share sensory experiences of the world that allow for
this generalization of the sign of the ball. For someone that receives different sensory feedback of their environment, it could be impossible to distinguish between a basketball which makes a pleasing sound, smells good, and is weighted in a way that makes a person feel more steady, and a koosh ball which smells bad, feels tickly, and is so light it makes the person feel anxious. Chew invites us to imagine metaphor and generalization together, and in so doing posits that the ways that we talk about our world, and the ways that we understand that speech, are predicated on a normative experience and understanding of the world, an understanding that may not be obvious to someone with autism.

And then there is the question of whether or not behavior must have communicative meaning. Ilona Roth (148) suggests that art by low-functioning autistic people is often dismissed because of the critique that it cannot come from a place of creativity and meaning. In particular she writes about Beate Hermelin, a man diagnosed as low functioning autistic who draws beautiful, intricate, realistic impressions of buildings from memory. Because he is unable to speak about his art, and to offer himself up for recognition as an artist by spectators, his art is often dismissed as “not art” because it apparently involves no creativity. One is tempted to ask here, what of the entire discipline of photography, which in its simplest forms involves the exact reproduction of something that the artist sees and finds meaningful and worth preserving? Here we are back to the paradox of autistic speech - once speech is produced by autistic people, they either cannot be rendered fully autistic, or the speech itself cannot be rendered as real speech.

We can also look for communication outside of the act of speech with words. Mark Osteen writes of his son, Cam, diagnosed with low functioning autism, and his ongoing problem with toilet training. Despite years of attempts, Osteen and his partner have not been able to get their son to urinate in a toilet. He pees on the floor, in his bed, in the car, on the couch, and
sometimes even next to the toilet, but he refuses to pee in the toilet. Osteen, perplexed by this behavior, comes to the conclusion that his son, who has very little functional language, may be using urination as a way to communicate. “Throughout his life, Cam had been forced to find ingenious ways to compensate for his inability to speak...Urination gave him power he couldn’t gain any other way.” (Osteen, 222) Although “urinish” as Osteen calls it is by no means the most efficient form of communication, it does provide Cam with some authority over his environment. By urinating on the couch or in his bed, and then jumping up and down and clapping (as was his ritual), he forced his parents to perform a certain set of actions in response - sighing, getting together paper towels and cleaning supplies, changing the sheets, patting down the stains, and rebuking him in exhausted and exasperated voices. Besides the sensory pleasure that may also accompany the ritual, it was clear that he enjoyed these interactions with his parents.

It is clear through Chew, Roth, and Osteen, people diagnosed with low-functioning autism certainly communicate, though their communication may not be recognized as such by the neurotypical people with whom they live their lives (or maybe the neurotypical people who determine how their lives or lived). Rather than imagining “autism” speaking, it might be more useful to imagine autistic people communicating. If we can move outside of a preference for spoken words and learn to look for communication even when it does not come from a recognizable, definable, translatable language, we might be able to understand low functioning autistic people as human. We need to be able to imagine speech beyond redemptive confession - speech that derives from different and unique sensory experiences of the world, from a reality that might be difficult for the neurotypical among us to recognize as reality.

Olga Bogdashina takes a different approach to imagining autistic speech. In her book *Autism and the Edge of the Known World* she suggests that we can imagine autism as primarily a
different way of sensing the world. Bogdashina suggests that we should try to imagine different sensory worlds without employing a deficit model. She gives the example of the experience encountered by blind people. “This is by no means a dysfunctional world. it is rather a completely different world. Instead of visual images, they have tactile-motor concepts. Their perception of space and time is different. They perceive distance through time - by how long it has taken to reach or pass objects” (Bogdashina, 2003: 24). Instead of thinking of a blind world as one that lacks visual stimuli, we can imagine it instead as a reality constructed by the ability to make meanings out of different stimuli. I am not arguing here (although Bogdashina sometimes does) that blind people have exceptional hearing abilities, for instance, but rather that their understanding of reality is still reality. Similarly, autistic people, who are often extremely over or undersensitive to stimuli, experience a reality that is still reality.

Bogdashina is not alone in this perspective; Temple Grandin, a animal behaviorist at the University of Colorado who was diagnosed with autism (then known as Kanner’s autism) in the 1950’s, speaks frequently about her own heightened sensory perception and the way that it has affected her ability to be in the world socially. Both Bogdashina and Grandin suggest that autistic people may perceive the world in “parts” rather than “wholes.” For example, Grandin describes how she learned how to generalize concepts, “To learn a concept of dog or street, I had to see many specific dogs or streets before the general concept could be formed” (Grandin, 2008: 13). Because Grandin focused so intently on the sensory differences of individual dogs and individual streets, she developed a different understanding of the concept of dogs and streets. Here we are back to Chew’s ball example. We might imagine a ball to come in many different sensory packages, but we can imagine all of them as balls because they are spherical, and perhaps
because they are used in play. However, with a different sensory experience of a ball, it might be impossible to classify all of them as balls.

Bogdashina also describes the phenomena of “distant touching” which has been described by some autistic people and their family members (Bogdashina, 2003: 168). Distant touching is an experience not unfamiliar to most of us, even those of us who are neurotypical; it is the feeling that one experiences when they know that someone is standing behind them, even though they may be unaware of changes to sensory stimuli. We know that there is someone behind us, even though we are not sure how we know there is someone behind us. Bogdashina then tells an anecdote of a mother that she knows, who is able to communicate to her autistic son that he is misbehaving by staring at him. The child finds this sensation uncomfortable and will cease engaging in the activity - Bogdashina describes this as a form of “distant feeling” where the boy may have the experience of being touched, and knows that that touch means something, based on sensory experiences of the world that neurotypical people are unable to pick up on (the sound of his mother moving her head and the stillness that follows as she turns to look at him, for example) (Bogdashina, 2003: 156).

Having worked in several classroom settings, I can attest personally to the fact that “the stare” can be a very useful device when working with neurotypical or autistic children. I also remember my mother employing a similar technique when she thought I had been lying to her, which would immediately produce within me a feeling that I had lied to her, whether I had or not. Regardless of whether “the stare” is produced through an extra-sensory awareness that feels like touch, we can conclude that it is definitely a type of communication, although it is separate from language, and is in some ways indescribable by language, unless we speak of "the touch of
the eyes.” A person who responds to “the stare” is participating in communication, even when that communication may not be recognized as such.

It is impossible not to communicate, and when someone is seen not to communicate they are seen as something other than human. Even the autistic baby who cries and arches her back after experiencing the unpleasant sensation of human touch is communicating something.

Even though autism is a socially constructed reality, autistic people can distinguish themselves individually as apart from the other autistic people who stay in the “world” of autism, by using communication methods recognized as rational and favored by normative society. In doing so, it is easy to forget that autistic people communicate without speech, without even language, through the ways that they interact with others in their lives. The boy in the video confesses his inadequacies to a normative audience, and we grant him salvation through listening to what he has to say and recognizing both him and his speech as human.

In the past few months, Autism Speaks has rolled out a new slogan to go along with their campaigns: “Autism Speaks. Are we ready to listen?” In these two sentences, it is autism, not autistic people, who is speaking when we see what Skinner would have referred to as “behavior.” In this situation, Cam’s urination can only be “autism” speaking, and the boy interviewed is speaking despite autism. In imagining a person as another human being, it is important to imagine that whole person as being wholly human. Cam has a desire to communicate, and that desire is addressed though his act of urination. Regardless of how disturbing that may look to us, or how ineffective “urinish” is as a language, we must always keep in mind that the desire to communicate is separate from the ability to do so in socially accepted ways, and that the reality from which Cam derives his urinish is still a reality, even though it feels different than the reality known to the neurotypical.
I am asking that we keep this understanding of the socially constructed nature of speech and communication in mind as we move on to the next chapters. So much about the concept of school is predicated on the assumption that it is possible to extract from students how much they know, how well they know it, and if they are able to use that knowledge, through speech, writing, and testing. What happens when a student appears who does not seem to respond to these attempts at testing, or communicate in the normative way?

