

**Inclusion in Childhood Studies and Education:
Ethical Responsibility *to* and *for* Children with Disabilities**

by
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Abstract

In this thesis, I discuss what it might mean to engage in an ethically responsible pedagogy, by posing the following questions: What is our ethical commitment and responsibility to and for others—especially when those others are children with disabilities? More importantly, when recognizing that the most challenging task for educators is to create a context for the collective (Rinaldi, 2006), what kinds of ethical and pedagogical contexts should be cultivated when encountering children with disabilities, so that each child’s existence and alterity are revealed? To engage these questions, I explore the concept of listening through multiple avenues: listening as attending to and for others, listening as attending to the revelation of alterity, listening in the state of dialogue, and listening through “taking a while”. All of these concepts of listening are interpreted in relation to Emmanuel Levinas’s conception of I/other relationality.

Keywords: pedagogy; responsibility; ethical commitment; listening; alterity; dialogue; Emmanuel Levinas; children with disabilities

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Preface

This master's thesis research has been impacted by the current unprecedented and difficult conditions of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

I originally planned to conduct empirical research at Simon Fraser University (SFU) Childcare Society with the children and educators onsite, focusing on immersing myself into the idea of what it means to live well with and for others, specifically when those others are children with disabilities. The foundation of my planned research was to be observing the lived experiences of children and educators and collecting data through live field observations, notes, photographs, and videos of children's and educators' pedagogical engagement.

However, following the public health orders issued by Fraser Health and Vancouver Coastal Health Authorities, SFU's guidelines for individual research changed. Since my original research methodology required human participation and direct contact with others, I decided to change the method of data procurement, after thorough and careful discussion with my thesis supervisor. Accordingly, my original plan to conduct empirical research changed to a conceptual framework. The thesis also includes several anecdotal vignettes, which represent significant moments in my past professional experiences, but these vignettes are not meant to represent particular children or parents.

Chapter 1. Introduction

Thinking back on memories long past always takes me to an unforgettable encounter that I experienced when I was about ten years old, yet I still reminisce about the event from time to time. I am not certain whether or not this encounter could be summarized with the word reminiscence, because whenever I think of this encounter, my heart aches and draws me to think of what it means to have an ethical responsibility for the Other or others¹. Although the event has passed, lingering thoughts keep coming back to me, to this day, allowing for “an ongoing engagement with a past that continues to haunt [my] present” (Todd, 2003, p. 26). The inspiration of Sharon Todd (2003) leads me to write about my incomplete yet emerging thoughts, which actively show my “struggle to symbolize [my] relationship to [the other] and to [myself] . . . that is, the incident is not simply an event that has passed without comment . . . but participates in [the] negotiations of what it means to be a [being]” (p. 26), here and now.

Throughout the years of attending an elementary school in one of the major metropolitan cities in South Korea, I had a friend (I will call her Chloe) who was in my grade and class. Chloe had difficulty walking with both legs and was dependent on her wheelable walker. (Now when I recall Chloe’s symptoms, I surmise that her diagnosis may have been cerebral palsy.) There was a system in my classroom where two students would become partners or study buddies and would sit at the same designated desk throughout the year while attending class. When I was in grade three, I was selected to

¹ In keeping with most educational scholars writing on Levinas, I will use the capitalized Other to refer to a specific, identifiable other and the lower case other to refer to nonspecific others, except in direct quotations that may use the terms differently.

be Chloe's partner, and because she needed more space to move, we always sat in the very first row of seats. Without truly knowing what moral and ethical responsibility might mean, just being a partner with Chloe involuntarily obligated me to sense an ethical duty to assist her, helping push or pull her walker and regularly waiting and walking alongside her. Even with a deep commitment to support her, I experienced difficulties from time to time, as assisting her was physically challenging due to the weight of her body.

One day, I was about to help her to walk when all of sudden she told me, "No thanks, I can do it by myself. I don't need your help anymore." I was not sure what it meant, and at the same time, I was a little bit upset at her because I assumed she was not able to notice and/or appreciate the support that I had been showing her.

How could she say that to me when I was merely here to help her?

How could she react like that when all I did was support her all the time?

How could she . . . ?"

My automatic reaction was focused on my own frustration and feelings, rather than thinking and being there for Chloe—and I eventually did not care what made her reject my support. After that day, there seemed to be an invisible wall between us, even though we were still together at the same desk. A couple of months passed, with this estranged feeling towards each other lingering, as we never had the chance to debrief or talk about what happened. As time went by, we moved to the next grade and were placed in different classes. Afterwards, our only communication was to say "hi" whenever we ran into each other in the hallway, but nothing more than that.

Now that I am here writing about what happened, relying solely on my memories, I have experienced flashback moments of how untarnished and naïve I was, and it causes me to think about what I could have done differently. What if I had stood there and asked her why she did not need or want my help anymore? What if the way that I approached her was not something that she longed for? What if there was another way of being there for her, besides providing physical help? What if . . . ? Or would what-could-I-have-done-differently be enough when my commitment got lost in the middle of nowhere because I chose to avoid having difficult conversations rather than facing it or at least allowing space for further dialogues (Bauman, 1993, as cited in Todd, 2003)?

With these lingering thoughts in mind, this thesis becomes a space to unpack and rethink—where my journey begins.

Preservation of the past, and an emphasis on the need to transform for the future, enables a wider glance at the entire picture. However, neither the past nor the future can accurately provide a guide for what is needed in the present. As Michel Foucault (1998, as cited in MacNaughton, 2005) argues, the past intimately influences the present, requiring us to reconceptualize what is already known as salient in order to constitute new ways of knowing. Hence, perpetuating historical ways of teaching in current educational systems is problematic, with the onus of responsibility for change falling heavily on present educators. In a similar manner, the importance of cultivating an inclusive, ethical, and educational environment where the individual's human subjectivity is respected has surfaced in recent research studies (Biesta, 2013, 2016, 2017; Chinnery,

2003a, 2003b; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Todd, 2003, 2010) but has not yet concretely fostered a shared understanding of what human subjectivity means.

My academic experiences, alongside my work experiences as an early childhood educator (ECE), Infant Development Program (IDP) consultant, early childhood care and education (ECCE) faculty have inspired me to question the current state of education, more specifically in childhood studies and education. My concerns arose particularly when I started working as an IDP consultant. Briefly stated, the role of an IDP consultant is to work closely with children who have, or at risk of, disabilities, and their families, to support the children in maximizing their potential. The majority of the work is done alongside children and their families and includes providing adequate parenting handouts, completing developmental checklists, such as ages and stages questionnaires (ASQs) and *Developmental Assessment of Young Children – Second Edition* (DAYC-2; Voress & Maddox, 2012), and establishing monthly goals to preplan children’s lives based on the parents’ and consultant’s observations.

The intent of the program is to promote the growth and development of children with disabilities. However, this notion constantly troubled me, with the program effectively being based on a deficit model in a developmental framework, establishing children with disabilities as “needy” and lacking certain capacities. This belief has its limitations because it perpetuates the conception that there is an assumed ideal child and childhood out there and that the goal of children’s lives is to live up to these idealized images. Under these conditions, the ideal child in this perspective is one who does not need others—a conception rooted in a modernist ideal of sovereign, rational, autonomous subjectivity (Biesta, 2013, 2016, 2017; Chinnery, 2003a, 2003b). Further, the purpose of

education becomes cultivating autonomy, independence, and individuality. I will unpack this notion in Chapter 3, when discussing what a community might be—a community with multiple subjectivities, pluralities, diverse others, and its own strangers (Biesta, 2016; Chinnery, 2007).

In my experience of working as an IDP consultant, the lives of children with disabilities were constantly evaluated through checklists and documents, as if there were certain answers to their “problems” and lives that could be fixed with the implementation and repetition of worksheets and parenting guides. Providing parenting guidelines and handbooks agitated me as well, because the action of supplying documents has a predetermined assumption that those parents are in urgent need of additional guidance on parenting, as if there are only certain correct ways of being with others (in this case, being with children with disabilities), but also placing a heavy burden on parents’ shoulders to assimilate their children into a rather pallid view of what a child should be, wherein children with disabilities are “rendered more normal, or generously accommodated through individual program plans and special-needs interventions” (Jardine, 2006, p. 105).

Inspired by Säfstrom and Biesta’s (2001, as cited in Biesta, 2016) question, “How can we respond responsibly to, and how we can live . . . with, what and with whom is other?” (p. 15), the question I seek to pursue in this thesis is “*What does it mean to live well with and for others, specifically when those others are children with disabilities?*” I consider this question in the context of childhood studies and education in North American settings, more specifically, in British Columbia (BC), Canada. Noticing that Euro-Western epistemologies permeate not only North America but the whole world, and

having spent half my life living, studying, and learning in BC, I am drawn to focus on the BC context in connecting professional experiences and anecdotes with my lived experiences and contemporary educational theory.

A note on terminology

It is worth spending some time to explain why I am choosing the specific term *children with disabilities* rather than *children with extra support needs* and/or *children requiring extra support*. First of all, those terms are often used interchangeably in the field of ECCE. In the newly revised *British Columbia Early Learning Framework (ELF)*, “children with extra support needs” are defined as “children who are experiencing, or who are at risk of, developmental delay or disability and who require support beyond that required by children in general” (Government of British Columbia, 2019, p. 100). In the document *Community Care and Assisted Living Act – Child Care Licensing Regulation*, “children requiring extra support” are defined as children who require additional support or services (Government of British Columbia, 2007). It is noteworthy that there has been a tendency to change the terms as a response to connotations of deficit, and to focus on including all children, yet still the term *disabilities* is embedded in the definition itself.

In a similar vein, much of the early intervention (EI) literature, which includes IDP research that has been conducted in the Lower Mainland, still uses the term *children with disabilities* (Iarocci et al., 2006; King & Meyer, 2006; Pighini et al., 2014), because the grounding framework of those studies relies heavily on psychology, developmentalism, and “outcome-based measures” (Guhn, 2009, as cited in Pighini et al., 2014, p. 264). Even though the studies aim to look at parent-child engagement, the focus is often on the children’s developmental needs and support. Further, the name of one of

the most influential disability organizations in BC includes the term *disability*² as a way of expanding its role for the community (Developmental Disabilities Association, 2021). In addition, in the *BC Early Intervention Therapy Program Guidelines*, the term *disability* was used as “an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations, or participation restrictions including environmental and personal factors” (Government of British Columbia, 2009, p. 1). Recognizing that there are many layers and complexities in the terms *children with disabilities*, *children with extra support needs*, and *children requiring extra support*, I will use the term *children with disabilities* here, because my research includes many vignettes from my previous experience as an IDP consultant where “children with disabilities” was the dominant discourse.

Grounding the work within the reconceptualist movement

Although it is not often said explicitly in childhood studies and education that developmental psychology and child development dominate and generalize the field, there remains a tendency to focus on children’s ages and stages of development, such as their maturation processes, what they need to be doing at a certain age, and what are the best and age-appropriate practices, to name a few (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2005). The problem with this way of thinking is that it only values certain groups of children—those children who fit into the typical norm, usually based on Euro-Western culture, and those children who develop in the “right” and linear path of progression. Those children who do not develop according to that path are marginalized, a term that also refers to

² The term *children with special rights* has been used in Reggio Emilia, Italy, to see inclusion as a mandate. Recognizing the value of this term, the BC Early Learning Framework adopted the concept and changed the term *disabilities* to *diverse abilities*; however, it only replaces the previous term with a new one, without resolving any significant problems with the previous term. I will return to this idea in Chapter 2.

groups of people from “diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and value contexts” (Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education, 2014, para. 2). These concerns were brought up by many reconceptualist scholars, and problematic ideologies “have been addressed using different methods and forms of critique” (Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education, 2014, para. 1); embedded assumptions are constantly deconstructed, critically analyzed, and carefully rethought with alternative possibilities. This is considered a way of responding to the conditions of our current times through thoughtful exploration of what has happened in the past, to create a livable future (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2005; Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education, 2014). Thinking with the reconceptualist movement, the purpose of my study is to propose alternative possibilities, drawing primarily on the ethics of the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas to *deconstruct* and *reconstruct* (Cannella, 2006) the prevailing modernist view of disabilities in childhood studies and education.