In the next chapter, I discuss the ways in which we come to understand autism have some of their origins in part in the way that we understand school and the nature of students. An understanding of the co-construction of both autism and school may lead us to a place where autistic speech and perspective is not a detriment to participation in education, nor an impossible paradox like the one described above, but something that could potentially enrich education as we know it.
Chapter Three
Autism and Education

Autism is a disability routinely referred to by its strange relationship to speech and language, but it is also recognized (problematically) as a disability of childhood and, in particular, school. From the day that a toddler or preschooler is identified with autism, their lives are understood in the context of their experience in school or other educational settings. In a sense, the autistic spectrum is contexted and makes an appearance frequently in educational settings such as school. Often, up to forty hours a week of therapy are suggested in an early intervention preschool setting. The orientation behind this suggestion is to give the children more time to understand how to behave in school - how to follow directions, stay seated at circle time, not hit other children, and to also teach them some language early, whether it be in the form of speech, sign language, or the Picture Exchange Communication system. This is seen as leveling the playing field for children with autism; the logic is that neurotypical children spend their preschool years learning the skills that will make it possible for them to participate in and benefit from school later, whereas children with autism need specific training in order to do so. There is a presupposition that autistic children will benefit from school later - school is understood in an utilitarian way for students with autism in a similar way to how it has been understood as beneficial for laborers, immigrants, and other groups of children who need to be “assimilated” into the mainstream.

Many studies have found that children enrolled in intensive Early Intervention programs are more able to communicate, behave in school, and achieve academically than those who are not (see for example Walker & Sprague, 2007: Lynch R., 2004). Additionally, the effect of EI on social justice and equity should not be understated. Although many media representations of autism focus on white, middle to upper class boys, there are just as many children of color, immigrant children, and working or lower class children identified with autism. Since these EI
services are often provided through Head Start preschools and are generally free, EI is a way that children from less advantaged social positions can potentially access the kind of preschool education normally reserved for those whose parents are able to pay for it. In being critical of EI, it is always important to remember the ways that EI can help children keep up academically as they grow older, accessing better resources and opportunities in school and beyond, opportunities that may have been denied for them before because of unequal access to quality preschool programming.

There are various opinions on the usefulness of such programs. Some autism activists argue that this kind of training teaches children that they need to change in order for society to accept them. The theory behind Early Intervention supports a medical model of disability where the problem lies in the body of the disabled person, rather than in a society that constructs that person to be disabled (abfh, 2007). Other activists feel that the amount of time and energy spent on early intervention services neglects the needs of autistic adults (Ne’eman, 2008). On the other hand, Temple Grandin attributes much of her success as an adult to intensive behavioral therapy that she received as a child (Grandin, 1995). Grandin was not enrolled in Early Intervention as we know it today because it did not exist when she was a child; but she was explicitly trained for many hours a week on acceptable social behavior.

Some argue that this kind of explicit intensive therapy is simply too much for young children to handle, even neurotypical young children (see for example Mommy Niri, 2011). Parents of autistic children are often given additional parenting responsibilities by therapists, teachers, and doctors, which might include labeling everything in the house with words and pictures, speaking more frequently and intentionally around their children, and obsessively notating each developmental milestone reached or not reached. The combined stress of running
such a program at home, getting the child to therapy or preschool, and then dealing with work, mortgages, rent, and other children on top of all of this can lead parents to be tired, stressed out, short tempered, and feeling as if they are solely responsible for their children’s autism. There have been many criticisms of the implications of parents, and particularly mothers, in therapeutic regimens for autism.

What the debate about early intervention is missing, however, is a social understanding of how we have come to know autism and school together. The connection between autism, special education, early intervention, inclusion, and intelligence might seem obvious, but it is this very obviousness that I would like to tease out. “Inclusion” as a concept evokes a whole and a missing part that aspires to join the whole. When we talk about “inclusion,” we assume that the classroom is a space made up of neurotypical and able-bodied individuals that allows people constructed as disabled to participate, people who have always been not included. However, when we begin to see the way that discourse of autism and discourses of education work together to construct each other, we can understand that disabled children, and here, children with autism, have not necessarily always stood completely apart from the discourse of education and childhood. This understanding allows us to more readily imagine inclusion as a radical, critical, social justice oriented practice that provides opportunities for both autistic and neurotypical students. In this chapter, I analyze the Kanner and Asperger’s accounts of what they coincidentally termed autism. Both of these accounts are lengthy, and could be remarked on from a variety of angles. Here I am interested mostly in intelligence and schooling - how is it through current discourses of intelligence and schooling did Asperger and Kanner come to understand autism?
One of the strangest coincidences in the history of autism is the ways in which two men, working separately, at around the same time, were able to identify the same set of symptoms as belonging to a specific pathology, and give that pathology the same name - autism. The two scientists, Hans Asperger and Leo Kanner, published their papers in 1945 and 1944 respectively. Each traced their use of the word "autism" to Eugen Bleuler's 1912 description of "autistic schizophrenia," a form of psychosis in which the person retreats into a world of their own creation, apparently consisting of only themselves. Interestingly, Bleuler also understood "autism" to exist outside of psychosis, describing autism as the state in which children engage in imaginary play with or without toys, pretending to be different people or animals and acting out fantasies separate from their immediate, lived reality. If we still used the word the way that he did, we might be encouraging children diagnosed with autism to be more autistic in their imaginary play!

Both Kanner and Asperger noted the ways in which Eugen Bleuler used the word "autism" and appropriated it under the condition that their subjects were not to be understood as psychotic, or if they had some sort of underlying psychosis, that psychosis was not understood to be the root cause of their autism. Kanner theorized that his patients were schizophrenic, and Asperger wanted the disorder he described to be considered a personality disorder with organic origin - meaning, that it was caused by brain damage or some other problem with the body, rather than by poverty, parenting, psychic distress, or conventional notions of inclusion.

Asperger was careful about this description; eugenic thoughts about biological bases for other disabilities or disease had lead to the extermination of many children and adults with disabilities during the Holocaust, and some have suggested that this association is the reason his ideas were not circulated widely outside of Germany and Austria (Feinstein, 2010). Asperger
added several pages onto the end of his paper describing the unique intellectual gifts of the children in his ward, urging that they should be educated and encouraged to pursue technological vocations. Among those pages were also practical suggestions for teaching autistic children in the classroom (a classroom that he always seemed to imagine as one that included both autistic and neurotypical children).

Asperger was working and publishing in Vienna, Austria, where he was trying to avoid being forced to join the Nazi party, despite two attempts by the Gestapo to arrest him (Feinstein, 2010). Kanner, who was Jewish and had also grown up in Berlin, had moved his family to the United States to escape German inflation in 1924 (Feinstein, 2010). Kanner’s research led him to identify young patients in psychiatric institutions as autistic, as well as the children of university professors with whom he was friendly.

Asperger’s paper was published in German in 1944, and Kanner’s was published in English in 1943. Because of worldwide political conditions of the time, few if any scholars on either side of the Atlantic experienced both papers when they were published. World War II was winding down and Americans were attempting to distance themselves from anything tainted by Germany and eugenics. When “autism” began being used as a diagnostic category after the publication of Kanner’s paper, it was sometimes referred to as “Kanner’s autism” or “classic autism” up until Asperger’s Syndrome was theorized by Lorna Wing in 1981, and his paper translated to English in 1991. It was soon after the translation of this paper that the autism spectrum was described by Lorna Wing as a way to describe children who did not fit cleanly into Kanner’s autism or Asperger’s Syndrome, but clearly showed signs of autistic psychopathology.