Overview of the thesis

Each chapter begins with vignettes from my professional experiences, which are woven throughout. All the vignettes draw purely on my past and retrospective memories and ongoing interpretations. None of the encounters involves either observations or data collection. To preserve the anonymity of the children and families, pseudonyms are used in all of the vignettes, and any identifiable markers have been removed. In Chapter 1, the current chapter, I begin by stating the concerns that arose while I was working with one of the Infant Development Programs (IDP) in the Lower Mainland. These concerns are vital, as they allow me to delve deeper into deconstructing the dominant discourses in childhood studies and education in BC to find alternative possibilities for what it means

to encounter others ethically, specifically when those others are children with disabilities. Also in this chapter, I explain the reason why I am choosing the specific term “children with disabilities” rather than other terms. Further, I briefly explain what the reconceptualist movement is, and how I am grounding my work within this movement in childhood studies and education.

In Chapter 2, I discuss how the word *others* is presented in a developmentalist frame. To highlight the perpetuation of theories driven by Euro-Western epistemologies, which are deeply rooted in modernist assumptions about the self and others, and concerns and problems of generalization, I interpret the perspectives of child development theorists Jean Jacques Rousseau, Jean Piaget and problematize its concerns. I also briefly discuss the history of disabilities in British Columbia and how it has been introduced and discussed in the educational system, together with some of the problems of the language used around disabilities. I then suggest alternate possibilities for language on disabilities by introducing the Reggio Emilia approach to education and their projects of working with children with disabilities—or, to use their term, children with special rights.

Given the shortcomings of the modernist perspective, I turn to Emmanuel Levinas’s conception of otherness in Chapter 3. I begin by addressing what it might mean to live well with and for others, specifically when those others are children with disabilities, by exploring problems with the conception of humanity within modernism, what an ethics of encounters as embracing otherness in a community of strangers might look like, and what it might mean to be-for-the-other with passivity and commitment. I also leave a space for further elaboration of Levinas’s conception of passivity as an entity

that “reveals itself as the activity of welcome” (Chinnery, 2003a, p. 86) with constant attentiveness and consideration.

As I turn to the implications for childhood studies and education in Chapter 4, to think about what it means to engage in ethically responsible pedagogy, I begin by proposing questions, such as: What kinds of human subjects do we want to cultivate through a pedagogy that is responding to our present concerns, when recognizing pedagogy addresses subject formation (Biesta, 2016; Chinnery, 2003a, 2003b; Todd, 2003)? What kinds of pedagogy do we want to think in relation with, when our interests lie in the creation of ethical and pedagogical human beings? What is our ethical commitment and responsibility to and for others (Chinnery, 2003a, 2003b), when each human being has the right to exist in the world with uniqueness and singularity? More importantly, when recognizing that the most challenging task for educators is to create a context for the collective (Rinaldi, 2006), what kinds of ethical and pedagogical contexts should be cultivated in education, especially when encountering children with disabilities, so that each subject’s existence and the alterity of the world are revealed? To engage with such questions, I explore the concept of listening in various avenues: listening as attending to and for others; listening as attending to the revelation of alterity; listening as being in the state of dialogue; and listening as the idea of “taking a while”. Levinas’s conception of I-other relationality is woven throughout the discussion on listening.

Chapter 5 begins with a brief summary of the thesis. I also explain how the current pandemic conditions impacted my thesis and changed my methodology from what I envisioned originally. While acknowledging the current situation, I propose implications for future research by suggesting a couple of ideas that I could take up if I

have opportunities to pursue further research in the near future. These suggestions include reengaging with my initial research proposal, which was paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic, incorporating empirical data collection, analysis, and interpretation; delving deeper into Levinasian veins of literature, engaging more deeply with the original sources of Levinas's works; and perhaps researching further into other philosophical frameworks in relation to Levinas, as Levinas's conception of I-other encounters seems to be becoming the very foundational and ethical grounds from which other ideologies are branching. I conclude the thesis by addressing concerns some might have that Levinas's proposals are too impractical and utopian.

Chapter 2. Developmentalist Understandings of Who Children with Disabilities Can Be

I stand in front of a strange house and ring the doorbell. The door opens. Here comes a mother holding a child in her arms. Joyfully, yet anxiously, she invites me to come into the house. As we sit down in the middle of the living room, a strange silence encapsulates us. A mother, a child, and me. Here I go, trying to break the cumbersome awkwardness.

“As you can see, there are five different areas of development and I will be assessing your child in all these areas by asking you some questions that are indicated on this assessment tool. I will be scoring it afterwards and will decide where your child is at and which area may require further support and development for improvement.”

I repeat these words multiple times a day, as if there were a certain way of guiding these children whom I meet, hoping to find “normality” in the child. A mother of a child thoroughly and meticulously answers all the questions on the assessment sheets. Each and every question on the sheet has a certain way of asking, to which a certain set of responses are predicted, rhetorical in many ways. Who asks these questions, and does that matter? Anyone can do this, as long as there is a set of questions on the assessment sheets. Here I am, breaking the awkwardness again to continue talking:

“As the results indicate, your child has some delays in these areas of development, which means your child will need extra support from us. As an IDP, I can also make referrals to other medical services and professionals. In the meantime, I will be working closely with you to help your child maximize their potential.”

What am I doing here? What are these words that came out of my mouth? What do I want to tell these parents? Who am I to utter these words to the children and families

that I have been encountering? All these painful thoughts have come back to me while I narrate this story. What is the purpose of asking these questions? What would these scores do at the end of the assessment? Who am I to classify children by these scores and results? What do these results tell me and the families about the children I have met?

Over the past several years, my field of studies and professional endeavours have led me to realize that the most fulfilling times in my life have transpired when I was with children. Through my work experiences and academic studies, I am mindful that children are not sponges or empty vessels that absorb and receive knowledge from others (Freire, 1988). Rather, they are unique individual beings who can enthusiastically co-construct knowledge with others in various environments. I have confronted many situations where educators tend to view children through their own preexisting conceptions, without truly knowing the children over time. I questioned myself: What does it mean to reconceptualize embedded notions and practices in the field of childhood studies and education, as an educator, as an IDP consultant? What are the possible ways of providing variety in environments to allow each child to have the opportunity to discover their possibilities? Ultimately, what does it mean to live well *with* and *for* others, particularly children with disabilities in the various contexts?

Sharon Todd (2015), who is deeply inspired by Emmanuel Levinas, reminds me that finding something new is not always necessarily to “find and excavate” (p. 406) new concepts that no one else has thought about or investigated before. Instead, she suggests that “newness is . . . about allowing ideas to circulate in a novel relationship to other ideas that might not have been previously high up” (p. 406), which suggests that one is

excavating something that already existed, not something entirely new. In a similar vein, Affrica Taylor (2018), whose thoughts align so much with childhood studies and education of the poststructuralist movement, suggests that poststructuralists, who are part of “the reconceptualist movement” (p. 92), not only transform preexisting knowledges and theories in childhood studies and education, but also critically challenge dominant ideologies in order to think otherwise. To do so, Taylor (2018) examines “where poststructuralist ideas came from and their important relationship to the traditions of structuralist thinking” (p. 92). Accordingly, it is essential to note the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jean Piaget, two important developmentalists who built the foundation of child development, which plays a central role in developmental psychology and the field of education in general. It is also important to mention here that it is not my intention to either dissect and study developmentalism to prove its essence, or to dismiss and relinquish developmental psychology completely. It is rather to be inspired by Putnam’s assertion (as cited in Cannella, 2006, p. 2) that “deconstruction without reconstruction is an act of irresponsibility”; that is, I study the work of the above developmentalists so that it is possible to deconstruct the impact of such theories in the field of childhood studies and education, and further, to construct alternative possibilities to encounter children with disabilities by unpacking the concerns about developmentalism when it is used as the only definite truth of understanding children and their childhood. I start by providing a glimpse into some of the developmentalists’ works and my concerns with these approaches in the field of childhood studies and education. Then, I delve into the history of disability education in British Columbia and issues that have arisen in BC education in relation to children with disabilities.

Developmentalism, its approaches and problematization

Much of the childhood studies and education literature in Canada is dominated by psychology and child development theories (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2005; Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education, 2014). In these dominant discourses in childhood studies and education, the most recognizable developmentalists who describe development as linear are Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jean Piaget³. As Rousseau is famously known as the precursor of developmental psychology, Piaget took Rousseau's theory seriously and furthered his perspective (Lumen Learning, n.d.; MacDonald et al., 2013). To begin with a brief overview of Rousseau, he is one of the most familiar philosophers and psychologists in the field of education, who had a strong belief that children are innately innocent beings who are new to the world (Rousseau, 2004). Like Freire's (1988) argument that children should not be considered empty vessels to be filled with others' experiences and knowledge, Rousseau's approach to childhood has its own limitations. Affrica Taylor (2011) points out that the concern with Rousseau's assertion that children are innately and naturally innocent is that "if this essential natural quality was not properly nurtured it would decay" (p. 3). Further, Troy Boone (2005) suggests that Rousseau's notion of "natural education [was] designed both to shield children from this corruption and to prepare them for their inevitable entry into the social realm where [corruption] prevails" (para. 1).

Natural education tends to impose the romanticized notion that children are pure objects and *tabula rasa*, blank slates (Locke, 1989, as cited in MacDonald et al., 2013)

³ Given that it is impossible within the scope of this thesis to cover and thoroughly examine all developmentalists, I pulled out some widely used theories from a couple of theorists who have had a significant impact on "developmentally appropriate" learning and practices in childhood studies and education.

where knowledge can be filled, facilitated, and inserted by adults and others who are older than children. When children are seen as mere objects and containers with nothing inside, we are devaluing the children's presence in the world and not seeing them as actual beings in and of the world. Children with or without disabilities should be seen as human beings who are taking part in a process of becoming. Further, Rousseau's legacy has an embedded expectation that children, generally and normally, will follow a natural pattern of development and maturation, and when the child's development either slightly or significantly departs from this "natural" development, those children's lives and childhoods are ignored and/or obliterated. Under Rousseau's regime, the lives of children with disabilities cannot belong anywhere.

Following Rousseau, Piaget's psychological theory, which was heavily inspired by Immanuel Kant (Alves, 2014; Cannella, 2006), contends that children pursue a linear path of development, maturing in the process (Gindis, 1999). In this manner, certain ages and stages in children's lives, and their childhoods, are idealized; therefore, only certain children's lives and childhoods can be recognized. This notion suggests that Piaget saw development as an independent cognitive function whereby cognition and maturation occur in isolation without any relation with others. Halpenny and Pettersen (2014) assert that

Piaget made it possible to consider planning for children's learning and development based on the concept of *universal* periods or stages in children's lives, during which thinking shares key features of all children's thinking within this age range, and, conversely, periods of time that are qualitatively different

[than adult thinking] in terms of the associated thinking structures related to children's age. (p. 18, italics in original)

Both Rousseau's and Piaget's understanding of children's lives and their childhoods are predominantly based on the linearity of development, which diminishes children who do not fit well into the category of "normal" or follow normalized patterns of development. Further, when not all children's lives and childhoods are recognized, children who do not fit the expected linear model of development become an anomaly, deviant in their development. What is particularly questionable about Piagetian developmentalism is that, as Cannella (2006) indicates, it upholds a deeply rooted proposition of determinism that there is formidable predictability and knowability of who children can be, as "docile and knowable" (Foucault, 1995, p. 190).

To go back to the vignette above, in my position as an IDP consultant I was performing the role of the *knower* and the *expert* of the child. I acted as if there was a solution that I could give to the family, providing a sense of comfort to the parents. I acted as if the questionnaires and the assessments knew where the child was at in terms of development and could predict a future for the child. Using the assessment tools became my predominant way of knowing children. The tools provide five different classified areas of development to evaluate, upon which to make assumptions about where to start the intervention for the child. Aligning a child's development with different age groups according to a defined scientific discourse in order to identify and evaluate whether a particular child will fit into certain classifications of development is questionable and potentially problematic if used as the "truth" about each and every child's development, especially children with disabilities. With this notion, the lives of children with

disabilities are segregated and unrecognized as if they are “objects and . . . instruments of . . . [developmentalism’s] exercise” (Foucault, 1995, p. 188).

Even though it might be true that the works of the above developmental psychology-driven theorists were innovative and inventive in the times in which they lived, it is daunting to realize that such Euro-Western epistemologies are still performed as the consolidated foundation of childhood studies in the current era and function as immortalized, exclusive entities to prevail, not only in North American contexts, but all over the world. When one analyzes perspectives different from the above developmentalists and developmental philosophers, it is evident that seeing children as capable and unique, rather than expecting them to conform to a monotonous system of learning, has yet to change educational systems worldwide.

A history of disability education in BC and its concerns

I have discussed Rousseau and Piaget above to lend understanding to the history of child development and how these thinkers’ works impacted and grounded childhood studies and education; I also expressed concerns about when those theories are used as definitive truths around the world. While living, studying, and situating myself in the context of the Canadian educational system in the province of BC, I came to realize that it is important to understand how disability education came about in BC. Above I provided a glimpse of how developmental theorists’ ways of seeing children were deeply rooted in the field of childhood studies. In this section, I outline the brief yet pivotal history of disability education in BC, which is crucial to my thesis since this process will lead to engagement with and recognition of the history itself and how disability education was inherited in BC, while recognizing its ramifications for the present state of education.

According to the timeline that O’Neill (2018) shares, from the early 1800s to the 1890s, children with disabilities were not even recognized as human beings; the focus and emphasis were only on their disabilities, thus classifying children and labelling them with specific diagnoses was institutionalized. From the 1900s to the 1970s, more actions were carried out, such as the establishment of separate classes for deaf and blind children, curriculum modification, and funding legislation for and about children with disabilities (O’Neill, 2018). As O’Neill notes, it became the norm to segregate children with disabilities from other children who were defined and classified as normal and typical. This created a big gap between children with disabilities and those who were considered normal.

The early 1950s to the 1960s, was a provocative decade in inclusive education in early years in British Columbia (Developmental Disabilities Association, 2021; Inclusion BC, 2021; Reach Child & Youth Development Society, 2017). In 1955, families of children with disabilities started a movement by creating their own schools for their children with disabilities due to the lack of support from the government (Inclusion BC, 2021). Without adequate support and guidance from the government, finding dedicated teachers to educate children with disabilities was very challenging, thus families of children with disabilities took up tremendous initiatives to advocate for the need for support and early intervention (Developmental Disabilities Association, 2021; Inclusion BC, 2021; Reach Child & Youth Development Society, 2017). Since then, the government has gradually recognized the importance of bringing children with disabilities into the public school system, as well as providing adequate early intervention support and funds for children with disabilities. Further, for families of children with

disabilities, their movement to support their children was political; therefore, many provincial organizations were created in the Lower Mainland (Inclusion BC, 2021). 1958 was the first year that Canada recognized that it is not only the parents' role, but also a public responsibility to care for and educate children with disabilities (Reach Child & Youth Development Society, 2017). In 1956, the University of British Columbia offered the first "special education teacher training" (O'Neill, 2018, p. 2) and in 1959 became the first Canadian university to appoint a professor of special education (O'Neill, 2018). This movement became the foundation of special education training for educators in BC⁴.

Despite these efforts, there has been a notion of degrading children's voices; as Cannella (2006) asserts, "the most critical voices that are silent in our constructions of childhood studies and education are the children with whom we work" (p. 10). Furthermore, the voices of children with disabilities are even more devalued and not heard in this sense, due to the classification of them as not yet developed, because children with disabilities are not even considered as beings, but rather "as a thing among other things" (Heidegger, 1947, 1993, as cited in Biesta, 2016, p. 6). I am not arguing that the creation of a disability and inclusive education teaching and training program was not an innovative move when initiated back in the 1950s; however, it is important to address the concern that these programs run the risk of embedding teachers as fixers of children with disabilities, whereas working with these children is far more complex than this perception conveys.

⁴ It is important to note here that even though special education training is intended for the Kindergarten to grade 12, many of the early year intervention services require minimum of bachelor degrees in a relevant field and may include ECE certification in Special Needs (BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, 2021; Reach Child & Youth Development Society, 2017; Sources BC, 2021). Accordingly, acquiring the special education training supports the work of the early year intervention.

First, early intervention is intended “to optimize the growth and development of children from birth to school entry who have, or are at risk for, a developmental delay and/or disability” (Government of British Columbia, 2009, p. 2). However, my concern is that if we adopt a perspective of children with disabilities as *things* to be fixed, rather than actual human beings, the job of early intervention consultants and special education teachers becomes one of diagnosing and repairing those children so they can come closer to the prescribed norm. Such an approach does not allow each individual’s *otherness* and *alterity*, as Levinas puts it, to emerge (Biesta, 2013, 2016, 2017; Chinnery, 2003a, 2003b; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Todd, 2003, 2010). I will unfold these notions further in Chapter 3. This way of treating children with disabilities under the regime of best practices is troublesome because it generates questions which do not have simple or definite answers. For example, what do we mean by best practices? Who can define its meaning? How and why? What does it do when there is a certain way to define best practices? Who is marginalized and who is privileged under the idea of best practices?

Second, Edmunds and Edmunds (2014) note that even though each province in Canada has different legislation regarding special education, and laws which are formed accordingly, universal notions of disability remain. This is because many special education documents have been published stating the importance of considering “US laws as they continue to have an effect on special education practices in Canada and around the world” (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2018, p. 14). These educational documents insist that there are many similarities between special education in Canada and the United States because “the basic practices of special education follow the same conceptual models reported in literature worldwide . . . models that know no political boundaries”

(Edmunds & Edmunds, 2018, p. 18). Assessments, including Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ; Paul H. Brookes Publishing Ltd., 2021), *Developmental Assessment of Young Children, Second Edition* (DAYC-2; Voress & Maddox, 2012) and developmentally appropriate practices (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.), are still universally perpetuated and used as if those assessment tools and documents are the only measurements of knowing, understanding, and determining children and their development in general. This makes me question further what caused the majority of people to be vastly influenced by “the Euro-American dominant historical knowledge” (Cannella, 2006, p. 3) and what it made the only way of knowing children. A further concern is that such documents have critical issues regarding language around disabilities that perpetuates the universal ideology of children with disabilities as less-than and lacking. I will unpack these concerns below.

Problems with the language around disabilities

In recent years, there has been a big change in language around disabilities, and further supports and implementations to be used in the school system were created, such as guaranteeing minimum service ratios in classrooms, publication and revision of special education policies, procedures, and guidelines and so forth (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2014; O’Neill, 2018). The wording was amended from “children with extra support and needs” and “disabled children” to “children with disabilities” and “children with exceptionalities” (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2014). However, some problems still remain with the language around disabilities. One crucial concern to point out is that the movement to change the name from disabilities to exceptionalities does not provide adequate moral and practical support. For example, the newly revised British Columbia

Early Learning Framework (ELF) refers to children with disabilities as “children with diverse abilities” (Government of British Columbia, 2019, p. 19) and highlights “the principle that children of all abilities, including *children with diverse abilities* and needs, have equitable access to quality learning and childcare and are supported in play and learning along with other children in a regular program” (p. 19, emphasis added). The notion of celebrating exceptionality has been questioned, because it is undeniable that life outside the mainstream is both different and, in most cases, harder for these children and their families.

This movement to change the term could be problematic because it may convey a message that disabilities are something to be celebrated and blessed. This notion definitively diminishes the actual disabilities the child has, thus potentially removing essential funds and supports that children with disabilities must access. For example, the Canadian Association of the Deaf–Association des Sourds du Canada (CAD-ASC, n.d.) indicates specific terminologies, such as deaf, Deaf with a capital D, hard of hearing, and so forth, to be used carefully in relation to deafness, to respect individuals’ differences. There also are some unacceptable and offensive terms, such as deaf-mute and deaf and dumb (CAD-ASC, n.d.) which convey disrespect towards people who are deaf and hard of hearing. Accordingly, individuals who are deaf want to be recognized and valued for their differences, depending on their different types of deafness, and want to be approached with the right terms in identifying who they are. When these terms are used, a space is created for these individuals, who were previously looked on as less than, to be recognized beyond their disability, to express who they are, and to insist on the right to

receive adequate supports whenever necessary. Therefore, it is critical to think about what changing language really does.

Cannella (2006) was inspired by Foucault and Jacques Derrida and emphasizes that “language is considered the major avenue for the production of knowledge and is tied to the cultural codes of those who create its forms. Language . . . constructs knowledge and consequently limits alternative knowledge forms” (Cannella, 2006, p. 13). The problem arises when language is simply changed from one word or term to another without an actual transformative change occurring in what the language does. While altering the language of disability to one of diverse abilities may change the societal view and perception of disability as something to be praised and celebrated, it fails to recognize the pain and suffering the child with disabilities and their parents must endure every day, as these perspectives are rarely seen or recognized, and are further concealed from the public and society by simply altering the language. Furthermore, the new terminology disregards each and every child’s uniqueness and their own being in the world (Biesta, 2013, 2016, 2017), and asserts the notion that all children are equal when there is no such thing as equality for anyone, especially for children with disabilities. In this sense, the language stands alone doing little but perpetuating the status quo. The term diverse abilities thus becomes problematic when only the language changes but the societal norms remain the same.

The significance of the matter is to consider what follows changing the language of disability and how, and I will say more about this below in relation to Reggio Emilia education. Thoughtful consideration of “the possibility for an emergent power” (Affrica Taylor, 2018, p. 99) from the citizens and government, alongside provisions that can

produce socially constructed knowledge and procedures that entail mutual understanding of what we are, as a collective, is crucial in supporting children with disabilities. In this regard, there are more possibilities to see each child's uniqueness as-other, that is, one who has the otherness and one's own alterity in becoming (Biesta, 2013, 2016, 2017; Chinnery, 2003a, 2003b; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Todd, 2003, 2010).

Alternative possibilities towards language on disabilities

One of the greatest inspirations that I want to refer to here, regarding the language on disabilities, is the educational and “local cultural project” (Moss, 2019, p. 66) that emerged in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Reggio Emilia is a small town in northern Italy where, in 1963, Loris Malaguzzi, educationalist and pedagogista, created the now-famous educational project for the town's children and their families, especially those who suffered from poverty. Earlier on, in 1922 to 1923, early education in Italy originated in, and was based on Catholicism and the Fascist regime (Cagliari et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 2011; Moss, 2019). Under Catholicism and the Fascist regime, only certain models were implemented in early education, such as “a medical-hygienic model of child care . . . [and] the Fascist ideology of motherhood” (Edwards et al., 2011, p. 19). Further, the debris of the Second World War (WWII) from 1939 to 1945 remained in Italy, which “left a terrible legacy of human loss, psychological scarring and material destruction” (Moss, 2019, p. 66).

However, in the post WWII period, from 1945 to 1946 in Italy, there arose a sense of hope and desire to reconstruct the early education system as a whole. Many of the citizens, especially women (mothers of young children), factory workers, and farmers, were ready for change. In 1963, the community built a school in the small village of Villa

Cella. From this provocative event, Malaguzzi was empowered to have a vision “to renew education and to make a more just and better society for all children” (Dahlberg, 2016, p. viii). He noted in his interview with Lella Gandini that “it was a necessary change in a society that was renewing itself and changing deeply and in which citizens and families were increasingly asking for social services and schools for their children” (2016, p. 31). Malaguzzi became one of the most innovative thinkers and initiators to bring transformative changes in early education to the city of Reggio Emilia (Cagliari et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 2011; Moss, 2019), and he “devoted the rest of his life to working for the *commune* [the city’s active local authority]” (Moss, 2019, p. 66, italics in original). Further, he truly wished to see and value each child, with or without disabilities, as a unique protagonist who brings newness into the world.

Malaguzzi truly believed in the role of education to uphold values of solidarity, democracy, and intersubjectivity (Kim & Nelson, 2020). Moss (2019) emphasizes the importance of recognizing Reggio Emilia education as a “local cultural project” (p. 66) and not just an approach, because, to him, when a project is simplified as an approach, it implies “a generalizable model” (Moss, 2019, p. 66), whereas Reggio Emilia was “a local cultural project that has emerged from a very particular time and place . . . a place with a very particular history and political cultural and social context” (Moss, 2019, p. 66). This provocative project became the foundation of a “movement for integration and inclusion” (Soncini, 2011, p. 187) with a holistic process to value each and every child, including children with disabilities. Stefania Giamminuti (2009) notes the following to inform how the Reggio Emilia project has been thinking and dwelling with the notion of disabilities:

As a sign of a “more accomplished humanity”, children with “special rights” are granted priority access into the schools of Reggio Emilia. . . . All children are viewed as possessing rights and strengths rather than needs; thus the educators in Reggio Emilia have transformed the dominant educational discourse of the needs and “special needs” of children into a discourse of rights and “special rights”.