Asperger's paper "Autistic psychopathy in childhood," comes across as much more literary than one might expect a scientific paper identifying a formerly unknown syndrome to be.
He switches back and forth between descriptions of the children he studied and explanations for these descriptions, and case studies of several representative children themselves. He observed the children in a hospital ward set up specifically for this process. In the chapter before her translation of his essay in *Autism and Asperger's Syndrome*, Uta Frith describes the University Paediatric Clinic in Vienna where he was working. "As in the hospitals other wards," she writes, "The children lay in neat little rows of beds, and twice daily there was a ward-round. They were treated as sick children who needed to be made well again" (Frith, 1991: 8). As the program grew, the children were eventually taken out of bed during the day and allowed to play and attend classes and other group activities together. Many of Asperger’s observations of the children’s behaviors and learning style came from observing their activities in the hospital.

The paper is over 60 pages long, and was not translated into English until the publication of Frith's aforementioned book in 1991. Asperger’s descriptions of the children are both general and remarkably specific, and the way in which he uses language to describe them is a little uncanny, in that similar language is still used to describe children with Asperger's Syndrome or high-functioning autism. For example, the sentence, "The autistic personality is an extreme variant of male intelligence," (Asperger, 1944) is almost word-for-word the same phrasing Simon Baron-Cohen uses to describe his "extreme male brain" theory about autism.

One of the most consistent points in Asperger's paper is that children were referred to his clinic by teachers and education administrators. In fact, three of the four children that he writes in depth descriptions of were referred to the clinic by adults in their school. The one exception is a boy referred to as Hellmuth, who had brain damage from birth and a number of other physical symptoms (indeterminate gonads, breasts and hips, for example) that suggests some sort of chromosomal or intersex condition (Asperger, 1944). Asperger seems the least interested in him,
only spending one page describing him after having spent five or six pages on each of the other children, but includes his case as a way of showing that autism has organic causes, more readily apparent in some children than in others. In addition to his four main case studies, Asperger also references a variety of nameless children, describing the things that they have done and said and referring to their age.

The three other children described in depth were referred by school, either teachers or administrators, and none of them had any obvious physical symptoms (though he describes all of their physical features in depth) or experienced unusually traumatic birth. Fritz V., whom Asperger describes as "a highly unusual boy who shows a very severe impairment in social integration," was "referred by his school as he was considered to be 'uneducable' by the end of his first day there" (Asperger, 1944: 39). After this apparently in depth series of assessments by the school, it was obvious that Fritz V. would be unable to participate and there was something “wrong” with him that needed medical intervention. These problems seemed more due to conduct rather than intelligence. Asperger writes, "Fritz did not know the meaning of respect and was utterly indifferent to the authority of adults...Although he acquired language very early, it was impossible to teach him the polite form of address" (Asperger, 1944). Asperger is referring here to the way that one denotes authority in the German language, by using one set of formal address for those who are higher ranking, and an informal address for friends, peers, and those who rank lower than the speaker. This observation of his is interesting because English does not have a similar system of address anymore, and so this particular description of deficit is not included in descriptions of autism in English speaking countries. This is yet another example of a problem that appears to be very troubling in one society, but is nonexistent or not particularly troubling somewhere else. While pronoun reversal by autistic people is still experienced as a
problem in English speaking countries, I have never read of anybody worrying that autistic people cannot understand how to distinguish between formal and informal modes of address.

The intelligence tests that Asperger administered to Fritz V. suggested to him that, "it was impossible to get a good idea of his true intellectual abilities using standard intelligence tests," (Asperger, 1944) as Fritz often, "jumped up or smacked the experimenter on the hand. He would repeatedly drop himself from his chair to the floor and then enjoy being firmly placed in his chair again" (Asperger, 1944). Despite this, when the tester could catch Fritz in a more compliant mood, he was able to answer all the questions many years advanced for his age. An interesting epilogue to this story is that Fritz V. as an adult became a professor of astronomy and noticed and resolved a mistake in one of Isaac Newton's theories.

The second child Asperger describes in depth is Harro L., an eight-year-old referred by his school as "unmanageable" (Asperger, 1944: 62). Apparently, the referring teacher had also said that Harro L. "could [do it] if he only wanted to," (Asperger 1944: 63) a sentiment frequently echoed by many educators of so-called “unmanageable” children, both in the past and in the present. Harro L. seemed to have some major conduct problems at school and would frequently fight with or bite members of his class; he had also been held back a year. Despite his behavioral issues in school, Harro was mature for his age in some other ways. At the age of seven, he began taking the train from his small village to attend school in Vienna, alone, every day. Asperger also observed that Harro had difficulty being instructed in a group on the ward - "His mind wandered off on his own problems and he would not know what the lesson was about," Asperger explains (Asperger 1944: 56). Asperger also admits that during the intelligence testing he allowed and even encouraged Harro to come up with original answers and go about solving problems in his own way - ways that were often incredibly roundabout and confusing to
Asperger and other adults - but concedes that such techniques would be impossible in a classroom setting.

Ernst K. is described by Asperger as "acting like a red rag" to his classmates (Asperger, 1944), meaning that, like a bullfighter with a red cape, he was constantly teasing and tempting his classmates to get into trouble, or was seen as somehow responsible for the “deviant” actions of his classmates. Ernst was also referred by his school "because of severe conduct and learning problem." (Asperger, 1944). Ernst's mother was engaged in a battle that current parents of autistic children know all too well; she "fought desperately against a transfer into a special school for retarded children" (Asperger, 1944). Possibly, it was because the mother was so insistent that her son was not retarded and needed to be in school with the mainstream population that the school resorted to referring him to Asperger. Asperger describes the boy as being tall and skinny, with a voice “roughly like the character of a degenerate aristocrat” (Asperger, 1944). Like the other children described, Ernst had difficulty with self-regulation and discipline. “In a group, which is meant to follow a common command, he behaved impossibly badly,” Asperger writes, granting that at least part of this misbehavior was due to Ernst’s clumsiness and gross motor problems (Asperger, 1944).

Leo Kanner (1943) worked in a residential school, similar to the setup of Asperger's clinic. In his similarly lengthy paper, Kanner described the cases of twelve children identified with autism. Unlike Asperger, three of the patients he described were female, and he made no statement explaining the lack of females in his study. Also differently from Asperger, he seemed to place a great deal of his attention on “intelligent physiognomies.” (Kanner, 1943) Physiognomy was a technique used to discern how intelligent someone was by the size and
shape of their head, now completely discredited within medicine as having clearly racist and eugenic origins.

Kanner also spent much more time on parental background, generally criticizing parents for their obsessive monitoring of their children, or, conversely, their considerable neglect of their children. At the end of the paper, he criticizes what he refers to as “stuffing” (Kanner, 1943), the practice by the parents of teaching their children nursery rhymes, the names of composers, songs, memorized lists of sums, and the 25 Protestant Catechism questions and answers. He deplores this practice because he feels, “it is...difficult to imagine that it did not cut deeply into the development of language as a tool for receiving and imparting meaningful messages” (Kanner, 1943). For Kanner, who seemed to see these children as being kept in a social environment of “profound aloneness” due to their parents failure to connect with them, encouraging a child to use speech to recite back lists and songs does not seem like an attempt on the parent’s behalf to better engage with their child and do something with him or her that was interesting to both of them. Rather, he sees it as something like a parlour trick, that does little to help children understand the “real” purpose for language, and ultimately makes it even harder for them to participate in society.

Kanner’s patient referrals seem to come mostly from parents, especially mothers but also a few fathers, whose letters describing their children he quotes at length in his article. He explains, "Many of these children were brought to us primarily with the assumption that they were severely feeble-minded or with the question of auditory impairments," (Kanner, 211) although the administration of hearing tests and IQ tests suggested that neither of these answers were correct. Kanner spend much of his time speculating and reflecting on the parent’s relationship with each other and to their child - birth order is always noted, as well as the
prevalence of autistic traits in children and parents, and the tendency of the parents towards obsessive tracking of their child’s growth and development. Children were studied in the context of the administration of IQ testing in an office, as well as during overnight stays at the Child Study Home, where they appear to have lived in family-style groups with other children.