Starting from a perspective of rights, the educators in Reggio Emilia have re-cast the image of the child; they have reconceptualized the weak, egocentric child in need of care, the reproducer of culture and knowledge, as a strong, rich, social child, a citizen with rights, a co-constructor of culture and knowledge. (p. 32)

From this perspective, children with disabilities—children with special rights in the Reggio Emilia perspective—are always included in any spaces and places, and this has been visible throughout all the years of works from Reggio Emilia. Further, it is evident that Reggio Emilia’s projects did not simply change the language—from “disabled children” or “children with special needs” to “children with special rights”—but also the focus. The valid reasons and intents of changing the language from one to the other are visible through the everyday practices and lives of the children, educators, families, society, and municipality as a whole, helping everyone to truly understand what it means to be with, and live with children with disabilities. The reason genuine understandings and everyday practices are possible is because there are mutual understandings from all the citizens of Reggio Emilia and through the actions put in place by the municipal government. This government involvement ignites “emergent power . . . [which] is both regulatory and productive” (Affrica Taylor, 2018, p. 99). As Moss and Petrie (2002), drawing on Foucault, argue:

The issue is not to do away with power, which is impossible. Nor can any of us—policy makers or practitioners, researchers or other experts, parents or other relatives—stand outside power, occupying some objective position from which we can discern the truth. Instead, we can become aware, through critical thinking, of how power operates and to what effects, for example through determining what will be considered truth and knowledge. It then becomes possible to unmask assumptions and question them, offer alternative possibilities, find ways of doing things differently and being governed less. (p. 34)

Thus, the majority of citizens in Reggio Emilia share an understanding of what it means to appreciate differences, understand the conveyed meanings in the language of disabilities, and acknowledge each individual's differences in multiple aspects. The citizens have specific responsibilities to and for other(s) and accordingly, they put everything into their practices—in the way of their thoughts, presences, lives, and actions. Through the practices of emergent power that were, and are still exercised in the municipality of Reggio Emilia, a space has been created for a high level of societal understanding and acceptance within the community.

Another aspect to consider is how public awareness in the city of Reggio Emilia creates conditions for children with disabilities and their families to be noticed and recognized in the educational system in order to receive authentic support within the community. As Ivana Soncini (2011) explains, all the systemic processes for children with disabilities begin at their birth in the hospital. If there is an urgency for specific children to receive medical support, the national health service directs the child and family to a pediatrician. As relationships strengthen through the years, the pediatrician

also becomes a part of the decision-making processes alongside the family in choosing the “right” school for their child. In these processes, the family often thinks about such choices as “school location, presence of friends, or the physical structure of the school” (Soncini, 2011, p. 191) that will allow their child to feel welcomed. Giamminuti (2009) also notes that the admission process often gives preference to children with disabilities. She explains that a support teacher is always assigned to the classroom for children with disabilities and additional staff members are always onsite to see “the centre as a system, rather than viewing each class in isolation” (Giamminuti, 2009, p. 40). She continues,

In fact, educators and staff believe in the value of co-responsibility, where, similarly to a community, each member is responsible for the other, adult or child. As such, the staff in the school (educators, atelierista, cook, auxiliary staff, pedagogista) are collectively termed “gruppo di lavoro” or “working group.” (p. 40)

According to Giamminuti (2009) and Soncini (2011), these collective works are always in collaboration with families, not leaving the individual feeling isolated. Rather, these groups are “founded on the values of relationship, shared dialogue, and co-responsibility” (Giamminuti, 2009, p. 40). These co-responsibilities to and for children connect closely to Levinas’s idea of recognizing *otherness* and *alterity*. In thinking of these perspectives in relation to the services of the Infant Development Program (IDP) in British Columbia, there still is a long way to go. Because the program is deeply rooted in the idea of fixing children and applying the old developmental goal of making children normal (Wolfensberger, 1972, 1980, 2011), “especially children, who were labeled as deprived, low functioning, or somehow lacking in opportunity” (Cannella, 2006, p. 8),

the only methodology that can be applied to children and their development is the developmental assessment tools (ASQ, DAYC-2, DAP, and so forth). When disabilities and their developmental theories are completely eradicated through language, people become blind and unconscious to disability, which remains out of society's sight. This becomes "an attempt to 'contain' difference by a reduction of difference to the same" (Chinnery, 2003a, p. 66).

It is not my intention to dismiss the validity of those assessments or to propose not seeing disabilities at all; the developmental assessment tools also can be used as effective documents to decide whether there are any concerns to be paying particular attention to. Further, those evaluation tools can also be used as to capture a child's strengths, notice important milestones of each child, and support parents to see how their child is progressing (Paul H. Brookes Publishing, Ltd., 2021). However, what I want to insist on is that we must move away from relying solely on viewing children's development as occurring in a straight line, despite abilities or disabilities, and create different forms of understanding and knowledge. Further, we must think about what it means to see *beyond* disabilities, while still recognizing individuals as unique beings who are "coming into presence" (Biesta, 2016, p. 53) in the midst of their disabilities.

This shift calls educators in childhood studies and education to rethink, review, and reconceptualize their knowledge of disability and children with disabilities. What would philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas suggest that educators think deeply about? I will continue discussing these concepts in the next chapter, exploring the thoughts of Gert Biesta, Ann Chinnery, Gunilla Dahlberg, Peter Moss, Sharon Todd, and others—not in an attempt to *apply* Levinas to education, but rather to *think with* Levinas.

I will focus on what it means to see otherness in the other(s) and will unpack possible alternative approaches to living well *with* and *for* others when the others are children with disabilities.

Chapter 3. What Does it Mean to Live Well with and for Others?

When I think about what it might mean to live well with and for others, Sarah and her son John, whom I encountered while working as an IDP consultant, always come to mind. When I first met John, his level of socialization was very limited; he barely made any eye contact with others and only enjoyed the solace of independent play, showing a lack of interest in other people. John often was scared of seeing new people he was not familiar with. I vividly recall how he liked to repeatedly spin one particular object by tapping it with his hands repeatedly throughout the day, and how he could only utter basic sounds from words he had learned. Most of the time there was no smile on his face, and he was not keen on encountering anything new or unfamiliar, whether objects or people. John was diagnosed with severe autism spectrum disorder (ASD) at the very young age of 38 months.

Despite John's condition, I remember how much vibrancy Sarah brought into his life. Sarah did not give up. Her countless eye contacts despite the lack of embrace, repeatedly singing to John in multiple different languages on various occasions, and consistently taking him to social events and community programs confirmed the mother's deep-rooted acknowledgment of her child's "unencompassable alterity" (Levinas, as cited in Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 78). Sarah's affirmation of John's otherness and her responses to John allowed his existence to be reshaped through the mutual actions of the child and the mother. When I last saw Sarah and John, John was occasionally able to make eye contact with other children and adults, and he quite regularly looked attentively at Sarah with a big smile on his face when she sang to him.

To see, to attend to, and to respond to otherness does not mean noticing a list of difficulties and challenges the child with a disability has. Instead, it perhaps is about recognizing each child with or without disability as another being who has different ways of being in and of the world, and responding to the alterity each child brings to life. It might also be to deconstruct misinterpreted societal norms towards disability, from something to be prevented or cured, like a disease, to something to be valued and respected. The right to exist in the world without a prefixed concept of that being should become the prevalent and dynamic vision to encourage individual beings to be present in the world.

In the previous chapter, I addressed developmentalist understandings of who children with disabilities can be, the history of disability and special education in British Columbia, and problems with the dominant language around disabilities. I then suggested alternate possibilities for language on disabilities by introducing Reggio Emilia's projects of working with children with disabilities—or, to use their term, children with special rights. In this chapter, I would like to bring attention to the phrase “living well *with* (and *for*) others,” which I often come across in the field of childhood studies and education. I would like to unpack what it really might mean when encountering others, specifically when those others are children with disabilities. I sometimes worry that the phrase might be used and overused meaninglessly, that it is somewhat clichéd—as if there is a romanticized world out there where each of us can live well, without any complexities or different thoughts to be shared. It also troubles me when many educators in the fields of

childhood studies and education adhere to this notion without any context and/or explanation, thereby making the notion verge on redundancy.

In a similar vein, Cristina Delgado Vintimilla (2012) indicates the danger of using such phrases as slogans; she draws on Linda Farr Darling's assertion that "what is worrisome about slogans is that they confer respectability on ideas that are in practice radically underspecified or poorly understood" (as cited in Vintimilla, 2012, p. 44). However, reading through Biesta's (2016), Chinnery's (2003a, 2003b), and Todd's (2003, 2010) works, I find that these authors invite me to think that living well with others does not end by merely putting oneself into someone else's shoes or feeling empathy for others. Vintimilla (2012) further provokes me to think that living well is not vaguely "synonymous with social harmony, [n]or . . . finding a commonality premised in certain harmony" (p. 122). In essence, *living well* is neither creating a harmony, cohesion, or togetherness in the name of community nor creating nonstop disturbance in the community (Biesta, 2016; Chinnery, 2003a, 2003b, 2007; Vintimilla, 2012). It is rather a much more complex concept to be suggested and deeply thought through, which upholds a trajectory of disrupting the modernistic way of establishing unity and sameness in the community to reconstruct and co-construct "the community of those who have nothing in common" (Lingis, 1994, as cited in Biesta, 2016, p. 55).

Ultimately, living well with and for others could be about composing a "permanent coexistence with the stranger" (Chinnery, 2007, p. 331; see also Biesta, 2016) in the community—living with diverse others (Biesta, 2013, 2016; Chinnery, 2007), where children with disabilities are assuredly included as well. In order to do so, I will unpack some problems with humanism in modernity, including how humanism

affects the creation of community under the modern regime, and engage in the idea of what it means to live in a community of strangers, a community of people with nothing in common. Throughout this chapter, Emmanuel Levinas's conception of otherness and what it means to be *with* and *for* others, as an ethical encounter made possible by the alterity, or otherness, of the other, and my responsibility to and for the other (see e.g., Biesta, 2013, 2016, 2017; Chinnery, 2003a, 2003b; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Todd, 2003, 2010) will be discussed as alternate ethical possibilities in education.

Problems with humanity under the regime of modernism

I mentioned briefly in Chapter 1 my concern about the conception of the ideal child, a conception rooted in a modernist ideal of sovereign, rational, autonomous subjectivity. When subjects are idealized as such, the purpose of education becomes cultivating autonomy, independence, and individualism (Biesta, 2016; Chinnery, 2003a, 2003b). But who is this sovereign, rational, autonomous subject, and what is at stake in the notion? To understand such issues and concerns with autonomous subjectivity, it is critical to first delve into the notion of humanism under the regime of modernity.

Chinnery (2003a) draws on Charles Taylor's argument in her assertion that the practice of modernity has its own limitations because its "commitment to the increasingly self-focused individualism that currently pervades North American society results in lives that are 'inevitably flattened, narrowed, and poorer in meaning' (Taylor, 1991, p. 4)" (Chinnery, p. 9). Chinnery problematizes "the standpoint of the sovereign rational subject who can come to know the objective truth about what is, in and of itself" (p. 3). In this notion, it is clear that the aim of modern humanity is to become a sovereign rational subject and to acquire the power of knowing the truth about oneself and the world, as if

these traits and knowledge are sufficient to live a fully human life. Thus, the problem of idealizing the creation of sovereign, rational, autonomous, and independent subjects is directly interwoven with the problem of humanism in modernity, because “humanism . . . can only understand the human being as a ‘what’—a ‘thing’—but never as a ‘who’” (Biesta, 2016, p. 34). Within this view, people who are not sovereign, rational, and autonomous enough are devalued as “things.” Biesta (2016) draws on Heidegger’s proposition to argue the following:

Humanism . . . doesn’t ask the question of the *Being* of the human being—and thus can only apprehend the human being as a thing among other things . . . the problem with humanism, therefore, is that it posits a *norm of humaneness*, a norm of what it means to be human . . . it specifies a norm of what it means to be human *before* the actual manifestation of “instances” of humanity . . . humanism specifies what the child, student, or “newcomer” must become before giving them the opportunity to show who they are and who they want to be. (p. 6, emphasis in original)

Accordingly, inferring what was briefly mentioned before, the purpose of modern education becomes instrumental, with a goal to provide, to insert, and to implement adequate knowledge and theories into the human “things,” mostly into children, who are considered innately not-yet-become-beings, so that they may contribute to the world after growing into sovereign, rational, and autonomous subjects.