Accounts of Kanner’s patients at school vary. For example, Donald, who was observed at the Child Study Home running around nonsensically shouting words like, “Semicolon!” and “Slain, Slain!” (Kanner, 1943: 221) was placed in a first grade classroom on the suggestion of a friend of his mother, who also happened to be the principal of the school. The letter his mother wrote to Kanner notes Donald’s relative compliance during the school day. “I visited his room this morning and was amazed to see how nicely he cooperated and responded,” she writes, “...He does not squeal or run around but takes his place like the other children.” (Kanner, 1943: 221) Donald then participates successfully in a lesson, finding his name on the blackboard and then following the direction attached to it (Feed the fish).

The fourth child that Kanner describes, Paul G., had attended a nursery school “where his incoherent speech, inability to conform and temper outbursts created the impression of feeblemindedness” (Kanner, 1943: 226). He also notes that “formal testing could not be carried out, but he certainly could not be regarded as feebleminded in the ordinary sense” (Kanner, 1943: 228). He describes this intelligence as "cognitive potentialities," (Kanner, 1943) that is, the extent to which a child might potentially be intelligent. Distinguishing the children as something other than feebleminded is a huge concern for Kanner, and he often points out how difficult it is to do IQ testing with them. Barbara K., for example, “showed no interested in test performances. The concept of test, of sharing an experience or situation, seemed foreign to her” (Kanner, 1943: 229). Here he explicitly links “testing” not with “intelligence” but instead with “sharing.” The
tester, Kanner in this case, presupposes that Barbara understands the meaning of the test, and that
the meaning that she understands is the same or similar to Kanner’s. Failure is something only
possible for Barbara, not for Kanner, who determines the terms and meaning of the test.

Similarly, Virginia S. achieves an IQ of 94 with the “nonlanguage items of the Binet and
Merrill-Palmer tests” (Kanner, 1943: 230) but the psychologist administering the test remarks to
Kanner that, “Her intelligence is superior to this” (Kanner, 1943: 230). Dorothy, after being
described as both feebleminded and schizophrenic, “attends school where she makes good
progress; she talks well, has an IQ of 108” (Kanner, 1943: 232). Alfred L, a child so distracted
by trains that it is impossible to administer any sort of testing to him in a room with items that
might even look like trains, achieves an IQ of 140 - after numerous attempts on his part to escape
the room and end the testing. (Kanner, 1943: 234) This is a relatively young child who was also
described as having been in “eleven different schools” (Kanner, 1943: 234), though Kanner does
not describe why he switched schools so often.

There are a few different ways to analyze the discourse used by Kanner and Asperger in
their descriptions of autism. We could look at these texts as literal representations of what autism
is; we could develop checklists of the symptoms that they list and apply them to people and in
particularly children to explain those things that are different about them. Generally, this has
been the way that these texts have been received. With some changes made by other autism
researchers such as Lorna Wing and Simon Baron-Cohen, these descriptions of autism are still
very much in line with how autism is imagined and the way that it is diagnosed among
populations of children. Here, as discussed in Chapter One, I want to focus more on the
construction of “autism” as a thing, and the meaning given to that construction.
We can also analyze the language used by Kanner and Asperger to see what concepts they take for granted as normal or necessary to development. For example, in Asperger’s description of Ernst, he explains that the purpose of a group is to “follow a central command.” (Asperger, 1944: 61) His phrasing here, no doubt also altered by translation, is interesting. Is it really an intrinsic quality of all groups of people that they follow a central command? Is the issuer of the command apart from the group? Are there ever any groups of people who don’t follow a central command? Why is it so important that every member of the group follow central commands? In another time and place, where children were not routinely in large groups and ushered from one space to another during the school day, might the inability to follow the central command of a group not be such a deficit, and in some situations, might it even be a useful adaptive strategy?

To pay attention to language in this way is not to dismiss everything that Asperger and Kanner wrote as being untrue, or more biased than anything else ever written. Asperger described his patients using the vocabulary that he felt best conveyed the point that he was trying to make. The fact that groups follow a “central command” was, to Asperger, a matter of common sense, and the fact that Ernst was apparently unable to go along with the group was an obvious problem that was inhibiting his ability, and the ability of the other children in his class, to benefit from school.

Gramsci writes that “common sense” is “the folklore of philosophy and always stands midway between folklore proper...and the philosophy, science and economics of the scientists.” Gramsci goes on to argue that common sense is what allows capitalism to remain the hegemonic ideology of the world. There is no way out of a system when that system is based only on what people imagine to be the obvious truths. For Asperger, the idea that groups must take central
commands was common sense; similarly, for Kanner, the fact that the parents were highly intelligent and educated suggested that their children must have some sort of “cognitive potentiality.”

What do we make of the common sense assertions central to Asperger and Kanner’s description of autism? It is clear that the children described in both of these papers had difficulties at home and school, but we can imagine that in the private sphere of home, disturbing differences that might lead even to marital strife, damage to the home and property (and even to siblings) may go publicly unacknowledged unless they also appeared at a public sphere such as school. Additionally, Kanner's descriptions emphasize the children's “cognitive potentialities,” suggesting that there might be something redeemable about them, although they cannot interact socially in ways that are expected or that make sense to him. Both Asperger and Kanner focus on intelligence and potential in their descriptions of autism, in particular, highlighting the creative ways that these children appeared to solve problems, and the things that they were able to memorize. What was it about creativity, problem solving, and memorization that seemed so valuable to them? Were these skills that were considered educationally valuable at the time? Would it have been possible to understand autism as we do today without school the way that we know it today? Could this be how two independent researchers were able to identify the same condition and give it the same name?

It is difficult to imagine a world without school as we know it; school itself has become a common sense idea. Of course everyone is entitled to education, and almost all children receive that education in some sort of school setting. But school has not always carried with it the same set of meanings; it is a signifier that has pointed to several different ideas and assumptions. “School" has undergone extensive changes in theory and practice even in the past hundred years.
The reasons why we go to school, and why we insist that others go to school, are various and often conflict with each other, and although some members of the far right toy with the idea of completely privatizing all schools or, as Newt Gingrich recently suggested, foregoing school for all but those who could afford it and training poor children to work as janitors, (Weismann, 2011) no one seriously argues that eliminating all schools would solve our problems. Schools may be underfunded, inadequate, or corrupted, but school itself as an institution is a taken for granted reality in much of the world.

Even without the formal setup of school, education is generally considered valuable and a way to get oneself out of poverty and aspire towards the middle class. Particularly in the United States, which had one of the highest rates of white male literacy in the Western world during the colonial period, education has always been considered an important value worth going forward with.

The idea of the purpose of schools have changed over the years. For example, in the United States, school was supposed to provide a sort of moral imperative through religion. Protestants, among which were the New England Puritans, believed that one must have a personal relationship with God through the Word, and in particular, the Word as written; and to do this, one must become literate enough to read the Bible. Consequently, New England in the 1600's had one of the highest levels of white male literacy, exceeding 90% in some places. (LaBaree, 2010) While some children did attend common schools in larger communities, most children were still educated at home by their parents or, if they were from wealthier families, by tutors.

David F. LaBaree, in his book Someone Has to Fail (2010), points out how many of the goals of education in the West are self-defeating and at odds with each other. School must be a
place where we can all achieve equity and have an equal chance. School must also be a place where, with hard work, one can get ahead and make a name for him or herself. School must be a place where we learn how to participate in democracy and work together as a community. School must also be a place where children learn respect and obedience to authority (central command?), as well as self-discipline and responsibility. Louis Althusser correctly described school as being one of the "ideological state apparatuses" (ISA), a social structure that does the work of supporting the state through ideological, rather than repressive, means. All of these different articulations for the purpose of school can be understood as different ideologies transmitted through this particular ISA.