The work of the developmental theorists I discussed in the previous chapter provides good examples of modernistic views of molding children to become “human, that is autonomous beings” (Kant, 1982, as cited in Biesta, 2016, p. 36). To illustrate

further, under such developmental notions, after the maturation processes of growth, a child reaches their maximal development to become an autonomous being. After the linear process of development within a sociocultural environment, a child becomes a rational subject. Further, after natural, innate stages of development, a child becomes an independent citizen, having fully attained knowledge of how to become one. The biggest problem of modern humanity thus is the collapsing of differences and making everyone as similar as possible, which Gunilla Dahlberg and Peter Moss (2005) would refer to as a “fully controlled and ordered world—with instrumental rationality and moral indifference . . . as the dissolution of feelings of responsibility for the Other” (p. 70). Under such a regime, a child with a disability is considered nonhuman, a mere “thing” whose sole direction in life is “to become self-motivated and self-directing, a rational subject capable of exercising individual agency” (Usher & Edwards, 1994, as cited in Biesta, 2016, p. 35). Accordingly, all children, whether with or without disabilities, cannot be the humans of this world; they are left out as non-beings who cannot be part of this world when sovereign, rational, autonomous individualities are affirmed—they are instead “monstrous child[ren]” (Jardine & Field, 2006, p. 104) and thus to be corrected and fixed to be fitted into normalcy. The assumption about the normal and ideal child is often based on the deficit model, a dominant discourse in the field of childhood studies and education (see e.g., Davis, 2013).

David Jardine and James Field (2006) emphasize the significance of the idea of monstrosity in childhood studies and education, writing that it “*calls law into question* and disables it. . . . The monster thus is essential to the life of the commonplace and ordinary, saving it again and again from its own sleep, its own unreflectiveness, its own

calcification” (p. 104, emphasis in original). However, as modern humanity points towards the creation of sovereign, rational, autonomous subjects, the embedded meaning of monstrosity is altered to “something to be avoided” that eventually calls for molding “the abnormal individual[s]” (Jardine & Field, 2006, pp. 104–105). Drawing on Foucault, Jardine and Field further note the problematic viewpoint of abnormality:

The abnormal is named, measured, and controlled by normality . . . and therefore defined by its proximity to or distance from the normal, the known, the expected, the standard, the ordinary. Any “abnormality” that is not thus tetherable is left monstrous. The eager or shadowed face of the “troubled child” in the classroom is understood along radiating gradients in his or her proximity to the normal, to “standards.” Their troublesome face is thus defaced, “normalized” by being rendered abnormal . . . and therefore rendered more normal, or generously accommodated through individual program plans and special-needs interventions. (Jardine & Field, 2006, p. 105)

Under such a regime, children with or without disabilities are presented as degraded, misconstrued, and corrupted beings. Within this modernist perspective, the children who require extra support whom I met through my years of working as an IDP consultant would be considered abnormal and needy, incapable of becoming sovereign, rational, autonomous subjects. In essence, certain children’s lives are segregated into tailored developmental systems to reach their potential to be independent, and children who do not fit into the normal realm are “labeled as gifted, slow, intelligent, or special” (Cannella, 1999, p. 36), further disassociated and identified as abnormal. Hence, I am left wondering, is living well with and for others possible within this inhumane notion of

humanity, when children with and/or without disabilities are not even seen as actual human beings? What philosophical and ethical framework should we embrace and be committed to in order to truly engage with the idea of living well with and for others?

A community of strangers

I briefly introduced the concept of living in a community of strangers (Biesta, 2016; Chinnery, 2007) earlier in this chapter. To unpack this concept further, let me begin by offering a brief overview of what community means in a modern rational sense. Just as humanity under the regime of modernity poses problems, the notion of community under modernity poses similar concerns. Biesta relies on Alphonso Lingis to support the notion that “community” is often construed as a place where people find something in common, such as “a common language, a common conceptual framework—and building something in common: a nation, a polis, an institution” (Lingis, 1994, as cited in Biesta, 2016, p. 55). Further, both Biesta and Chinnery draw on Zygmunt Bauman’s notion of the community of modern society and explain that it is inescapable to see a community as a warm and comfortable place where people can “relax . . . [and] may quarrel . . . enjoyable quarrels . . . to make our togetherness even better and more together” (Bauman, 2001, as cited in Chinnery, 2007, p. 330). Such a community, a so-called “rational community,” is where people’s interests lie in finding commonalities and cohesiveness amongst themselves and others, thus universalizing and formulating unity is inevitable (Biesta, 2016; Chinnery, 2007).

However, as Biesta and Chinnery both argue, it is not our role to completely discard the existing idea of a community as a united place. Rather, we need to reform what it means to be in such a community, since a modern community of sovereign,

rational, autonomous beings also creates its own strangers who are not accepted in the community that created them because they are seen as anomalies who do not fit into the right condition or the right category, further unravelling the notion of unity the community typically tries to advocate. When modernity does not allow these strangers and different beings to live and strive within the community, this community becomes either *anthropophagic* or *anthropoemic* (Bauman, 1995, as cited in Biesta, 2016, p. 58).

Biesta relies on Bauman, and explicitly engages with the two terms: anthropophagic and anthropoemic. The literal meaning of the former word is “man-eating” and the latter means “vomiting out [the deviant] humans” (2016, pp. 58–59). Bauman’s interpretation has a deep-rooted connection to Derrida’s assertion of community as a “military formation” (Derrida, 1997, as cited in Chinnery, 2007, p. 331), because in such communities, united subjects build walls and barriers to guard themselves from any differences and only allow in people who align with the norm, otherwise, they are denied entry. Thus, the modern community, with its aim of creating sameness, creates subjects who are monstrous and strange, and who are either completely absorbed and assimilated into the society or brutally destroyed by and turned away from it. When this happens, children with disabilities either must conform into normal beings or lose all sense of belonging in this type of community. This, Chinnery (2007) writes, is a “pernicious form of metaphysical violence” (p. 332).

With this in mind, the core philosophy of my IDP consulting work was to utilize screening tools (ASQ and DAYC-2) to evaluate children and to compose written reports with the results of the observation and assessment. On a daily basis, while composing the documents, I faced a philosophical dilemma, questioning the purpose of completing the

assessments and whether it was actually a necessary tool or not. If the fundamental aim of education is to transform what is already known to new ways of knowing (Biesta, 2016; Todd, 2015), then what different uses of the assessment tools might be undertaken so that children are not acclimatized to conform to what is typical and normal but are given the opportunity to foster generative potentialities lying unseen and dormant within?

Then, what would it mean to see and recognize each child's subjectivity as unique, rather than affixing labels and classifying them? How could a community be seen as a space where multiple subjectivities are shared, respected, and negotiated through transformative communication, rather than molded and sculpted by the knowledge that is channelled to the children? In essence, how can a community be recognized as a place where a plurality of subjects becomes possible? What does it really mean to live in a community where people have nothing in common (Biesta, 2016; Chinnery, 2007), a place of strangers and "other beginners" (Biesta, 2016, p. 49) of the world? Next, I turn to Levinas to reframe a community of otherness, to acknowledge the notion that we are all "inescapably and irreducibly other to the other" (Chinnery, 2007, p. 331), as well as to consider the notion that subjectivities cannot come into existence without others, thus "subjectivity is derivative of an existentially prior responsibility *to* and *for* the other" (Chinnery, 2003b, p. 5, emphasis added).

Ethics of encounters as embracing otherness

In this section, I begin by unfolding Levinas's conception of who the other can be and what it means to embrace others as unique beings. First of all, who are the "others" anyways, in Levinasian terms? Levinas proposed, in very plain terms, that "the Other is what I myself am not" (as cited in Todd, 2003, p. 29). However, just because his

proposition sounds simple, that does not mean his ideas are easy to know and grasp. Chinnery (2003a) expresses two challenges one might encounter in reading Levinas. First, we read Levinasian ethics transposed into a traditional Western philosophical milieu; second, we seek to understand the in-depth meaning of Levinas's "deceptively simple terms to convey complex and subtle ideas" (p. 72). The latter challenge is important to point out, because there is a tendency to think that "good writing is marked by clarity and plain language—a conviction that is frequently invoked in order to discredit and dismiss especially the more difficult postmodern and poststructuralist texts" (Aoki, 2000, as cited in Chinnery, 2003a, p. 72).

Accordingly, Todd (2003) and Chinnery (2003a) draw on Levinas to remind us that thinking about others is not a simplistic comparison of myself to others, or putting myself into the other's shoes to feel empathy. Rather, it is a much more complex concept, and, in a way, it is impossible to know and understand who the other is, what the other strives for, and who the other can be, because "otherness [is] absolute (that is, always already a given) . . . other [is] infinitely unknowable" (Todd, 2003, p. 3). An often misconstrued notion is that one can easily grasp the other, which derives from a desire to know and understand the other. This "grasping" (Levinas, as cited in Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 77) ties directly into the above two challenges in reading Levinas and recognizing otherness. I will unfold this notion below, along with concerns and issues that arise when it is used as a definitive way of knowing the other.

Dahlberg and Moss (2005) elaborate Levinas's concepts of "grasping" (p. 77) and "alterity" (p. 78) of the other. The idea of grasping, in Levinas's (as cited in Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) terms, starts with one's "will to know" (p. 77), which is the desire to know

the other and to fit the other into “the knower’s prefabricated system of understandings, concepts and categories” (p. 77). The problem arises when one (the knower, who has the desire to know) has preestablished and predetermined knowledge of the other, thus making the other assimilate to a certain way of being in the world. This also has a direct connection to the concept of modern society, which was addressed in the previous sections, where its aim is to create unity and sameness without any recognition of perplexities or diversities in others. Further, when one’s desire to grasp the other is perpetuated in the relation with the other, the unknown is always “reduce[d] . . . to the known” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 77); thus, a “totalizing system of the knowing subject” is formed (p. 77). In essence, Levinas posited that with “a will to know” the other subjects, one’s sovereignty, autonomy, rationality, and individuality are affirmed through mastery of the known subjects:

In knowledge there also appears the notion of an intellectual activity or a reasoning will—a way of doing something which consists precisely of thinking through knowing, of seizing something and making it one’s own, of reducing to presence and representing the difference of being, an activity which appropriates and grasps the otherness of the known. A certain grasp: as an entity, being becomes the characteristic property of thought, as it is grasped by it and becomes known. Knowledge as perception, concept, comprehension, refers back to an act of grasping. (Levinas, 1989, as cited in Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, pp. 79–80).

With such a will to know and grasp the other, no room exists for differences amongst and between subjects; thus it is even more limiting for children with disabilities to exist and be recognized as subjects. Further, to go back to the vignette in Chapter 2

about my experience as an IDP consultant, it is evident that my practice was embedded within the overarching purpose of measuring and classifying the children to see where each individual was at. The whole practice was about grasping the children's developmental levels to know what kind of support was necessary to acclimatize them into the sovereign, rational, and autonomous community without truly recognizing each child's alterity (Levinas, 1987, 1988, as cited in Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Todd, 2003). But what does Levinas mean by alterity, and why is it critical to recognize the individual in relation, as an individual *with* and *for* others?

Levinas saw alterity as an absolute and inevitable factor of otherness, because it is what makes each subject unique amongst others. Some might argue that alterity is similar to the concept of "difference"; Biesta (2016) puts significance on the term as it is about "giv[ing] up the idea that knowledge of the other is a necessary and sufficient condition for engaging with the other" (p. 103). However, to take it one step further, Levinas suggests that the conception of alterity should not be merely understood as simple differences. Instead,

alterity is not at all the fact that there is a difference, that facing me there is someone who has a different nose than mine, different colour eyes, another character. It is not difference, but alterity. It is alterity, the unencompassable, the transcendent. It is the beginning of transcendence. You are not transcendent by virtue of a certain different trait. (Levinas, 1989, as cited in Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 78)

Perhaps it is more about recognizing that others cannot be obliterated or turned into some version of "myself, . . . my thoughts and my possessions" (Taylor, 1987, as

cited in Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 79). When there is no attentive recognition of the other's alterity, the subject's being in the world fades away, as if there is a "death of the subject" (Laclau, 1995, as cited in Biesta, 2016, p. 33). Todd (2003) elaborates Levinas's interpretation of the other and explains that "an unassimilable and unknowable alterity means that the I and Other lie in a relation of nonreciprocity, where they come together only ever as strangers to each other, a fundamental strangeness that secures the hope for ethicality" (Todd, 2003, p. 9). This notion has a strong connection to Chinnery's (2007) and Biesta's (2016) assertions that living well with others means living in a community of strangers—subjects of radical alterity and irreducible otherness.

To illustrate further, John, the child I described in the vignette in this chapter, has an alterity that was recognized by his mother, Sarah. More importantly, John was able to (and constantly will be able to) be in the state of becoming who he can be as a unique, irreplaceable being with the help of his mother's recognition of his alterity and his fluidity. Acknowledging John's being in the world, Sarah's existence and alterity also were recognized. Their myriad engagements and interactions are the approaches of recognition of each other's alterity. van Manen (2002) acknowledges this as true recognition, which "literally means to be known . . . someone who recognizes me thereby acknowledges my existence, my very being" (p. 38). In essence, to recognize another means accepting and valuing them for who they are, despite the abilities or disabilities they might have. It is not about labelling a list of difficulties and challenges the child with disabilities has, but instead it is more focused on the recognition of each subject as a different being with diverse ways of being and becoming in this plural world, full of alterity and fluidity. Perhaps it is about seeing the person beyond the disabilities and

genuinely encountering them in each moment; therefore, ethical encounters with the other require recognizing and preserving the other's alterity.