School is also hugely connected to patriotism and nationalism; in the United States, for example, many states require that all children recite the Pledge of Allegiance and salute an American flag at the beginning of each day. During the Cold War, children practiced drills in case of nuclear attack by the Soviet Union, somehow finding security from nuclear weapons on the linoleum floor under a desk. These kinds of lessons, lessons that are not tied explicitly to the official curriculum of the school and refer more to patriotism, submission to authority, and the ability to fit into society, are often referred to as the "hidden curriculum." (Wotherspoon, 2009) These hidden curricula concerning patriotism, nationalism, power, and authority, are also one of the reasons why the education of the children of immigrants was seen as so important in the United States and elsewhere. Schools could be used to teach children a common language and set of customs, assimilating them into the interests of the nation. One of the major reasons why schools expanded in the United States during the 1930’s was because of the recent influx of Eastern European immigrants in major urban centres. (LaBarre, 2010)
During the period directly after World War II and in particular during the Space Race of the Cold War, popular discourse about school and the purpose of schooling was driven by human capital theory, which suggests that education is "an investment to stimulate productivity and economic growth." (Wotherspoon, 2009). Though this theory became popular during the post-war years, it was not unique to this time period - Adam Smith described human capital in the second book of *The Wealth of Nations* back in 1776 as, "the acquired and useful abilities of all the inhabitants or members of society" (Smith, 1776: 120). Smith compares the training or a laborer to the tuning of a machine, suggesting, "the improved dexterity of a workman may be considered in the same light as a machine...which, though it costs a certain expense, repays that expense with a profit" (Smith, 1776: 121). In this model, school becomes a place where human machines receive fine tuning and programming, where they are able to attain skills to make their labor more efficient, productive, and politically useful. Though the Space Race ostensibly took place between the United States and the Soviet Union, discourses of human capital in education were catching on around the Western world. In order to stay competitive in the post-war world, nations needed to invest in the education of their citizens. The human capital theory became popular pedagogically alongside, rather than instead of, other ideological justifications for school. The human capital theory needs inequality - by investing in a student's education, the state is providing a way for them to be successful instead of somebody else. Human capital theory works along a "someone must lose" framework, accepting inequality as not only reasonable, but necessary.

At the same time, the reason many parents have wanted to send their children to school is so that they might have a chance at a better life and career. School has been seen as the answer to racism, poverty, and class stratification, while also being designed along the lines of human
capital. While it is giving kids a chance to get ahead of each other and stand out while looking for jobs, it is also supposed to be able to equalize conditions of inequality. School exists to acclimate students to obedience to authority, patriotism, and personal accountability and efficacy, but it also exists to invest in those who will pay off for the nation in the future. It is in the intersection of these two ideas that autism became a reality.

Recall that Asperger described autism in 1945, and Kanner did so in 1944. Both published papers after having spent years studying their participants. Asperger had been working in the clinic for almost ten years before he finally published, and Kanner had been working with institutionalized children for about the same length of time (see page 45). Schools around the world were undergoing significant changes at this time. In the United States, where Kanner worked, local school boards were beginning to extend education beyond eighth grade, establishing public comprehensive high schools with different tracks for different expected outcomes - vocational, college prep, technical, domestic etc. Beyond the establishment of public high schools, elementary and grammar schools were also becoming more established. With the passage of child labor laws and the influx of immigrants to the United States in the late 1930’s, there were more children with time available during the day to go to school, and there were large numbers of children who were seen to need the assimilation into American society that school promised. Whereas before 1930 there were many adults who had attended little or no formal school but were instead educated at home and through apprenticeships, almost every child attended some form of school at some point during the time period when Kanner would have been working with his patients. Around the time when Kanner was seeing children and identifying them with autism, more of these children would have been expected to attend school, and parents may have been more likely - in some cases, required by law - to enroll them.
That Kanner and Asperger would both identify autism at the same time, and that their descriptions of autism relied so much on intelligence, suggests that the theory of education at the time provided an opening for autism to be constructed in the way that it has been. Here are children who are ostensibly intelligent, and who seem worthy of investment, except that they cannot learn in school, and particularly, they cannot learn in the context of a classroom full of similarly aged peers. This is how we come to Fritz V, deemed "ineducable" even though he clearly has the language skills that would ordinarily lead to success in school (and did!), and Ernst’s inability to go with the flow. Additionally, these are children who do not easily catch onto social norms and expectations. They frequently reverse pronouns and do not use respectful forms of address. At a time when school was seen both as an investment and as a civilising tool, children like this - intelligent and yet seemingly unable to understand how to act appropriately socially - would have stood out obviously.

Similarly, Germany and Austria were undergoing changes to the structure and setup of schooling when Asperger was identifying children with autism. During much of that time much of the focus of both countries was on the rise of Hitler and World War II; the effect that World War II had on Asperger’s description of autism and the politics of education at the time cannot be understated. Asperger was describing a population of formerly normal children, children who could be seen as rude, mischievous, and delinquent but not quite “retarded” or “ineducable,” and identifying them with a pathology, during a time when any person in Germany who did not conform to the Aryan ideal were routinely tortured and killed. Asperger made a point of identifying the things that his patients were good at, suggesting that their ability to systematize data, memorize, and visualize pointed to an innate intelligence that could be very useful for society. “Able autistic individuals,” he writes, “can rise to eminent positions and perform with
such outstanding success that one may even conclude that only such people are capable of certain achievements.” (Asperger, 1944) He suggests several approaches to take with autistic students, and urges teachers to remember, “"However difficult they are even under optimal conditions, they can be guided and taught, but only by those who give them true understanding and genuine affection, people who show kindness towards them and, yes, humour." (Asperger, 1944) Nearly all of the advice he offers is directed to teachers, not parents, and it is clear that he imagines the children as students in school. Clearly, Asperger imagines another purpose for schooling, which is to give children like the ones that he was identifying a chance to use their gifts and intelligences, and also providing good things for the nation in return.

Being able to imagine autism and school not only as social constructions, but as things that needed each other to be constructed, opens up spaces for new ways of thinking about inclusion. Just the word itself, inclusion, suggests that there is some whole that must specifically include someone who does not fit into that space automatically. In the next section, I discuss different ways that inclusion has been attempted for students identified with autism, and what they assume about normalcy, education, and what it means to be human. I am arguing against what Anna C. Hickey-Moody has argued is a “Cartesian” approach to inclusion, where one body is moved into a classroom and expected to conform to the new space; a critical and radical approach to inclusion recognizes the way that meaning is made between our bodies in space with each other, and that the individual becomes changed as he or she becomes a part of the group, and the group itself changes with the input of the individual. I insist on using the word “inclusion” despite its Cartesian connotations (nor does it need to have Cartesian connotations) because it is the language most familiar to many of us in education, as well as parents and students.
Chapter Four
A More Radical Inclusion?

It might be tempting to imagine that because autism is a socially constructed understanding of difference, that autism itself does not exist. For example, Timini, Gardner and McCabe (2011) suggest that autism is part of a greater movement in society against certain forms of masculinity and maleness. Others have written at length about the apparent problems that boys face in school, suggesting through selective reading of studies of gender and intelligence and learning that the normal learning style for boys is not supported in schools, and that this is why girls are so much more successful in schools than boys (Newkirk, 2002). My response to this point is that it seems that, these days at least, many learning styles are not supported in school, and scholars such as Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) have pointed out that many apparent sex differences in learning are difficult to tease out from the realities of gender discrimination in school. Moreover in studies between males and females there are more differences between individual males and individual females then there are between males and females as a group. The argument that autism isn’t real, it is socially constructed, and is the result of anti-masculine/anti-male attitudes in school is reductionist at best, and may suggest the impossibility of co-educational schooling.