Now I am left wondering, what does it mean to have the responsibility of creating an ethical and responsible space in education where one's alterity is recognized and respected through saying "yes" to the otherness of the other (Chinnery, 2003a, 2003b), rather than diminishing that otherness in order to fit the other into societal norms? What are the ethical commitments and responsibilities one should embrace when encountering others who are not oneself? What does it mean to be responsible, to be for-the-other instead of being for-oneself (Chinnery, 2003a, 2003b)?

Ethical responsibility to and for the other

I would like to start this section by highlighting the importance of language. As I mentioned above, Levinas often uses ordinary words in extraordinary ways, and this has raised difficulties in comprehending his use of the term "responsibility." A critical problem in contemporary education is that it relies too much on "how to"—solutions and methods—rather than on *what* the deeper issues might be, and this is true with regard to responsibility. When the focus of education is on *how to*, we may fail to notice *what* might be at stake, what it truly might mean to take responsibility for others, what kinds of pedagogies we should think with, and so forth. Merely conducting an implementation process where only the *how to* is addressed, without requiring any examination or reflection on one's own ways of being, risks promoting a more superficial kind of education that anyone could deliver, since the focus would be not on what to address but only on how it should be done.

In addition, Smiley (1992, as cited in Chinnery, 2003a) argues that the modernist conception of responsibility is based on “the application of impartial and universal reason and focuses on the praise or blameworthiness of the individual agent, beyond or outside any particular society’s or group’s conventions” (p. 48). Within such an understanding, being a responsible subject means that one’s duty is to fulfill one’s own sovereignty, rationality, and autonomy, without much regard for others. As such, C. Taylor (as cited in Chinnery, 2003a) argues, “we become less concerned with others, and our lives are inevitably flattened, narrowed, and poorer in meaning” (p. 59) when the focus of responsibility is on one’s own individuality. What does it mean, then, to ensure responsibility in an ethical and moral perspective, to think for the collective rather than focusing on personal individualism? I will address this question by drawing on Levinas’s and Bauman’s interpretations.

Levinas constantly reminds us that, as ethical subjects of this world, we should recognize that we have a profound and inevitable responsibility for the other whom we encounter, because our own being as a self—an I—cannot exist without the other, who is also a being, a part of this world. In a dialogue with Richard Kearney (1986), Levinas asserted such responsibility as follows:

I am defined as a subjectivity, as a singular person, as an “I,” precisely because I am exposed to the other. It is my inescapable and incontrovertible answerability to the other that makes me an individual “I.” So that I become a responsible or ethical “I” to the extent that I agree to depose or dethrone myself—to abdicate my position of centrality—in favor of the vulnerable other. (pp. 26–27)

What Levinas stressed here is that we, as human beings, cannot think and treat responsibility as something one can take or choose not to take based on one's own will, because "subjectivity is preceded by intersubjectivity . . . before the 'I' comes into being, it is already inscribed by responsibility to and for the other" (Chinnery, 2003a, p. 79).

Further, Todd (2003) draws on Levinas to say that,

for Levinas, learning from is a profoundly ethical event because the very encounter with difference, with the Other, is a passive one, one in which the learner is openly receptive to the Other. Such openness signals for Levinas an unavoidable responsibility for the Other, placing an encounter with the Other in the time of ethics. It is the very responsibility born of passivity that enables a nonviolent relation to the Other to emerge. Thus, for Levinas, it is the disinterestedness, the noninvestment of one's conscious ego—and one's psychological past—that allows for the preservation of the Other's alterity. (p. 11)

With all this in mind, it is worth interpreting further here my practice as an IDP consultant. I propose that IDP work itself could flourish with the recognition that my being and subjectivity are possible only because the others—in this case, children with disabilities and their families—were there. Each and every child and their parents whom I met as a consultant have their own unique way of being present in this world, and because of their own uniqueness and alterity, my presence as a consultant was made possible. Therefore, it is critical to think with Levinas about the role of the IDP as not about changing and fixing this particular child with whom I have met. Rather, it is about loosening up my power and positionality to truly encounter the child and the family, so that our encounters with each other become a recognition of each other's existence and

being in and of the world. Now, I would like to return to one of the long quotes above to discuss what it might mean to think of passivity as ethical responsibility for the other.

Being-for-the-other with passivity and commitment

Todd (2003) asserts that for Levinas, “it is the very responsibility born of passivity that enables a nonviolent relation to the Other to emerge” (p. 11). What could this statement mean? What is the role of passivity in ethical responsibility, and how does Levinas’s view differ? As Chinnery (2003a) notes, some may argue that the notion of passivity entails a paradoxical dilemma, since it is often viewed as opposite to being active. Here, in Levinasian terms, passivity is offered as a completely different form. Levinas saw passivity as an exclusive entity that “reveals itself as the activity of welcome” (Chinnery, 2003a, p. 86), with constant attentiveness and consideration. The notion of what it might mean to *attend to* others will be discussed more in detail in Chapter 4. As briefly mentioned in the section above, a Levinasian interpretation of responsibility cannot be understood as something one can take or choose not to take based on one’s own will. Considering responsibility as such is viewed as an “Aristotelian (and Murdochian) view . . . [that] the agent chooses or consents to passivity, which presupposes that [one] can also refuse it” (Chinnery, 2003a, p. 87). However, as Levinas constantly proposed, responsibility is not something that can be chosen and applied. It is “*prevoluntary, previrtuous, preconscous and premoral*” (Peperzak, 1997, as cited in Chinnery, 2003a, p. 87, emphasis in original), and it is almost an unconditional recognition and attentiveness of the other that makes my being present. In essence, I do not become my being unless the other calls me into being—my being cannot come into existence without the other’s presence.

Another proposition that I would like to bring in here is the notion of *being-for* the other. Bauman's claim (as cited in Todd, 2003) of viewing togetherness under three different forms connects to Levinas's offering of passivity. Bauman notes that three different forms shape the notion of togetherness: being-aside, being-with, and being-for. To briefly review what each form means, being-aside is a mere togetherness in which different beings inhabit and share a mutual space, while being-with is more than being-aside; however, it lasts for a shorter period of time because it is "constrained by the parameters of time and place, whereby people may have interesting interactions but are not transformed in any way by them" (Todd, 2003, p. 47). However, this does not mean that being-with is necessarily problematic, because the word "with" is used as a way of connecting to others, which ultimately aims composing a "permanent coexistence with the stranger" (Chinnery, 2007, p. 331; see also Biesta, 2016) in the community—living with diverse others. As to being-for, it is much bigger than either being-aside or being-with, as it is used as our ethical responsibility of disrupting the hierarchical way of seeing children as needy. It is thus used as a "transcending the limitations of being with [which] demands an attentiveness to alterity" (Todd, 2003, p. 48). As Bauman (as cited in Todd, 2003) notes:

Being-for is a leap from isolation to unity; yet not towards a *fusion*, that mystics dream of shedding the burden of identity, but to an *alloy* whose precious qualities depend fully on the preservation of its ingredients' alterity and identity. Being-for is entered for the sake of safeguarding and defending the uniqueness of the Other; and that guardianship undertaken by the self as its task and responsibility makes

the self truly unique, in the sense of being irreplaceable. . . . Being-for is the act of transcendence of being-with. (p. 48, emphasis in original)

Accordingly, I recall watching a video of Judith Butler and Sunaura Taylor (Astra Taylor, 2008) where they were talking about the issue of societal norms towards disabilities and some challenges that Taylor faces as a person who relies on a wheelchair due to difficulties with her hands and feet. While they were strolling through the streets, Taylor brought up the challenges she confronts when visiting coffeeshops. Although capable of holding a coffee cup on her own, albeit only with her mouth, the empathic eyes surrounding her and carefully observing her amplify her disappointment that tries to comprehend “the normalizing standards of [her] movements and the discomfort that causes when [she does] things with body parts that aren’t necessarily what we assume that they’re for” (Astra Taylor, 2008). This made me revisit the vignette in the introductory chapter. When my close friend Chloe abruptly told me that she does not need my support anymore, what might have happened differently if I had recognized the importance of passivity by being there for her with true attentiveness and thoughtful consideration? What might have happened differently if I had truly seen Chloe’s alterity without my imprudent and meaningless support, when perhaps all she needed was my presence as being-there-for-her? I mistakenly treated Chloe’s presence as wobbly and imperfect. Nevertheless, for Chloe, it may have been a moment of her asserting her uniqueness or singularity and refusing to be reduced to my previous conception of her and her needs.

Chapter 4. Towards an Ethically Responsible Pedagogy: Implications for Childhood Studies and Education

If one asks what might be the most memorable moment that I encountered while working as an IDP consultant, I will always recall the times that I spent with a mother, Bella, and her child, Miley. The very first moment was unforgettable, as we had met during a very busy lunch time at one of the women's shelters in the Lower Mainland. There were many other women waiting for their lunch to be served, and there was Miley, running freely everywhere, as only Miley could do. Bella tried to stop Miley from moving everywhere, telling her "no, stop, walking feet please," trying to conceal her embarrassment. She and I sat down on one of the couches and started talking about the reasons why she wanted to connect with the infant development program. She shared her struggles with Miley, who seemed unable to hear and talk at the age of 24 months. Bella also shared her sorrow that Miley never showed any affection towards her—she felt that there was not enough (or even no) heartfelt emotional exchange between herself and Miley. All the episodes with Miley that Bella shared with me were concerning in that Miley really might not have been able to hear anything: She barely turned around when Bella or others called her name, she continuously threw lots of blocks and toys on the table as loudly as possible, she only turned around when someone tapped her shoulder, and she was only able to utter "ah-ah" sounds, to name a few. Bella told me that she was waiting to hear from the audiologist for a further check-up of Miley's ears. I am still uncertain what kind of sentiment or attention I had towards this family. However, I could sense that my responsibility to and for Bella and Miley was slightly more than for the other families I had encountered. (Needless to say, this does not mean that I did not have any responsibilities towards other families.)

After our first long conversation, I kept thinking about what I could do for this family, as a consultant, to support the mother and the child to make it through the tough waiting times together. One of my major roles as a consultant was to set a monthly goal with the mother for the child's development; however, I felt that my ethical commitment lay more on listening to Bella's and Miley's struggles and stories and being there for the family, especially when they needed my support in creating a space for dialogues to happen. Just as Todd (2002) reminds us that "listening . . . is an ethical movement wherein receiving the gift of the other, the listener gives of herself, risking her own suffering" (p. 410), some of my conversations with Bella were tough to swallow. There were lots of painful cries and dazed pauses, yet with many laughs and much trust interwoven throughout. Among our numerous dialogues, Bella and I also made many visits to Miley's daycare to meet the educators, to the hospital and small clinics on several occasions, and to the women's shelter when needed. Through these encounters, we finally found out that the condition of Miley's ears was severe enough that she had to have multiple surgeries.

Even with the severity of Miley's ear problems, Bella and I did not give up on her. We had started to use many different ways to converse with her—sign language with our hands, made-up hand and body gestures, looking into her eyes whenever we talked to her, sensing her body gestures and movements, recognizing differences in her utterances, and more. Although I am no longer able to meet with this family, Bella and Miley still come to my mind once in a while. As I sit here reminiscing about the moments I spent with them, I can never forget a specific day when I had visited Bella and Miley at their house, and Bella exclaimed excitedly, "Miley gave me a kiss for the first time! She also

sat on my lap and gave me a big hug!” Tears prickled Bella’s eyes, and a big grin spread across her face. Perhaps because of Bella’s careful and ceaseless affection and careful listening to Miley’s existence, conveying “more than what [was] being said” (Todd, 2003, p. 121), Miley’s absolute otherness was revealed. Perhaps it was due to Bella’s and my responsibility and commitment to Miley, a commitment not to see her as a systematically defined person with a list of disabilities, but rather to truly listen to her, to see her, and to attend to her alterity without attempting to grasp her / the other.