There is a similar tendency on the opposite end of the spectrum to try to claim all of history’s very intelligent misfits as autistic, as suggested by Jennifer Elder and Mark Thomas in their popular children's book, *Different Like Me: My Book of Autism Heroes*, (2006) In this book, Albert Einstein, Barbara McClintock, Andy Warhol and many others are described as having autism or Asperger’s syndrome, despite the fact that the language that would have described these people in that way during their lifetime did not exist. Ian Hacking (1998) writes against this tendency, stating, “Each of us becomes a new person as we redescribe the past” (Hacking, 1998: 68) In other words, the person that we understand ourselves to be today arises out of a
historically situated reality that we understand based on our identities and subjectivities, and the language available for us to describe ourselves. Autism as we know it today needed a certain historical setting in order to make an appearance as we imagine it now, and children diagnosed with autism today may well have been diagnosed with something entirely different years ago, if they were diagnosed with anything at all. Even Kanner suggested, “it is quite possible that some such children have been viewed as feebleminded or schizophrenic.” (Kanner, 1944: 243). But just because somebody might have been diagnosed differently today than they were a hundred years ago should not mean that we go through history and retroactively construct everybody as disabled. This practice does not take into account the social meaning of normal ability and how and why that social meaning has changed.

The way that we ought to try to imagine autism, as a socially constructed reality in educational settings, or in other settings for that matter, is that autism is another way of being in the world. Everybody diagnosed “autistic” has arrived at that diagnosis through a different process, and even as we describe, identify, target, and develop teaching strategies for students with autism, the meaning of autism changes, and hence our understanding of what it is to be human, what it is to be mechanical, and the meaning and nature of speech and expression. We also need to realize that inclusion is not a matter of the majority population deciding for the first time to allow autistic students to take part in education. Autistic students have always been there, right from the first time they were identified as a discrete group, referred to Asperger by teachers and administrators who found that the usual tricks did not seem to work on these children. A more radical form of inclusion would be admitting that students understood as autistic have always been a part of the world, that they bring to the class experience and potential that changes the class as a whole, and the class in turn becomes a part of who they are too. A classroom
community is not a community of neurotypical students with one or two autistic students allowed to join them during gym as long as they act normal during that time period. An inclusive classroom community is a community that recognizes that difference can be “a springboard for creative change” (Lorde, 1984: 115).

It is true that everybody learns differently, and that everybody will live different lives with different social trajectories. The danger is in using that understanding of the individualization and uniqueness of every student to justify placing them in segregated classes away from their apparently higher achieving classmates. Another danger of this way of thinking is that children are grouped only in terms of ability, in such a way that the other realities of their lives are ignored, or even worse, downplayed as an unfortunate aspect of their disability. Poverty and intellectual disability have always been constructed together. For example, in the United States during Jim Crow, black voters were routinely forced to take unconstitutional literacy tests before they were allowed to vote (Goldman, 2005). This policy linked intellectual unfitness with race; because black people were seen as being simpler and more likely to be mentally retarded, they were considered to be inhuman in such a way that it was considered impossible for them to vote.

When the first IQ tests were administered and calibrated, it was always done in such a way so that the superiority of white Americans would be obvious - There was considered to be something wrong with the test if blacks scored as highly as whites, or whites scored less highly than other races (Smeadly and Smeadly, 2005). Before we begin a project of full inclusion of students with disabilities into school, we need to remember the history of the construction of disability, race, gender, class, and sexuality, and consider the child’s whole experience in the world as someone who is both disabled, raced, gendered, classed, etc. Understanding the
The changing nature of the way that we name and locate difference is also clear when we look at how racialized children have been described as disabled in various times and places. In her study on special education in London, Tomlinson (2004) points out that the disability described as “educably subnormal” (ESN) was one applied primarily to black children, but during the 1980’s and 90’s, a new disability category was constructed. This new disability is called Emotional/Behavior Disorder (EBD), and as rates of ESN among black boys fell, the rate of EBD grew. Similarly, Harry and Klinger (2003) note that the “Educably Mentally Retarded” or “Mild Mental Retardation” to describe a child whose IQ is below 70 are disorders that have always been applied to more minority children than white children. When white children were identified with this disorder, in particular middle-class White children, the label “learning disability” was developed to describe a child whose verbal and performance IQ differed by 10 points or more - a distinction often true for children diagnosed as MMR or EMR. As the use of the word “retarded” has become more stigmatized, more minority children are being diagnosed with learning disabilities, a category of disability once almost solely applied to white children.

One of the attitudes derived from our current understanding of disability is that disability is something that is floating around, waiting to attach to any formerly normal person. One of my disability studies professors, Tanya Titchkosky, once referred to this in class as “that’s disability, over there.” For example, someone might argue that emotional/behaviour disorder is not disability. That is a social construction of difference applied mainly to children dealing with the psychic effects of racism and poverty. (see for example, Harry and Klinger, 2003) But autism? That is a real disability. EBD, over here, is not a disability, that’s a racist and classist social
construction that is keeping poor children, racialized children, and children who have experienced the trauma of growing up in a racist and classist society in special education classes. But autism, over there, is a disability, and those children really do need to be in those special education classes “over there.”

The effect of the “that’s disability, over there,” framework on the way that we imagine disability is that we come to imagine that disability is sometimes socially constructed, but sometimes not socially constructed, and always in either case negative. Disability moves from body to body, becoming real in some and unreal in others. From this logic we could imagine that this disability is tragic because it is not real, because it is made up as a way of justifying oppression against a person. This other disability is real, and because it is real, it is necessarily tragic. In literature focusing on the disproportionate numbers of racialized, immigrant, and low-income students identified as special education, autism is rarely considered as a social construct in the same way as reading disabilities, mild mental retardation, or emotional disturbance, and we can clearly see the “that’s disability, over there” framework in action. In even recently published books and articles on both race and disability studies in education (see for example: Harry and Klinger, 2003), there is little or no mention at all of autism, although MMR, ED, and to some extent ADHD are all examined critically. Additionally, the assumption of human behavior to fall on a “bell curve” with some people doing very well, and some people failing, posits that in all systems, some students are destined for failure, so disability in this instance becomes natural rather than constructed. (Dudley-Marling, Gurn, 2010). This is similar to imagining that some schools have to fail.

What this means for inclusion is that special education is never apolitical. Many people will come to agree with the statement that education is political and if this were not a concern or
an understanding, we would not have such jingoistic history textbooks. However, there are some who still argue that there is nothing political about special education (see for example Sasso, 2007). There is nothing political about the way that disabled students are prevented from accessing educational facilities with their same aged peers. There is nothing political about the streaming that happens, with some kids being pushed towards remedial education and others towards college prep. Because of a continued unwillingness to imagine that disabled people are complete people, all of them, even the ones who are “really” disabled, the necessity of their education comes not from a need to encourage civic minded people in the process of making the world a better place, but from a need to pity and care for out of responsibility and moral obligation. Being able to imagine disabled people as apolitical and without agency means that one does not need to consult with them about their roles in society, and it is unreasonable to expect them to have any input into the trajectory of their own lives. It is important to remember that although the education disabled people receive is often excluded from overt political and critical consideration, it is not for a lack of trying on the parts of disability rights activists, both within and outside of the special education world (Erevelles, 2005: 70).

Special education as we know it today requires a medical model of disability which treats disabled students not as members of a community but problems that need to be solved and rehabilitated into normalcy, problems who may be permitted to join the mainstream population when they are “ready.” The justification of keeping children with disabilities in separate classrooms in the school for their safety and the safety of others has happened in all iterations of school as we know it. Certain laws, some only recently repealed, barred students with grotesque features for fear of upsetting their delicate classmates, (White, 2011: 35) or students in wheelchairs who would somehow cause a fire hazard. There are strong arguments made that
different students need to learn different things because of the place they will occupy in the future; why bother teaching students with Down’s Syndrome Shakespeare? They’re never going to be actors or English professors. Better to teach them practical life skills classes so they know how to go shopping and clock in for work. Vianne Timmons (2007) rightly describes much of the engagement with disabled school-age children in the recent past as “custodial” due to their segregation from “normal” children. “Segregation,” she writes, “leads to the removal of humanity and dignity, as institutional staff focus on chores rather than children.” Rather than “the development of the children’s potential” children in segregated learning environments are cared for with the expectation that they will always be cared for (Timmons, 2007: 135).