In the previous chapter, I addressed what might it mean to live well with and for others, specifically when those others are children with disabilities, by describing problems with humanity under the regime of modernism, what the ethics of encounters as embracing otherness in a community of strangers might be, and what it might mean to be-for-the-other with passivity and commitment. I also left a space for further elaboration of Levinas’s proposition of passivity as an exclusive entity that “reveals itself as the activity of welcome” (Chinnery, 2003a, p. 86), with constant attentiveness and consideration. In this chapter, I would like to move on to discuss the implications for childhood studies and education, with hopes towards ethical responsibility to and for others, specifically when those others are children with disabilities. By doing so, I will engage ethical responsibility in relation to pedagogy as attentively attending to others through various concepts of listening.

Before delving into further details of what it means to attend to others through various concepts of listening, it is important to emphasize again the critical problem in contemporary education that I explained in Chapter 3—the tendency to put too much

emphasis on discovering “how to” methods rather than what the deeper issues might be. Todd (2003) views this as an instrumental way of applying ethics through education, which poses two concerns: “*how best to encourage the acquisition of ethical knowledge through teaching*” and “*how best to embody, or model, ethical principles and concepts*” (p. 6, emphasis added). As such, Levinas’s ethics of encounter, as well as ethical responsibility and commitment to and for others, cannot merely be imposed as an application, nor can his conception of ethical responsibility “be readily translated into a pedagogical model” (Chinnery, 2003a, p. 116). Thus, the tendency to seek definitive answers and straightforward implications of Levinas’s ethics is misguided; rather, it should be thought *through* and *in relation with* pedagogy, without compromising the integrity of Levinas’s work.

In a similar vein, Vintimilla and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2020) stress that the field of childhood studies, especially early childhood, is a pedagogical context where the definition of pedagogy cannot be described in simple terms. Rather, pedagogy is “an indeterminate field of responsive, generative, and collaborative practice of interpretation, ethical critique and invention” (p. 2). Further, because pedagogy addresses subject formation (Biesta, 2016; Chinnery, 2003a, 2003b; Todd, 2003), it is worthwhile to ask questions such as: What kinds of human subjects do we want to cultivate through a pedagogy that is responding to our present concerns? What kinds of pedagogy do we want to think in relation with, when our interests lie in the creation of ethical and pedagogical human beings? Further, what is our ethical commitment and responsibility with and for others, when each human being has the right to exist in the world with uniqueness and singularity? More importantly, when recognizing that the most

challenging task for educators is to create a context for the collective (Rinaldi, 2006), what kinds of ethical and pedagogical contexts should be cultivated in education, especially when encountering children with disabilities, so that each subject's existence and the alterity of the world are revealed? The most crucial aspect of creating such contexts is to *attend to* and *listen to* others.

Listening as attending to and for others

To begin to think about what it might mean to attend to others and why attending to others might be our ethical responsibility to and for others, it is worthwhile to explore the etymology of the word *attend*. Derived from the Old French word *atendre*, it means "to expect, wait for, pay attention" (Online Etymology Dictionary). From the Latin word *attendere*, it means "[to] give heed to [and] to stretch toward" (Online Etymology Dictionary). Further, the term attend also embeds the notion of "stretching one's mind towards something" (Online Etymology Dictionary). As the etymological interpretation tells us, the meaning embedded in the word *attend* portrays multiple, complex metaphorical interpretations. The very first aspect that comes into play is that one *awaits* others. In the midst of awaiting, there is a space for others and me, where each singular being is constantly in the state of becoming. In that state of awaiting others, the role of passivity also comes into play. As I noted in the previous chapter, Levinas's interpretation of passivity does not mean submissively waiting for others and doing nothing. It is rather about "how one is responsive beyond an act, beyond one's own vested interests, beyond one's own best intentions, and beyond one's own ability to reason" (Todd, 2003, p. 52). Thus, it implies actively paying attention, which vitalizes

my existence and my being through others' existence and presence. Therefore, in the act of passivity, there is an active waiting for others.

Another aspect that comes to mind when interpreting the word *attend* is the notion of stretching toward. As the etymological definition expresses, attending exposes the idea that one's thoughts and mind can reach out to others, and vice versa, by stretching towards others. Stretching towards can be understood in various ways. In the literal sense, it could mean that, by physically stretching one's arms wide open, it becomes possible to let others know that my being becomes possible because of others, and that I exist to embrace the otherness of the others. In doing that, "it signifies an approach to the Other in time: *I am here, I am present, I hear you*" (Todd, 2003, p. 135, emphasis added). In a metaphorical sense, the word stretching itself might seem to deeply hold an ethical obligation and responsibility to and for others to "[welcome] the Other in its own incompleteness" (Todd, 2003, p. 133) by stretching oneself towards others. In that action of reaching towards, the active listening takes part, as "listening [becomes] a time of *proximity, of closeness*" (Todd, 2003, p. 135, emphasis added). I see keeping the closeness as a state of in-between, of narrowing down the space, as well as maintaining an adequate distance between myself and the other. To go back to the vignette above, perhaps my responses and actions towards Bella and Miley were aimed at reducing the distance between us by stretching towards the family to welcome their otherness, yet at the same time keeping a proper proximity-in-distance so that acknowledgment of "the alterity of [Bella and Miley, which] is . . . not relative to me; it *reveals* itself" (Levinas, 1961, 1994, as cited in Todd, 2002, p. 408, italics in original) could become possible.

These etymological interpretations are helpful in pursuing further engagement of what it means to listen, as listening to others is “central to the ways in which educational projects of social justice are conceived” (Todd, 2002, p. 405). Although under the regime of modernity, children with disabilities used to not have enough spaces and contexts to reveal the uniqueness and otherness each singular being brings to the world, recently the discussion of listening to others has come to the fore through the reconceptualization movement, when those others are marginalized. Then, I am left wondering, what does it really mean that one’s alterity is revealed? Further, what are the ethical obligations and responsibilities when listening to and attending to others, specifically when those others are children with disabilities?

Listening as attending to the revelation of alterity

As Todd (2002) would argue, “listening is *itself* an ethical response” (p. 405, emphasis in original). However, there is a common mistake in thinking about what it means to listen, emphasizing only the verbal languages that others speak, because the majority of work in developmental psychology did not value the significance of attending to words that exceed the spoken (Rinaldi, 2006; Todd, 2003). As such, listening cannot be thought of as merely hearing others’ verbal and spoken languages; instead, it is about listening and paying attention to the hundreds and thousands of different languages that others express. The famous poem “No Way, the Hundred is There,” written by Loris Malaguzzi and translated by Gandini (2011), highlighted the prominence of seeing children as competent beings who have hundreds of languages, hands, and thoughts to share. Malaguzzi asserted that it is educators’ ethical responsibility to listen to the multiplicities in children through listening. In this sense, listening to all children’s

different ways of being in the world and sharing their thoughts and ideas beyond the words must be considered. This is something that is crucial to keep in mind, as children with disabilities always bring their own ways of sharing ideas and thoughts with hundreds and thousands of different languages. In my work, therefore, listening is about attentively paying attention to the different languages of children, such as eye contact, body movement, gestures, utterances, cries, to name a few, as a way that I, as a listener, could respond to the unavoidable commands that children with disabilities have revealed through my years of working as an IDP consultant.

Todd (2002, 2003) draws on Levinas to take this idea a step further, saying that the act of listening is about risking one's own suffering and attending to the otherness of the other, rather than "understanding, assimilating, or grasping the other, which would put the listener and speaker on the same plane" (p. 409). As I noted in Chapter 3, if one tries to grasp the other, the other is either completely absorbed or viciously obliterated. However, thinking with Levinas, when the essence of listening lies in the recognition that I cannot grasp the other, one can never say that, through listening, one completely comprehends and realizes who the other is. It is, rather, a constant paying attention to and listening to others "to learn what I cannot make my own" (Gibbs, as cited in Todd, 2002, p. 409).

Further, as Levinas noted, there is an inescapable condition that a speaker and a listener are always in an asymmetrical and unequal relation (Levinas, 1961, 1994, as cited in Todd, 2002). In that relation, a speaker can always command a listener to attend to words and more than words, because there is an unconditional receptivity and passivity of the other on the part of the listener. By doing so, the speaker is at risk, a risk that is

inevitable, because a listener learns something new about a speaker in the midst of their speaking (Biesta, 2016; Todd, 2002, 2003). In that midst, the active attunement to others is essential, because as Todd describes, drawing on Levinas, “it is precisely at the moment when the speaker calls the listener into question, when the listener is put at risk, that responsibility itself is inaugurated” (2002, p. 409). Moreover, in the act of paying attention to others, the revelation of alterity can happen. Todd (2003) asserts:

This revelation of alterity is a fundamental aspect of an ethical encounter. It is where the Other is not merely heard, seen, or felt with, but where the self is receptive to the revelation of difference and is thereby moved to a level of responsibility (p. 51).

Thus, listening as attending to the revelation of the other means that one’s alterity reveals itself through an active paying attention to the other, not with an intention of grasping and knowing the other, but with recognition that one can never fully know the other. Further, with this awareness, one is always risking one’s own suffering when listening to others, because it is our ethical commitment and responsibility to listen to others’ new stories, so that the others can reveal their alterities on their own. Then, to go back to the vignette above, by actively listening to Bella and Miley, I, as a listener, learned something new every time we met. The something new varied, from the child’s medical condition to the difficult life stories that the mom struggled through. Further, some of the new learnings included not only Miley’s physical disabilities, but also the everchanging transformation of Miley’s unique singular being—that she was and constantly will be engaging with and of the world at her own rhythm.

As I mentioned briefly in the vignette, learning something new about this family was not always easy. There were lots of tears, cries, sighs, and laments. There were times that we knew nothing, but were just patiently waiting. There were times when I was startled. However, because of those times of risking myself to listen to the otherness of Bella and Miley, my being as a consultant could be in the state of becoming. Further, as one's alterity can only be revealed through one's willingness to take a risk or not, I cannot guarantee that Bella and Miley were able to affirm their existence through my being and presence. However, what I wish for the family is that, at least, our encounters were ethically and pedagogically thought through, so that some of the thoughts we shared are coming back to them, as a way of continuing our ethical responsibility to and for each other. Then, I am left wondering, what kinds of contexts should be cultivated in relation to pedagogy, to listen to and attend to the otherness of others, that one's alterity can therefore be revealed? I would like to turn now to the idea of being in a state of continuous radical dialogue as a way of listening and attending to others.

Listening as being in a state of dialogue

As discussed so far, Todd (2003) invites us to think that listening cannot be merely thought of as a simplistic way of hearing words that are spoken by others. She insists that it is necessary to reconsider how listening is portrayed as a conventional form, so as "not to conform to a simplified version of dialogue" (Todd, 2003, p. 122). Coincidentally, an often misconstrued perception of dialogue within developmentalism is that there are two people, the speaker and the listener, who enter into the communication space through speech. This notion suggests that the meaning of dialogue requires the speaker to say something in order for the listener to engage in the dialogue in return

(Todd, 2003). However, Biesta (2017) sees dialogue as more than that. He argues that dialogue is a middle ground where one's existence can take place. He writes:

Dialogue . . . as an existential form, [is] a way of being together that seeks to do justice to all partners involved. Dialogue is in this regard fundamentally different from a contest. A contest is an existential form aimed at bringing about winners and losers. Also, a contest comes to an end once someone has won, whereas dialogue is an ongoing, never-ending challenge. . . . A contest requires a confined burst of energy; staying in dialogue requires ongoing and sustained energy, attention, and commitment. (p. 15).

Biesta's interpretation of dialogue has an intimate connection to the notion of a community of strangers (see also, Lingis, 1994), which, as I argued in Chapter 3, can be in this constant middle ground of dialogue to reveal alterity and existence. When viewing dialogue as a contest, one's own sovereignty and individuality is confirmed, instead of acknowledging the inescapable human condition that one cannot exist without others. Further, when the speaker and listener are rendered into winner and loser, there is no space for dialogue in which I can encounter the otherness of the other, as one always wins over the other. The winner is always the right one; the winner takes all, so to speak. Levinas would call this a "metaphysical violence of assimilation in another guise" (Cornell, 1992, as cited in Chinnery, 2003a, p. 66).

Likewise, Biesta (2017), draws on Levinas to assert that to exist means that you are in a constant state of dialogue with others who are not you, in order to be able to think about one's subjectivity in the world. He writes:

To exist as subject . . . means being in a “state of dialogue” with what and who is other; it means being exposed to what and who is other, being addressed by what and who is other, being taught by what and who is other, and pondering what this means for our own existence and for the desires we have about our existence. To exist as subject therefore means that we engage with the question of whether what we desire is desirable, not only for our own lives, but also for the lives we try to live with others on a planet that has limited capacity for fulfilling all the desires projected onto it. (Biesta, 2017, p. 4)

Returning to the vignette above, perhaps through many encounters which involved ongoing, never-ending dialogues, the space was offered to all of us—Bella, Miley, and myself—to reveal our existence through the persistent dialogues in which we engaged. In the midst of continuing dialogues, our ethical responsibility to and for the other lies in encountering dynamic challenges where we can never be in the “centre, origin, or ground of the world” (Biesta, 2017, p. 8). To exist as an ethical subject means to realize that we are always in relation to the otherness of others who reveal their own alterity. Thus, we become “responsible beyond our intentions” (Levinas, 1996a, as cited in Chinnery, 2003b, p. 11) through our own existence in and of the world. What, then, are the necessary conditions for the multifarious otherness of others to be revealed? What considerations should we keep in mind when listening to and attending to others in a state of radical dialogue with others? What does ethical responsibility look like when listening to and attending to others?

Listening through taking a while

In this section, I would like to bring the concept *whiling* from Jardine (2008), to propose it as a way of attuning to others, in the state of radical dialogue. There are a few ideas that I would like to interweave here. To begin with, Jardine provokes us to think about what it means to take a while, as the idea of “taking a while” is often unintentionally alluded to in relation to people who require extra support or have special needs, or to slow children, especially children with disabilities, concealed under the name of efficiency. Jardine proposes instead:

There is . . . a hidden ontology here, that to be worthy of while means not being disconnected and fragmented and distanced, [a] manageable object, but to be lived with. . . . Living disciplines full of topics we are living in the midst of and to which we belong in contested and multifarious ways. . . . [W]hiling over a topic . . . defines the work of hermeneutics. (p. 2).

To illustrate further, whiling is not about literally giving some physical time for others who need extra support, because this only pathologizes those others as lacking or less-than. Rather, the idea of whiling has to be thought with both ontological and hermeneutical meanings; one has to be in a state of living with (as well as lived) and interpreting through (as well as interpreted). Perhaps the way I have been narrating my vignettes throughout the chapters could be seen as a gradual initiation, and a process of *taking a while* with the moments I encountered with the children and their families, while bringing back those reminiscences here for further interpretation. Thinking with Jardine (2008), it might be a way of listening to the past memories that I have lived with, which keep coming back to me and linger with me for further interweaving processes. In that

midst, not-yet-known discoveries emerge. I will come back to the idea of discovery of the not yet known later in this section.

Moreover, in the act of reminiscing and engaging with memories, I might become, perhaps like Jardine (2008) notes, “someone lodged in the multifarious memory of the world . . . [I compose] myself in the middle of this worldly life” (p. 4). As Jardine reminds us, memory should not be merely stored as something that has happened in the past, to be put aside, but rather, through the act of collecting, recollecting, telling, retelling, shaping, and reshaping stories while being in the state of whiling, those moments of encounter become revitalized. It is the essence of listening through taking a while. This way of thinking about whiling as a process of listening takes me back to the idea of *attending to*, which I explained earlier in this chapter. Similar to actively attending to others, active whiling obliges us to stay close to the other. As such, taking a while in the state of dialogue, keeping proximate as a state of narrowing the in-between space, as well as maintaining an adequate distance between I and the other should be considered, is when one’s own and others’ existence could come into presence.

Another aspect that I want to weave in here is the discovery of the not yet known. To bring what Jardine (2008) conveys to the context of children with disabilities, worthwhileness cannot be simplified as a list of characteristics and properties of others. Rather, it asks us to think about what it means to “[compose] ourselves, [find] our composes in the face of what we have encountered” (Jardine, 2008, p. 3). It is because in active listening through whiling, there is a space for both I and the other to recognize each other’s existence. Gadamer (1989, as cited in Jardine, 2008, p. 3) proposes that

we do not understand what recognition is in its profoundest nature if we only regard it as knowing something again that we already know. The joy of recognition is rather the joy of knowing more than is already familiar. In recognition, what we know emerges, as if illuminated. It is known as something.

What Gadamer encourages us to think about has a close relation to the idea of listening as attending to the revelation of alterity, which I elaborated in the previous section. Gadamer's suggestion is that, through whiling, the mutual space is composed in-between oneself and the other, thus journeying to find my existence in relation to others is inaugurated. There is a constant transformation in myself and others in which we "recognize [our]selves in the mess of the world" (Hillman, 1983, as cited in Jardine, 2008, p. 3), thereby creating a space for the I and the other's revelations of our own alterity. The most crucial thought here is that there will be a constant not-yet-known to be discovered. As Gadamer continually reminds us, recognizing something new, something unfamiliar, something that has never been known, is the true value and joy of being with others. That joy becomes possible through our active listening to and attending to others, and through our attentive whiling. To return to the vignette that opened this chapter, the moment that Bella exclaimed her excitement about Miley's transformation in showing affection was an unfamiliar knowing that Bella, Miley, and I discovered together through our moments of encounter. It was also a moment of discovery of joy, because our unfamiliar knowing was increasing through our listening and whiling together. Bella, Miley, and I can remain as other to each other, yet at the same time, it was through these

encounters of knowing something more than what was already known that we recognized our inescapable relation to one another⁵.

⁵ See also Levinas's notion of teaching as an encounter with the other who "brings me more than I contain" (Levinas, 1969, p. 51; Strhan, 2007; Todd, 2001a).

Chapter 5. Lingering Thoughts and Directions for Possible Future Research

In the previous chapter, I discussed what it might mean to engage in an ethically responsible pedagogy, by proposing the following questions: What kinds of human subjects do we want to cultivate through a pedagogy that is responding to our present concerns, when recognizing that pedagogy addresses subject formation (Biesta, 2016; Chinnery, 2003a, 2003b; Todd, 2003)? What kinds of pedagogy do we want to think in relation with, when our interests lie in the creation of ethical and pedagogical human beings? What is our ethical commitment and responsibility to and for others, when each human being has the right to exist in the world with uniqueness and singularity? More importantly, when recognizing that the most challenging task for educators is to create a context for the collective (Rinaldi, 2006), what kinds of ethical and pedagogical contexts should be cultivated in education, especially when encountering children with disabilities, ensuring that each subject's existence and alterity are revealed? To engage these questions, I explored the concept of listening through multiple avenues: listening as attending to and for others, listening as attending to the revelation of alterity, listening in the state of dialogue, and listening through taking a while. All of these concepts of listening were interpreted in relation to Levinas's conception of I/other relationality.

Although I have been deconstructing some of the traditional ways of perceiving children with disabilities and suggesting alternate possibilities of what it means to be ethically responsible to and for children with disabilities, resonances of viewing children with disabilities as not-yet-becoming still remain in education, inhibiting movement towards co-creating a pedagogical context in which I/other relationality can exist.

Likewise, misinterpreted societal norms about disability as something to be prevented or

cured like a disease, which I discussed in Chapter 2, encompass negative connotations and should be continually decoded and recoded in relation to ethical and responsive pedagogy. Despite one's particular ability or disability, misperceptions towards disabilities should be seen as different forms of understanding and knowledge. Accordingly, accepting the uniqueness and remarkable newness each individual brings in and to the world offers new possibilities, as proposed in Chapters 3 and 4, where recognizing and valuing each individual's alterity can be revealed in ethical relation with the other.

In this last chapter, I would like to share some of my lingering thoughts and potential directions for extending my research. As I mentioned in the preface, my thesis research has been impacted by the unsought and unprecedented conditions brought on by the COVID-19 global pandemic. When I began my thesis, I had originally planned to conduct empirical research at the Simon Fraser University (SFU) Childcare Society with the children and educators onsite, immersing myself in the idea of what it means to live well *with* and *for* others, encountering others with a Levinasian conception of responsibility, with particular attention to children with disabilities.

My intention had been to observe the lived experiences of children and educators by collecting phenomenological data through live field observations, notes, photographs, and videos of children's and educators' pedagogical engagement. Further, I envisioned using pedagogical documentation (Rinaldi, 2006) as a methodological tool to document and interpret certain pedagogical moments while attuning to the ideas of what it means to respond ethically to and for others in relation to pedagogy in the childhood studies and education context. As Rinaldi (2006) explains, pedagogical documentation is "a process

for making pedagogical . . . work visible and subject to interpretation, dialogue, confrontation (argumentation) and understanding” (p. 12).

However, following the public health orders issued by Vancouver Coastal Health and Fraser Health Authorities, SFU’s procedures for conducting individual research changed. Since my original research methodology required human participation and direct contact with others, I considered with my thesis advisor how I might procure the data differently. After discussion, and because of uncertainty about when I might be able to collect data on site, we decided to shift my approach from empirical research to a conceptual framework. In future research, I would like to undertake the empirical study, and to analyze the data in light of the conceptual work I have done here.

Additionally, just as Levinas continuously reminds us of the impossibility of grasping and knowing the other, I myself cannot fathom the entirety of Levinas, because his ethics is intricate, often counter-intuitive, and he frequently uses ordinary words in extraordinary ways (Chinnery, 2003a). Since the majority of the work in this master’s thesis relies heavily on secondary sources of Levinas, in future research, I would like to delve deeper into his original texts, to engage and draw upon the primary sources I encountered during my master’s thesis, but have not yet fully explored. Although I recognize that I can never acquire deep knowledge of Levinas’s thoughts and ideas solely from reading his works, I find it imperative nonetheless to continuously engage with his original writings, as well as the works of others who draw from him, to study and think of his notion of I/other relationality. Todd (2001b) proffers,

To follow Levinas, it is our openness to the Other, our susceptibility to the Other’s stories, our capacity to enter into a “veritable conversation” that places us

on ethical ground. When I think I know, when I think I understand the Other, I am exercising my knowledge over the Other, shrouding the Other in my own totality. The Other becomes an object of *my* comprehension, *my* world, *my* narrative, reducing the Other to me. What is at stake is my ego. But if I am exposed to the Other, I can listen, attend, and be surprised; the Other can affect me, she ‘brings me more than I contain’ (Levinas, 1969). And insofar as I can be receptive and susceptible I can learn *from* the Other as one who is absolutely different from myself. (p. 73, italics in original)

In this way, my desire to think with Levinas does not become an attempt to use his writings as a mere application or instrumentalization of ethics and morality in my practice. Instead, it is more that, through Levinas’s writings, I am continually inspired and affected to be in a constant state of becoming, which leads me to question what it means to be ethically responsible to and for others. Further, it is not my intention to learn about Levinas’s ethics in order to master and replicate his work, but rather to *think with* and *taught by* his thoughts while acknowledging the infinite unknowability of others who are in the midst of revealing their uniqueness, and to “think alongside [Levinas’s thought] in open communication . . . [which] invites us to read differently, through our differences” (Todd, 2001b, p. 71). In this sense, Todd (2001b) asserts, “there is a methodological stake in [Levinas’s] ethics” (p. 71).

Further, in the process of delving deeper into both the scholarship on Levinas and his primary texts, I will likely discover other, related philosophical frameworks to explore, since his conception of I/other encounters has provided the foundational and ethical groundwork from which other ideologies branch out. For example, Biesta (2014,

2016) often weaves in Levinas's and Hannah Arendt's works, and, at times, points out the distinctive differences, not to compare them, but rather as a way of complementing the work of both philosophers. This makes me wonder what it might mean to read and study some other philosophical frameworks (such as Derrida's ethics) in relation to Levinas's offerings. Finally, moving forward, I hope to submit portions of this current thesis to journals in the field of childhood studies and education to think with, and bring a different perspective to the experience of being with and for children with disabilities.

In closing, one might say that Levinas's proposals are too utopian and idealistic, rather than straightforward and practical (Smart, 1999, as cited in Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 81). But, as Levinas responded to Kearney when the two were having a dialogue about Levinas's ethics as "entirely utopian and unrealistic":

This is the great objection to my thought. "Where did you ever see the ethical relation practiced?" people say to me. I reply that its being utopian does not prevent it from investing our everyday actions of generosity or goodwill towards the other: even the smallest and most commonplace gestures, such as saying "after you" as we sit at the dinner table or walk through a door, bear witness to the ethical. This concern for the other remains utopian in the sense that it is always "out of place" (u-topos) in this world, always other than the "ways of the world"; but there are many examples of it in the world. (Levinas & Kearney, 1986, p. 32)

As such, although Levinas's ethics may appear vague and naïve to some, there is no doubt they would bring about a brighter future for children with disabilities and their families if the dominant educational framework shifted from an emphasis on individual

children's weaknesses or incapacities to a collective ethical responsibility to be with and for others.

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