Anna C. Hickey-Moody suggests that the equation in school between performance of the body and worth as a person is a Cartesian idea of knowledge, "that accords value to bodies in light of their academic capacity" (Hickey-Moody, 2007: 362). The idea that one's worth is connected to one's performance in school is such a hegemonic ideology that thinking outside of it is nearly impossible; what is school if we try to imagine it without this equation? What does inclusion look like when we no longer have people considered excludable? Hickey-Moody asks us to imagine “bodies...as constituting valid and powerful sites of knowledge production” (Hickey-Moody, 2007: 359). What knowledges are produced in the ways that we ascribe meaning onto each other’s bodies as being “normal” or “disabled?”

Far too much of the discourse around inclusion has focused on the non-normative bodies of disabled children in classes designed for normates. This stems from a medical model of disability and learning (we might even go so far as to call this the "educational model of disability"), in which certain bodies are marked as being normal and others as abnormal. In this model of inclusion, students strive for normalcy, and difference is highly suspect. Before the
passage of the IDEA in the United States, for example, children using wheelchairs were often
turned away from school because they were considered to be fire hazards. A building designed
with the needs of certain bodies in mind could not accommodate these abnormal bodies, and the
problem was said to reside in the bodies of those students. Additionally, many students with
disabilities are blocked from attending regular classes with same-age peers because they are not
considered “ready” to take on the challenges of that classroom, or their learning is too dissimilar
from what is perceived as normal and acceptable (Jones, 2011). Instead they attend self-
contained classrooms where they attempt to learn to be ready for integration back into the
mainstream.

In this work, I have focused mostly on the United States, although special education and
inclusion is definitely a worldwide concern. This is partially because the statistics and data about
education and inclusion is more readily available from the United States, but it is also because
this is the system that I worked under for a few years, and the one that I plan to return to
eventually. But this theorizing of inclusion could be applicable in many other places where
similar assumptions about disability and school exist. And while most inclusion literature to date
has focused on percentages (percentages of students with disabilities in mainstream classes,
percentage of the time that students are supposed to be spending in their home classroom, special
placements, and therapy), I make my argument with more general observations. It is my
experience as both a paraprofessional and a student that though the paperwork may make some
statement about inclusion in the school community, the reality is often very different depending
on the students, the teachers, the community of the school, and the resources allocated. I urge
readers to keep these disparities in mind while imagining inclusion.
Schools in the United States are required to provide disabled students "reasonable accommodation" under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In the United States, the process works like this - a child is referred to a psychologist by teachers, principals, parents, or other adults, for IQ testing and other psychological tests. After a series of intelligence screenings performed by the psychologist, as well as any other tests or specialists recommended, the student is given a diagnosis and is eligible for support services through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). All districts do IEPs differently, but generally, IEPs are written during "team meetings" between the child's principal, assistant principal, teacher or advisor, guidance counselor or psychologist, and, if they choose or are offered the choice of attending, the child's parents and any other adults they would like to be present. An IEP identifies specific goals for the student to strive towards over the period of time until the next IEP meeting. The IEP also specifies what accommodations, if any, must be made for a student, and what behavior plans, if any, are suggested or mandated for that student. Accommodations listed in the IEP must be followed through by the school, and the team meets again to discuss changes or updates in the next six months to one year. The IEP also specifies whether or not a child may receive the services of a paraprofessional, and which therapies they will be receiving through the school.

At a first glance, the IEP may seem to be a reasonable way to invite students with disabilities into a school community. The IEP is a legal document that binds the school to promise to accommodate the student in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and often recommends one-to-one support and individualized instruction. However, the reality of teaching with IEPs reveals that this is not the inclusive utopia of education reformers’ dreams. Each student who has an IEP carries with him or her added responsibilities for the teacher; behavior logs that must be filled out, daily phone calls that must be made, and an in school therapy
schedule to be worked out alongside the regular school schedule, and all of that vaguely defined individual instruction, a phrase that is becoming a standard part of any IEP.

Ellen Brantlinger refers to the "individual instruction" mandate as a "slippery shibboleth," the effect of which, "amounts to differentiated but nevertheless indirect teaching through worksheet packets or personally assigned worksheets and texts" (Brantlinger, 2005: 127). Brantlinger goes on to describe how the call for individual instruction, at a time when many educators are advocating for inquiry based, student led learning suggests that there are some learners who really need that direct instruction that only a teacher can provide until they "catch up" to the mainstream. She suggests that this leaves disabled students working towards inclusion as students who are "ready because they are the same." (Brantlinger, 2005: 130, emphasis original).

Additionally, students who understand that they have been singled out to receive individual instruction may suffer from low self-esteem, imagining that they cannot try things and take risks on their own because they need the support of an adult. Students may also be aware of stigma associated with these programs and their classifications as special needs students, “as if the eugenic impulse that assigns individuals to a hierarchy of worth was merely a benign tradition” (Ware, 2004: 191). Individual instruction is an accommodation that accounts for a student's assumed deficit, his or her ability to function without an adult, without accounting for the ways in which that student's deficit is constructed in the social environment. Why does a student need "individual instruction?" Do they have auditory perceptual issues and have difficulty focusing on a teacher's voice in a large class? Are they often teased or bullied by classmates? Do they tease or bully classmates, and therefore must always be under the watchful eye of a responsible adult? Are their educational needs simply too much for one teacher to
handle alone on top of twenty five other separate educational needs? All of these questions invite us to question the built environment of the classroom and the ways in which certain students do and do not fit into the space normatively.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 13% of enrolled children in the nation's public schools have disabilities that qualify for IEP coverage (Digest of Education Statistics, 2010). This number varies depending on where you are in the country - the state of Georgia has a rate of 10.9% and in New Jersey, the number is 36.4% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). In a class of 26, a teacher is likely dealing with at least 3 and up to 9 IEPs. That's not to mention all of the other students who require individualized education for reasons other than disability - students identified as gifted (especially in the early years), English Language Learners, and students experiencing homelessness also require different educational strategies and bureaucratic measures. And there are probably at least one or two students who the teacher thinks may benefit from having an IEP who have not been formally diagnosed or who have no IEP yet, a process that can sometimes take up to a year. The IEP turns the classroom from a unit and splits into many parts that need careful attention to fit into a whole. Ultimately, it is up to the student and his or her team to develop in such a way that they merge more seamlessly with the others and appear less problematically different. And while the intentions behind this approach may seem pure, they are doing a huge disservice to the children that they are applied to.

A different way of imagining IEP needs and accommodation is through the model of differentiation. Differentiation is a process by which the teacher takes into account the individual needs of the students, including known teaching strategies that work well for them, environmental needs and sensory feedback issues, and topics that are interesting and exciting to
them. Then, the teacher adjusts the curriculum so that those that need the most assistance are able to access it, and those that are the most able to move on are able to have tasks that are challenging in a different way. Differentiation has worked well in classrooms set aside for gifted students; students who participate in special education and have IEPs not because of any known deficit, but because they are considered so much brighter than all the other children their age. Increasingly, students are being diagnosed both as gifted and as disabled, or, in the present lingo, “twice exceptional,” (Jones, 2011) creating problems with attempts to stream them into self-contained classrooms either for gifted or disabled children. A sixth grader who has an IQ of 140 and writes at a twelfth grade level but cannot remember multiplication tables and struggles with the executive functioning needed to get her own lunch and sit down in the cafeteria - does she belong in an autism classroom or a gifted classroom? Using differentiation can allow teachers a way for including these seemingly paradoxical students and other students identified as disabled, as well as neurotypical students.

After having questioned the environment of the classroom and the way that it privileges certain students, we can begin to think about the concept of Universal Design. Universal Design, which began as a movement within architecture and has spread to other ways of thinking, pushes us to imagine space as socially constructed, and access to that space as similarly constructed. By changing the space, we can change who is included. Similar to differentiation, universal design “requires a classroom atmosphere that makes everyone feel welcome and supported, learning areas and activities that are accessible to every student, a variety of teaching methods that engage students with a wide range of characteristics, and testing options that make assessment fair to everyone,” (Burgstahler and Cory, 2008: 565). In the case of autism, educators can practice universal design by designing classroom space that is free of visual or auditory distractions,
speaking to students in ways that are intentional and clear, and remaining flexible to changes to classroom space or practice. Intentionality seems to be the most important thing; if a teacher can explain why he or she is choosing to decorate a classroom in a particular way, use certain phrases for requests, and structure the daily schedule the way that he or she does, it will be easier to make adaptations for students for whom these “normal” classroom strategies do not work as well.

For inclusion of students with autism into mainstream classrooms to work well, teachers also have to be willing to understand the complicated nature of speech and communication, and think creatively about the different forms that speech and communication may take. Many have written about the cultural competencies teachers must develop to understand that students from “other cultures” may relate differently to Western expectations of communication, such as eye contact (see for example Byrd-Blake, 2011). It’s worth pushing educators to realize that children diagnosed with autism may learn social skills differently (and may even learn different social skills) and may miss a great deal of social cues that neurotypical children are able to understand. It would benefit all students in a class if teachers were able to speak intentionally and effectively communicate expectations, but a serious commitment to such a practice makes it possible for children with autism to participate.

Incorporating different kinds of speech into class discussions and decision making processes is a way to include students who communicate in non-normative ways. Biklen (2000) writes about the teacher of a seven-year-old student diagnosed with autism. The student, Cathy, speaks infrequently and only uses one or two words at a time. The teacher, Mrs. Castle, facilitates Cathy’s inclusion into the class by using a technique known as scaffolding, a process by which teachers provide structured opportunities for students to engage in conversation
without needing to contribute more than one or two words. For example, when asked how Martin Luther King may have felt being excluded from playing with white children as a child, Cathy says nothing. Mrs. Castle then asks, “How would you feel if your good friend Stephanie said she would not play with you?” and Cathy responds, “sad” (Biklen, 2000: 340). This allows Cathy a chance to “use and possibly improve upon her limited speech.” (Biklen, 2000: 340) while also engaging in the same process of dialogue as her classmates.

Mrs. Castle could have asked the question and then waited for Cathy to respond before moving on to another student. She could have repeated her question twice, obviously putting Cathy on the spot as a disobedient student who won’t answer a question. She could have ignored Cathy entirely and waited for her to raise her hands, as the other children were expected to. As it was, she was able to rephrase the question as one that Cathy could answer in such a way that it would contribute to understanding of the subject material by both Cathy and her classmates. By calling on Cathy, she insisted on her participation in the class, even though it would be something that would be difficult for Cathy to initiate. In this model, language is recognized as something that is created and shared between people, not as something that originates in the body of one person and is sent into that of another. Mrs. Castle uses Cathy’s life experience and interests, such as her relationship with a friend and the things that they do together, to help her participate in an area of discussion that may be less easy for her to relate to. This strategy is not only useful to Cathy, who is a student learning language in a non-normative way, but is also helpful for English Language Learners who may be having difficulty keeping up with the conversation.

We should be careful in theorizing inclusion to remember that teachers are not the only adults in a school community. Curriculum is decided in the United States at the level of local
school boards, with some input from state and national groups about the types of history or civics that should be taught, as well as the kinds of materials that are considered inappropriate to teach. To say that teachers are poorly compensated, barely appreciated, and overworked is a massive understatement. The systemic neglect of teachers and their working conditions no doubt leads to a hyper-ablest atmosphere within the school itself, where students that require extra assistance or patience for whatever reason become problems. Teachers may see the inclusion of students with disabilities, and in particular with “real” disabilities like autism, as something beyond their expertise that they have little time to learn how to deal with and that are seriously interfering with their ability to teach the other students in their class. A radical commitment to inclusion of all students means coming to terms with interlocking oppressions and one’s own positionality within these systems. This thoughtfulness requires the investment of emotional labor into a job which is already so emotionally trying. It is understandable that some teachers are less than willing to go there; it is easier to imagine each student as a potential problem then to imagine all of the ways that everyone participates in and is affected by ideology.

In addition to facilitating relationships between classroom communities, it is absolutely vital that administrators and principals work to create an environment of trust between the adults in the school. As Fauske (2001) writes, “school leaders can create safety nets for emotional labor and generate a sense of joining a journey, which is alternately rocky and smooth but always shared” (Fauske, 2001: 25). Administrators and specialists, especially autism support specialists who may be asked to help teachers come up with inclusion strategies for autistic students, can gain trust by admitting the limits of their own knowledge and attempting to actually work collaboratively with teachers rather than just telling them what they have to do differently (MacArthur, 2011). When teachers trust that principals and other administrators are working
with them and are invested in their success, they may be more likely to try things that are a little riskier, like agreeing to include children with autism in their classes with the condition that they meet frequently with autism specialists to help understand the way that their students experience the world.

MacArthur describes a situation where this works well, in the context of two support specialists in a mainstream classroom attempting to provide a disabled student with services that she needs. “She says, ‘I can’t fill out these things that they want me to fill out, only you and the teachers and the mother can do this,’” says one of the specialists to the main classroom teacher, “She invited me to one of the meetings before a new child came to the center to informally discuss some strategies for settling in this little boy. I didn’t know her from a bar of soap, but she involved me right from the very word go” (MacArthur, 2011: 173). When specialists act as resources for teachers and students, and not bureaucratic dictators, teachers are able to work collaboratively with them, sparing themselves alienation and emotional drain. Ideally this makes for a situation where the specialist is able to spread his or her expertise more evenly throughout a school environment.

Teachers are also often placed in the position of competing with one another for resources for their students. This is especially problematic in underfunded school districts, but can happen anywhere. Sometimes, for example, two classrooms are both equally overloaded with students, and both teachers agitate for an educational assistant or paraprofessional to be placed in the classroom to help with individual instruction and discipline. One teacher receives the paraprofessional part time, and one does not receive any help at all. It is difficult in these situations for teachers to not resent one another for their seemingly unearned access to resources that they both need.
Additionally, schools are often competing with each other for scarce resources, and recent major legislation in the United States Congress legitimates that infighting by punishing schools that perform lower on standardized tests by taking away essential grants and funds, and rewarding those that do better with more resources. All of this underscores the political implications of schooling, and the political implications of agitating for better inclusion practices. For inclusion practices to be successful, schools need to be more equitable places from the get-go, and teachers need to be able to work with each other and their principals and administrators to construct learning communities where students actually thrive. Linda Ware writes in “The Politics of Ideology,” “the starting point must be framed through the lens of civil rights and social justice since all else reduces appreciation for the complexity that is likely to follow” (Ware, 2004: 199).

Inclusion is not about placing non-normative bodies in the same classroom as normative bodies and calling it a success. It is not about downplaying the very real oppressions that students and teachers face in the world and including everyone under a rubric of diversity or multiculturalism. “Radical inclusion,” a concept used mostly in a Christian community context to refer to the integration of LGBTQ identified people into Christian fellowship, is about asking questions about who is here and who is missing, and why they are missing. It is about staying accountable to the ways in which we continue to oppress one another and to remember that the sight of bodies in the classroom does not necessarily speak to a radically inclusive classroom. Radical inclusion admits that community itself is a practice of learning, of loving, and of being something different together than what we are separately. Good inclusion practices will help all students in the class, but it will make it possible for marginalized students to participate at all, and when those inclusion practices take into account the idea that disability is another way of
being in the world, they do not have to originate from ablist ideas about what the world is and the correct way to encounter it. I am agitating here for a social project, a political project, and a loving project. “Another world is not only possible, she is already here,” writes Arundahti Roy (2003), “On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”
References:


