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# The Hermeneutics of Inclusion

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Hermeneutics of Inclusion

by

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A THESIS

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explored the topic of inclusion using Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics. Specifically, this thesis examined inclusion for students in K-12 codified as having severe emotional and behavioural disabilities (EBD) in the province of Alberta, Canada. The current trend in Alberta to talk about an inclusive education system could be seen as a response to the ongoing exclusion of students with EBD over the past 100 years. The research within this thesis involved interviewing three educators who de-segregated a highly specialized class for students with severe EBD to create inclusive classrooms. They implemented a co-operative teaching and inquiry based model for their year-long project. According to the educators interviewed, student's academic skills and understanding improved and negative student behaviours diminished significantly. Themes emerged which contributed to the success of inclusion: listening and tactfully responding to questions students have about one another and curriculum topics; educators' openness to ask questions of themselves and one another; seeing all students as capable learners; working in teams to facilitate and guide student learning; administrative support for inclusion; and inquiry based learning.

## Preface

Material from one paper in press is included in Chapter Four, and used here with acknowledgement of the *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. This paper was co-authored with Walter J. Williamson. The co-author has given permission to use the material in this thesis (see Appendix B). The full citation for the original paper is as follows:

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## The Hermeneutics of Inclusion

“Ultimately, it has always been known that the possibilities of rational proof and instruction do not fully exhaust the sphere of knowledge.”

Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2004, p. 21

The topic of this thesis is inclusion. For this study, I asked three educators<sup>1</sup> to share their stories of how they attempted to create and cultivate inclusive classrooms for all their students, particularly for students with severe emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) whom had traditionally been placed in special education classes. I also used anecdotes from my work as a teacher and special education consultant for students with EBD. The educators’ stories, including the anecdotes and our subsequent conversations,<sup>2</sup> point to the challenges and successes that came with trying to create or cultivate conditions for all students to thrive together in learning.

In this thesis, I invoked Hans-Georg Gadamer’s (1900-2002) hermeneutics for my explication of inclusion. *Truth and Method*, originally published in 1960, and several of Gadamer’s subsequent publications, are my primary hermeneutical resources. The story of the process of trying to understand inclusion found in this thesis is what I call the hermeneutics of inclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> As per the requirement of the University of Calgary, before proceeding with this research, approval from the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board was obtained. See the appendix for copies of the consent and confidentiality form, which includes instructions regarding the risks and benefits of this study that were given to and signed by the three educators.

<sup>2</sup> I took notes while digitally recording the conversations. We discussed key themes that emerged from our stories. Often, the notes allowed me to come back to those themes in our conversations.

## Chapter One: Compelled to the Topic

“We’re the bad kids. We know it.”

I paraphrase Mark<sup>3</sup> now, but that was what I remember of what he said seven years ago when I was his grade 6 teacher and he was a student in a specialized school for children with severe emotional and behavioural disabilities (EBD). At the time I thought Mark was just being Mark: always defiant, ever ready with an “off the cuff” answer that pre-empted my and the other professional staffs’ attempts to talk with him. We were explaining the school system for the four or five grade 6 students in our class because they were soon heading off to junior high school programs throughout the city. We did this so that the students might see the various pathways they could take towards high school completion. We also described to them the routes that led to high school at the Young Offenders Centre. The two child care counsellors in the classroom and I thought that if we helped the students see the bigger picture of the possibilities for schooling yet to come, they might choose certain pathways that avoided what we believed were the more deleterious routes. In that class, with the students, we tried to discuss what Mark had just said to us, but most of the students agreed with him, and told us that we did not understand.

The next year Mark moved onto a junior high school “satellite class” for students with “severe behaviours.” I moved out of the classroom and became a special education consultant for the school board and travelled extensively throughout the city. I ran into Mark three years after that year together. He was sitting outside a homeless shelter for youth, smoking a cigarette. As I approached, he did not recognize me at first. Suddenly, he

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<sup>3</sup> All student names in this thesis are pseudonyms.

stomped out his cigarette, blushed brightly, and grinned from ear to ear. I knew this side of Mark as well - sensitive to the world and surrounded by his shields of defiance. I think he was surprised and happy to see me. I think he was deeply embarrassed, too. There he was, out of a home and on the street, first thing on a weekday morning.

I saw Mark again, one year later. He was in a line of boys in a hallway of the Young Offenders Centre. He saw me coming and put his head down. The grin was gone. The line he was in was not the place to say hello. He seemed defeated in a sense, as if all his defiance had been stripped out of him. I also felt that the same Mark was there, full of shame. Did he remember what he had told me years ago? He had spoken a truth that, somehow not yet explicable, appeared to me to be not just his truth.

I realized that, as a consultant, I had seen far too many students like Mark, students who followed similar paths. I had always hoped for better for him and his peers that I had taught several years before. Seeing Mark like that troubled me; it made me question my work. This event and the subsequent uncertain feeling I had of having been taken hold of, and not quite yet sure how or to what extent, reflected what Gadamer described as those experiences that happen “over and above our wanting and doing” (2004, p. xxvi) and “awakens our interest” (2001, p. 50). An energy from the years of working with troubled youth had been stirred within me. I was compelled to know more, to try and understand the work I was in, and the paths of the students around me. Seeing Mark was like having my day to day work read back to me as inadequate to the demands his life and the lives of other students presented before me. The experience insisted I try to be present differently, or at least understand more of what his life spoke about educating troubled children and youth. I

decided to see what statistics might say about students like Mark. Was Mark's current home within a prison for youth reflective of a more pervasive concern or crisis with students with EBD?

### **The Need**

I discovered a diverse range of troubling data related to students with EBD. According to Gulchak and Lopes, over the past 20 years there has been a phenomenal rise in the numbers of students diagnosed with EBD in the western world (as cited in Winzer, 2009, p. 145). In Alberta, only 37% of students with EBD complete high school (Antaya-Moore, personal communication, February 29, 2012), far below the provincial average (Alberta Education, 2010). This number is the lowest high school completion rate of any disability in Alberta (Antaya-Moore, personal communication, February 29, 2012). According to Eber, Nelson, and Miles, students labelled with EBD are the most underserved and last to be considered for inclusive settings (as cited in Winzer, 2009, p. 145). In Alberta, 36% of students with severe disabilities are placed part or full time in special classes and schools (Alberta Education, 2008, p. 18). Teachers are more likely to be opposed to working with students with EBD in classrooms (Cook, 2001).

This data speaks to a crisis in schooling, particularly for students diagnosed with EBD, especially if the alternatives to high school completion are poor health, unemployment, and significantly lower incomes (Canada, 2011; Versnel, DeLuca, Hutchinson, Hill, & Chin, 2011). Youth incarceration is also part of this crisis; I sometimes visited students with severe EBD in the Young Offenders Centre. There is Canadian data strongly connecting students with severe EBD, and serious and chronic young offenders

(Corrado & Freedman, 2011). Given the nature of my work as a consultant for schools struggling with students with severe EBD, I felt deeply connected to these problems, and desired to do something more than what I had been doing as a consultant. Now, I realize that my early exploration or venturing forth into the data started to bring to light the topic of this research. However, the topic was not clear enough to articulate as anything else but an answer to the question "What's wrong?"

At the same time I strongly felt that the story of Mark was enough or, original in and of itself, as an event that spoke to the nature of student suffering and exclusion from school. Did I need all the data to form or make the case for a need to do and know more? Was Mark's story only worthy as part of an accumulation of cases? It is true, as the data has shown, that he is representative of something, as it is also true that his story is original in what it points to that demanded more attention.

### **Brought to Pedagogical Questions**

Unlike Mark and the heavy burden the above statistics placed upon me, there was Trevor. He was in my class, too, at the same time Mark was. Years later, I saw Trevor by chance, in a high school stairwell. He was heading to his class, and I was heading to a specialized class for students diagnosed with severe mental health disabilities. I knew who all the students were in the specialized class, and Trevor was not one of them. I was surprised to see him in a high school hallway, perhaps because of the disjuncture from what had become the norm of my work. After all, I spent most of my time going from crisis to crisis, and the school settings where most of those crises occurred tended to be specialized settings. I knew about many of my previous students mainly because they continued to

struggle in schools, and my work positioned me back onto the pathways of their lives.

Seeing Trevor in that high school hallway pulled me up short. I thought to myself, in disbelief, could Trevor be thriving in high school? What did the question say about how I viewed my work?

Trevor and I warmly greeted each other and I asked him how he was. He shared that he was doing well, and he was earning credits towards high school completion. He looked healthy, and happy, and he was so much calmer than how I remembered him when he was a deeply troubled grade 5 student in my class. I had to get to my meeting so I wished him well. Sadly, and perhaps also indicative of a certain malaise I was suffering in my work, I never thought to meet up with him again and learn more about how his life in schools had been. I told my wife about running into Trevor as if it were simply another “good news” story. I forgot that I had been questioned by this encounter. I did not go back and look at his educational file to see what schools he had been in over the years, or read his academic reports. Had he moved around from school to school? Was he thriving in school? What was working for him and his teachers and his classmates? I wish I had pursued these questions.

I remembered this story of Trevor, and what he provoked in me, long after I had written about Mark. In my passion to know what was wrong, I had spent tremendous amounts of energy focussed solely on deconstructing special education and psychiatric diagnosis, at the cost of hope. I was clinging to all the problems I had found standing within the story of Mark, and other students like him. I had responded to the initial question “what’s wrong?” with a consuming and concealing intensity, perhaps indicative of my own suffering in the work I have been doing for many years now. That work contained little

space for the topic to have anything long-lasting or worthwhile to say about pedagogy, or about the hope contained within the work of educating all students, especially students who severely struggle in schools, like Mark and Trevor. As Gadamer wrote of works of art, they are more than just energy; they have the character of a work (2004, p. 110) and thus, of having something to say about human life. I certainly did not want life in my world to be so dismal, especially not for my work or my young family and yet, how could I hold what Mark's life portended without pretending it did not have a place in the here and now of educator's and student's lives? Seeing my own critical and seething energy provided a clearing from which I could then hear the topic calling me forth differently, with hope rather than despair, and caution rather than rage.

The action of returning once again to the work, to re-view it anew, and in that renewal a deeper and richer world is evoked, often through memory, is part of what Gadamer claimed humans do when they understand something (2004, p. 308). Truth does not accumulate so much as it reveals itself in the light of the life of the world, and the topics of our concern. The memory of Trevor emerged suddenly. This took place within the complex context of being in the middle of the topic, writing about it, receiving feedback, and re-viewing the work. It was an event (p. 308) centred in trying to understand how to help students like Mark thrive in schools (p. 245). A complex and cyclical interdependence between the topic and me was at play in the illumination of the memory of Trevor as it applied itself to the topic, that application or play being an "implicit moment" of understanding's action (Gadamer, 2001, p. 47).

The action of concealment and illumination is the fundamental notion of truth in Gadamer's work (2007, pp. 228-245). This action is inherent to human understanding because in both concealment and illumination something about ourselves and the topic "authenticates itself" (2007, p. 214). Topics are never fully present, nor are they completely concealed. They are deeply complex and known in multiple ways, from multiple perspectives. Trevor and his place in the topic of inclusion cannot be reduced to my own subjective interpretation. My encounter with him pointed to the possibility that some students with severe EBD can and do thrive in schools, thus saying something about how inclusion is an ongoing, active event in schools. In this sense inclusion reveals something of itself that is beyond mere opinion.

Possibilities are inherent to the being of a topic like inclusion and perhaps this is what is authentic within it. The topic of inclusion seemed to always be on the way to becoming something different than what I thought it was or it seemed to be but it was not just what I wanted it to be or thought it might be. It certainly surpassed the very idea of being known once and for all in completeness. How could I know or have the confidence, even if I had spoken to Trevor at length and looked into his school file, to say that his success was precisely because of key factors that constitute inclusive education, for example? That he might be succeeding in school and looked happier and healthier than I had ever known him portended the possibility that he felt a sense of belonging to his school and was thriving in learning.

Hence, it would be false to say that I methodically brought forth Trevor as part of a method for the purposes of this thesis. Trevor's anecdote literally surfaced in the process of

trying to gain a renewed and hopeful yet cautious clarity on the topic. This was how I too was “being-played” by the topic (Gadamer, 2004, p. 106). I then had to work to weave Trevor’s story into the fabric of this writing, in order to give voice to its newly found structure as a “lasting and true” (p. 111) sense in my life and work. What is important here is to see that the memory of Trevor, as a historical phenomenon (p. 239) in the world, was evoked within a context, and this event played a very important role in my understanding. His memory and the memory of Mark helped bring me to the questions at hand in this study. As Gadamer (2004) wrote:

The real nature of the sudden idea is perhaps less that a solution occurs to us like an answer to a riddle than that a question occurs to us that breaks through into the open and thereby makes an answer possible. Every sudden idea has the structure of a question.” (p. 360)

The clarity of my sudden idea is articulated as, what does education look like when it goes well for students like Mark and Trevor? Or, what might a study of the conditions for students thriving in classrooms, and the challenges of creating or cultivating those conditions have to offer me in my work, and perhaps in the work of other educators? Over the years I have longed to see more students with EBD thriving in classrooms. This topic has long had hold of me, and yet it took what seemed like a tremendous amount of time and suffering for me to see it. Once Trevor emerged again from memory, the question broke forth suddenly. Gadamer (2007) wrote, “every statement has to be seen as a response to a question, and that the only way to understand a statement is to get hold of the question to which its statement is the answer” (p. 241). Mark and Trevor were powerful statements

about the world of educators and their students with EBD. The memories of Mark and Trevor arose for me in the light of the play of the topic I had been immersed in, and was starting to try to understand.

Thus, I recognized that I had been brought to the demand this study placed upon me through a long path of agonizing over how to ask pedagogical questions. This is a fundamental aspect of the hermeneutics of this study: the researcher lives within the topic, is involved in it, and must come to terms with that complicated and situated placement in order to understand it, accept it, and take care of it. Gadamer even suggested that we often do not have a choice in the matter (2007, p. 241). I would have severed myself from a pedagogical study had I continued seeing all that was wrong because it could mean that my work, and the work that may have been done for Trevor and perhaps, Mark too, was in bitter vain. The dialogue most likely would have been closed to the possibility of hope, and of learning something anew that could be worthwhile pursuing because it might help other human beings. At the same time, returning anew to a topic requires me to see the topic in some of its complexity, which can involve the negativity of a topic, too. Mark's story is true of this latter point.

### **Hermeneutic Demands**

Hermeneutics is about human understanding, and understanding involves judging well in the situations we find ourselves. To judge well gives us the space to carry on in human life in the face of difficulty and uncertainty (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 317-321). Gadamer (2004) invited us to revisit or remember the importance of practical wisdom or *phronesis*,

introduced by Aristotle (384-322 BC), a philosopher and scientist from ancient Greece.<sup>4</sup>

Phronesis is the virtue by which one can hold the difficulties and uncertainty well, rather than try to eradicate them, once and for all.

Throughout this thesis I will further bring forth how and why this study is hermeneutic, that is, concerned with trying to do the right things on behalf of children and youth who struggle in often terrible ways within schools. I will do this in the spirit of understanding this study, myself, as *right there in the middle of it*, working it out as it gains the character of a work (Gadamer, 2004, p. 110). While my explication of the worldly and practical process of this study is successful, it will also be a work of practical wisdom. This task began with Mark, and was furthered when I showed the play of the implicit moment of remembering Trevor as an event of recognition.

“All understanding is interpretation” Gadamer wrote (2004, p. 390). He also claimed that being “pulled up short” (p. 270) was essential to understanding or, life is constantly a process of misunderstanding and working through it, together. This too then, already has been and will continue to be a task for me in this thesis. All of this happens within language (Gadamer, 2001, p. 37; 2004, p. 387), as part of an ongoing conversation with texts and educators, and memory and “one’s own thinking” (2004, p. 398). Through such conversations, I began to see myself more fully within the topic, as the topic emerged (Gadamer, 2004, p. 385, 399). In this thesis, therefore, I must continue to strive to bring my own “preconceptions into play” in recognition that despite what I think inclusion may be,

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<sup>4</sup> The Nichomachean Ethics.

what is to come out of this is an interpretation that has had to “adapt...to the hermeneutical situation to which it belongs” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 398).

Thus, in what I trust will continue to be a genuine conversation, a conversation that I did not fully intend or control, understanding might arise (Gadamer, 2004, p. 385). What is written here then becomes part of a conversation, “detached...from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 397).

There is something here then of an adventure.

### **An Adventure**

Understanding is an adventure and, like any other adventure, is dangerous. Because it is not satisfied with simply wanting to register what is there or said but goes back to our guiding interests and questions, one has to concede that the hermeneutical experience has a far lower degree of certainty than that attained by the methods of the natural sciences. (Gadamer, 2007, pp. 243-244)

In hermeneutics we can come to understand our topics by arguments that are convincing, make “sense” to us instinctively, and fit the present moment and circumstances we find ourselves within (Gadamer, 2004, p. 19). These kinds of arguments could not be determined prior to understanding the topics of our concern. To understand the topics of our concern, we have to listen to the topic for what it speaks of our place in the world, within the topic. A researcher of this bent works out understanding in the process of making sense of the topic, in the language that comes forth from the topic. This means that such arguments could not take on the voice and character of the methods of the natural sciences which often attempt to predict, manipulate and control topics, as if they did not

exist in a richer, fuller and finite world (Gadamer, 2004, p. 19), or exist with us within them. In approaching inclusion in this research as a hermeneutic adventure-a risky venturing forth (Gadamer, 2004, p. 85)-I may not have the certainty of the natural sciences at hand, but this is important to embrace rather than refute, or defend its absence. The working out of understanding is always ongoing, always a sufferance to be had: it is human life (Gadamer, 2004, p. 221). The story of this suffering as learning or coming to understand-this conversation with texts and educators-can be convincing in the ways described by Gadamer above, and thus also be true of the world and scholarly. This was my ongoing task.

### **Right There in the Middle of It**

The story of Trevor reminded me that, despite the difficulties inherent in educating students with EBD, some students can and do thrive. It was from the negativity of experience that I was able to understand something about myself in the world, amongst other educators and students (Gadamer, 2004, p. 350). If I had not been thwarted in my expectations or wantings and doings, I would not have been brought to the newly remembered insight evoked through the chance meeting with Trevor. *Pathei mathos*, “learning through suffering” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 351), was the adage the ancient Greeks used, particularly in the tragedies of Aeschylus (c. 525 BCE). Gadamer was pointing to the importance of suffering in human life, as evidenced in those particular Greek plays and writings. Thus, he was also pointing to the importance of traditions within human life now. In a retrieval or remembrance of the past, which can only be undertaken now, the present is seen anew (Gadamer, 2004, p. 398). Trevor certainly suffered, at least for the two years I

knew him while I was his teacher. Educational life was very difficult for him, despite my best efforts to help him thrive. I wonder if, from out of his suffering, he had found a better way to be in education.

Likewise, one of the school teams involved in this study struggled all year to help students with severe EBD within a specialized class in their school. Despite their best efforts, everyone seemed to suffer. I experienced this as well because I was often in that classroom as a consultant. I was reminded that “every experience worthy of the name thwarts an expectation” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 350). Out of the suffering, there arose the opportunity or possibility to see and try things anew. For me, that emergence of possibility, illuminated by ongoing tension and uncertainty, helped further clarify the direction of this study.

### **Gary’s Specialized Class**

James, a young boy, had climbed high up a tree, again. Gary, the principal of the school, had called me and the police. I went to the school to support Gary and his school team, to see how I might be able to help. I was a regular visitor that school year because James and most of the other students in his class were often in distress.

At the time of the event, I worked for a large urban public school board as a consultant or strategist. My main work was to support schools in their work with students with severe EBD. The severe EBD status came from diagnoses that are found within the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). The DSM diagnosis allowed the school board to apply a provincial codification system to the students

which identified them as having severe EBD status. The code for severe EBD is currently numerical – 42 – in Alberta’s educational system (Alberta Education, 2011).

I also supported specialized classes for students with severe EBD. These classes were spread across the city, and in recent years had grown in number, considerably. James was a student in one of those classes. Ambulances and police had been called several times that year to attend to one or more of the nine students. James often climbed dangerously high trees near the school. Another student ran around the open concept school screaming in distress. Yet another student seemed to be perpetually fighting or crying, or both at the same time. Worse perhaps, the students in the class often fought amongst themselves. Their fights spilled out into the hallways and classrooms around them. Some of the students had to be physically restrained, and escorted to a smaller room where they could calm down.

This class was one of the most resourced and supported classrooms I had been in; there was a full time teacher and support worker, as well as weekly visits from a therapist, and a family counsellor employed by a non-profit organization. A pediatric psychiatrist visited monthly. Even with this support, the specialized class and school team were often in crises, as Gary, the school administrator attested:

*As the year went on and the kids were supposed to be integrated (into regular classrooms) we saw a lot of breakdowns in the kids, in their congregated setting they were kind of poking at each other...there was strain, and anxiety, and then there would be blow-outs that would impact all the children and so on a day to day basis we had numerous things going on in there...it was a constant battle and it really wasn't working. (personal communication, August 28, 2012)*

I could see the fatigue and stress on the faces of the school team that year. Near the end of the school year, they began voicing a desire for the situation to be different for the following year. I agreed. As a strategist, my role was to support the school team in their work with the students. In comparison to the other specialized classes I supported that year, Gary's class seemed to be in perpetual crisis, though many of the other classes had challenges as well.

The specialized classes were intended to ameliorate or help the students with their suffering, which often arose in the context of their learning. Some students, for example, would hide under desks at the mention of learning particular subjects, like Math. Other students felt extreme discomfort around people they did not know, or large groups of people. Yet others did not speak in school at all. As I moved among the other specialized classes, I realized how complex the students were, and the tremendous resources and efforts that were being put into their education, in order for them to thrive in schools. Still, despite all this there continued to be the shocking high school completion rate. For every ten of those students with EBD seven of them would not complete high school.

I had worked in a highly specialized school for deeply troubled children for three years. I had been a strategist for five years. I had been in schools all over the city, including many highly specialized classes. With the acuteness of the suffering in Gary's class, came another connected sense of understanding for me. I realized that my work had been riddled with similar stories from other specialized classrooms throughout the city, and perhaps those stories were not exclusively about the problems of the students in them. The problems were not just about the teachers either, or the students' families. The work was deeply

complex, multifarious, intertwined, and thus, not usually amenable to singular causes or solutions. What emerged for me, that made me step back and see myself within it once again and understand differently (Gadamer, 2004, p. 296), was the idea that my work, the work of often placing difficult students in specialized classrooms as part of education's answer to student complexity, was also sometimes part of the problem and thus not always a wise response. As Gary stated,

*In a congregated setting they are poking one another and they are not seeing themselves, you know, I could be totally wrong...I don't know if in a congregated setting they see themselves as just an average kid who is just dealing with an issue or if they see themselves as "you know we're kind of in this classroom for "whatever" ... (personal communication, August 28, 2012)*

The connection between the specialized classrooms and how students acted in them seemed to communicate the need to turn to this idea or insight: the possibility that sometimes the very structures and practices intended to help were counterproductively aggravating the EBD with which the students had been diagnosed. In an odd move of inversion, the specialized classroom as an antidote for students with EBD was starting to reveal how it could be a place with troubling constitutive effects (see Gilham, 2011), those effects seen clearly in the ways the students responded to being segregated as students with severe EBD. Lydia, a grade 4/5 classroom teacher in the school during that time, who would sometimes take particular students from the specialized classroom into her "regular" classroom for certain subjects shared:

*They were very separated. On the playground they would be in one part of the yard where they were all away from the other kids, umm, in the school the other kids didn't know them at all. They didn't know their names. They didn't understand who they were. We had a lot of conversations because there would be kids crying in the hallway or yelling and things like that that year. So we had a lot of conversations about, because kids had no clue who they were, they just saw these kids in the hallways and upset and...having meltdowns and so they did not understand what was going on so we just had conversations about them and about who they were and things like that but they were very separate. My kids did not socialize with them at all. (personal communication, March 7, 2013)*

I wondered, along with Gary, if the “poking one another” and “strain” and “anxiety” in the classroom was a result of placing the students together, and the students knowing they were placed together because of their diagnosed pathologies, in a classroom for “whatever,” and the isolation from the school community that ensued in their response to being with one another every day. The children in Gary’s class seemed to be saying this all year long through their often violent acts of resistance. The usual response for specialized and often segregated classrooms - one that Gary and I were most familiar with - was disrupted. As Gadamer wrote, “Understanding becomes a special task only when natural life, this joint meaning of the meant where both intend a common subject matter, is disturbed” (2004, p. 181).

Laura, another teacher who worked closely with Lydia in the inclusive classrooms the following year shared: “...and I do think that they are self-aware about that....the kids

*said so many times (after they had been taken out of the specialized setting and fully included in classrooms with all the other students in the school, author) “I’m just so glad we’re not in that classroom”*” (personal communication, August 28, 2012). James, the student who often fled the school and climbed trees in the school yard, used to say “*All I want to do is be in Mr. W’s class. I don’t wanna be in X (the specialized classroom, author)*” (Laura, personal communication, March 7, 2013).

The basic premise of the specialized classrooms seems simple and well-intended and yet, there, in our faces, the students were shouting out for a different response. I wondered, how had we arrived at the place where segregated special education classrooms were an accepted and typical way of responding to students with severe EBD, and what did this tradition have to say about education’s current wants to help all students thrive in schools? What did the poor high school completion rate and over 50 years of special education in the province have to say about the current focus on inclusion in education? How do educators currently belong to this past (Gadamer, 2004, p. 252), and how might a hermeneutic coming together of past and present fuse into a larger and higher horizon of understanding capable of opening up possibilities for the future (p. 305)? These questions reflected the demand inclusion placed upon me. *Being right there in the middle of it* is the topic’s application within my life.

Application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but codetermines it as a whole from the beginning....But this does not mean that...he first understands...per se, and then afterward uses it for particular applications. Rather, the interpreter seeks no more

than to understand this universal – i.e., to understand what it says, what constitutes...meaning and significance. In order to understand that, he must not try to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate to this situation if he wants to understand at all. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 321)

Cascading forth, overflowing as it were, the topic was broader and deeper and much more complex than statistics could allow, or my own and others' experiences would admit. In order to focus on the conditions where students with severe EBD had been successfully included in community classrooms, I felt I needed to understand how it was this demand arose in the context of Gary's classroom. This task required more than just a focus on Gary and his team and what they said they did, or what they meant when they shared their stories. This was part of the play or being of the topic that would not let it be controlled by a method, or a case study like Mark or Trevor, or tied down by an official interpretation of what people intended. Inclusion has a history in which our work has been immersed and is effected by, which is also at once ongoing and unfinished (Gadamer, 2001, pp. 85-86, p. 46). As Gadamer wrote (2004):

Thus it is not at all a question of a mere subjective variety of conceptions, but of the work's own possibilities of being that emerge as the work explicates itself, as it were, in the variety of its aspects. (p. 117)

The topic was making claims on what needed to be investigated through its being within my life and the lives of Gary, his teachers and the students; there were many tracks to explore, tracks that *are* the topic.

### **Why *This* Study? The Research Questions**

For a few years now education in Alberta has provided a generalized response to the complexities of trying to help students with severe EBD: “We need to be more inclusive for all students to be successful in schools.” This is a phrase (or variation on a phrase) I have often heard in educational settings, and read within educational research (for examples see Lupart, 2008; Slee, 2011; Thomas & Loxley, 2007; Valle & Connor, 2011; Winzer, 2009). This phrase is often deeply contested in both the literature and among educators because it is taken up in various, sometimes opposing ways (Leyser & Kirk, 2004, p. 271; Winzer & Mazurek, 2011, p. 5). It has been one of the primary initiatives of Alberta Education for the past several years (Alberta Education, 2009, 2012). Inclusion as the want or desire to have all students succeed in schools manifests itself in manifold ways, and thus is understood differently depending on whom is asked. Alberta Education (2013) currently defines inclusion as:

The goal of an inclusive education system is to provide all students with the most appropriate learning environments and opportunities for them to best achieve their potential... In Alberta, inclusion in the education system is about ensuring that each student belongs and receives a quality education no matter their ability, disability, language, cultural background, gender, or age. (para. 7)

As Gary shared, the students were not thriving in his school as he and his team hoped they would be. The educators wanted to try to help all the students be together in learning in the hopes that the students with severe EBD would be more successful in their schools. Gary decided to de-segregate the specialized classroom.

In this study, I explicate Gary and his team's attempts to de-segregate the specialized classrooms, and create inclusive classrooms where all students could thrive, together. I asked Gary and several of his teachers to share with me their stories of this work. In subsequent conversations we further discussed key sections of their stories to see what further possibilities for understanding might arise. In total there were three educators involved in 5 one-hour interviews. Sometimes we did this in small groups and sometimes one on one. We also often emailed one another with small writings and thoughts. There was one telephone conversation where I took notes. I was a part of their work both as a consultant, and graduate student engaged in educational research. My work in this study is, therefore, positioned *right there in the middle of it*, of trying to reach its understood meaning (Gadamer, 2001, p. 47).

In this particular work, involving the desegregation of specialized classrooms for students with severe EBD, we were challenged to ask ourselves: How did they cultivate the conditions in which students diagnosed with severe EBD thrived in non-segregated classrooms? What were the challenges in trying to cultivate such thriving? These were my primary research questions to which I offer this hermeneutic thesis in response. Given the current language of inclusion in Alberta Education (2009, 2009a, 2012), the topic poses itself as another question: What does the work in these particular locales-these places of a here and now in education-say about inclusion?

### **The Possibilities of this Study**

The dismal high school completion rate for students with EBD, the many stories like Mark that I have been witness to over the past five years, including the story of

suffering that the students in Gary's specialized class endured, and Alberta Education's public documents relating to inclusion, also speak to the possibilities for different responses or alternatives to the current conditions many students with severe EBD are educated within. Seeing Trevor being so well in that momentary, chance meeting reminded me that students with severe EBD can be successful in schools, which is evidenced in the approximately 40% of those students who do complete high school. An historical understanding of education for students with EBD and how educators and students, and their families are now immersed in that historicity might also create the space in which to re-view the importance of the current atmosphere of and hope for inclusion in Alberta's schools.

Gary's team took on the task of creating something different than a segregated special education class and a typical classroom environment. Their applied interpretation of and practices for inclusion were successful, and in that success inclusion was understood differently (Gadamer, 2004, p. 296). Their work holds possible pedagogical insights for other schools and classrooms. As Gary said of the students with EBD in the new inclusive classrooms, the students' ability to thrive compared to the year in the specialized class was "like night and day" (personal communication, August 28, 2012).

## **Chapter Two: The Historical Being of Ourselves and the Topic**

“The great horizon of the past, out of which our culture and our present live, influences us in everything we want, hope for, or fear in the future” (Gadamer, 2007, p.82).

### **Understanding as Historical Being**

Although in one sense I had gained “a new intellectual freedom” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 251) in the self-understanding that arose through the struggle to find the pedagogical questions inherent to my work and this thesis, I still had yet to labour through and with the topic as it further revealed itself. I still had to find my “way around in it” (p. 251). The words “gained” and “arose,” as well as “yet to labour” and “reveal” speaks to the historical nature of understanding inherent within language, within being a finite, temporal being aware of my finitude (Gadamer, 1981, pp. 74 -75). There is a sense of the importance of what has passed, what is, and what is yet to come in working through an explication of how I came to understand the topic and research questions. Possibilities inhabit the future. This range of human vision and the possibilities inherent to this temporality was termed a “horizon” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 301) and it is inextricably linked to the idea that it is only through the medium of language that “our whole experience of the world...unfolds” (p. 453).

“Every experience has implicit horizons of before and after, and finally fuses with the continuum of the experiences present in the before and after to form a unified flow of experience” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 237). My recognition of this fusion of facets of time and experience towards an anticipation of a better future has been freeing. This emancipatory sense re-invigorated the space to explore and adventure forth beyond the immediate

subjectivity of my own experiences and the experiences of the teachers, as if our experiences alone could meet the demands of the topic (Gadamer, 2004,, pp. 83 - 84). If the historical nature of our being is essential to understanding, and the stories of Mark and Trevor and myself in them speak to this, then likewise, an historical account of schooling for such students could further my understanding of the possibilities for inclusion. The topic, understood as what is present from the past in who we are and how we practice as educators, could find itself projecting towards the future, with hope, as well as the past, with recognition. My horizon of understanding inclusion might expand.

The word for present...waiting, already points to the fact that in it the future is in play. The future, as what is coming, is the present that “waits” for us, and that we await. All expectation of the future as such, however, rests on experience.

Therefore, in every present moment not only is a horizon of the future opened up, but also the horizon of the past is in play. Even so, the present is less memory and backward-looking thought than it is present experience! (Gadamer, 2007, p. 198)

Seeing the horizon that is constantly moving for us allows us to “see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 304). This can only happen if we test the present as it lives in our culture; in our hopes and wants for the future. Thus in this sense there is an action of moving from part to whole and whole to part (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 290-295). This is a circular action of venturing forth and returning, part of the adventure I alluded to earlier. This is known as a hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 2007, p. 82) and it is deeply embedded here in this work.

As I read historical texts, wrote about them, investigated leads, and held conversations with the educators within this study, I found myself time and again casting myself out into their possibilities, asking questions, wondering aloud if I was open to hearing them and if yes, what was true of the tracks the topic led me on, and what did those tracks add to the whole of the topic. There was a constant moving in and out of the locale of the phenomenon, and the larger historical context in which it belongs. This thesis was constantly revisited as my understanding was cultivated. This is reflective of the living nature of knowledge (Gadamer, 2004, p. 294) that is to also say, I belong (p. 295) to this topic, with all the prejudgements I have of it, those prejudices constituted as inheritances that I am not always aware of.

What this long explanatory path has led me to is this: For me to have honoured the topic of inclusion I had to acknowledge and give voice to the idea that the “present cannot be formed without the past” such that “understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 305). My understanding of the importance of the questions of my study led me to try and understand the topic in its historical being. Thus, in this study I had to move beyond what is merely present by also looking at the past because the two senses of temporality are indeed, not separate. They are, as I am, entangled. This is the nature of human being (Gadamer, 2004, p. 252).

### **Historical “Self-Forgetfulness”**

Hence, I suggest that the recent inclusionary talk in Alberta’s educational system-inclusion as helping all students thrive in schools-emerged historically as the answer to questions and demands society and education asked of one another, long before today. The

history of modern education in Alberta begins approximately and certainly more officially, in 1905. This was when Alberta became an official province of Canada, and Minister Rutherford approved the construction of 140 schools (Dechant, 2006, p. 17). However, the provision of education for all children and youth is a relatively recent phenomenon when compared to those first official days of the province.

For example, it was not until the 1960s that schooling for the disabled were more comprehensively offered in public schools in the province (Jahnukainen, 2011). At that time, schools were not legally bound to provide such services. It has only been since the 1980s, with the arrival of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, that the legal impetus for providing schooling for all students in public schools arrived nationally (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2002, p. 62). According to Winzer (2011), in Alberta there were massive increases in students identified as "exceptional" during the years after the arrival of the Charter (as cited in Winzer & Mazurek, 2011, p. 50). The Charter also was reflective of important human rights movements across North America throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (Lupart, 2008; Valle & Connor, 2011).

The disability movement in the United States during the 1980s resulted in American legislation that changed the institutional landscape of the country, literally (Valle & Connor, 2011, pp. 27-29). Wheelchair inaccessible roadside curbs had to be replaced, as well as access points to government buildings, including schools, for examples. The Canadian Charter mirrored the timing of American legislation and so, in parallel, North America was becoming more responsive to the needs of some of its most marginalized citizens (Winzer, 2009, p. 147; Valle & Connor, 2011, pp. 27-29). The local landscape is

still changing as a result of human rights legislations: a 2013 Calgary Herald article described the need for more public funds to help upgrade school buildings still not barrier free (Cuthbertson, 2013). This is reflective of how recent and complicated the history of attempting to provide dignified and respectful educational environments for all forms of human life is. What might such historical phenomenon further reveal about inclusion as it lives today?

Put differently, how might the history of the topic present itself contemporaneously, as part of how and what inclusion is today (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 123-124), so that it can be “experienced and taken seriously as the present” (p. 124)? A successful hermeneutic understanding of a topic has the potential to release one from subjectivity, what Gadamer called a self-forgetfulness. This forgetting helped make me a spectator to the topic, rather than a controller of it (p. 125). I was then, at once, able to mediate myself within the larger richness of the world where the topic exists, as I do too, which brought me-as if on a return from a journey-wholly back to myself, transformed anew (pp. 124-125).

### **The Historical Being of Inclusion**

The history of public schooling in both Ontario and Alberta is largely seen as a movement that tried to bring about social harmony (Prentice, 2004, pp. 127-128), or provincial stability (Dechant, 2006, p. 17) through “good character” training (von Heyking, 2006, pp. 9-15). Rapid industrialization and urbanization, as well as immigration resulted in severe social class divisions (Prentice, 2004) and increased demands for education for children and youth. “Between 1901 and 1911 Alberta’s population increased from 73,000 to 374,000” (von Heyking, 2006, p. 7). By 1920 there were approximately 135,000 students

in Alberta schools (p. 7). Children and youth who were not in schools either worked at home, in factories or in odd jobs, or they roamed the streets, according to McIntosh (1999). However, I struggled to find data relating to education for troubled children and youth in Alberta. Von Heyking (2006) wrote that there was a movement in Alberta at the time to provide school curriculum based on “manual training, school gardening, nature study and domestic science” (p. 8) but it was not taken up in earnest. Schools mainly had an academic focus, and there was an intense stress on social efficiency, harmony and “good character” (pp. 9-15). Some of this focus resulted in severe methods of discipline in schools like frequent use of “the rod” (p. 15).

The father of “free” or public schooling in Canada, Ontario’s Egerton Ryerson (1803-1882) is quoted as wanting to bring about a peaceful society by unifying the widening social classes (Prentice, 2004, pp. 127, 156) that had occurred mainly due to rapid industrialization and its resultant rapid urbanization. He also felt that with education there would be an increase in economic production from the poor, a hint of the prevailing belief of the day, and perhaps today as well, that the poor were unproductive because they were lazy, and only a strong Christian values-based education could change that (pp. 134, 156). He also believed that increased economic production would result in high land price values for those who owned property (pp. 83, 133), and he saw this as a direct benefit resulting from the social harmony agenda. High land prices did result and the poor could not afford to own land or homes, thus exacerbating or widening the gap between the classes (Dechant, 2006, p. 18).

At the same time, there was a prevailing belief in pauperism, in which helping the poor might further reinforce what was seen as “sloth and weakness of character” (Dechant, 2006, p. 17). In Alberta, there was a strong belief in the individual’s responsibility (Dechant, 2006, p. 17; von Heyking, 2006, pp. 7-20). In the movement to bring education to the masses there was also the belief that “unschooled vagrant children” (Prentice, 2006, p. 157) needed to be shaped, often through punishment, and that “schools would conquer lower class apathy for the good of all” (p. 134). On the other hand, the earliest forms of schooling were for the privileged few (Lupart, 2008), and it was claimed that the United States was a model for common or public schooling so lacking in Canada (DiMascio, 2012, pp.134-136). Many families advocated for schooling for their children in order to build an educated and prosperous society (von Heyking, 2006, pp. 7-8). These multi-layered positions I have shared are not exhaustive. They speak to the complicated and conflicting rationales surrounding the purposes and goals of education in Canada (See Prentice, 2004 for a detailed social history of schooling in Upper Canada and von Heyking, 2006 for a similar history of schooling in Alberta).

Massive schooling for the general population of children and youth was itself a new phenomenon. Prior to modern, urban life, children and youth were often seen and treated as adults; adults who worked with their families to support the family businesses that were common prior to industrialization (Mcintosh, 1999, p. 126). In Alberta’s first few decades of modern schooling many school-aged children were needed on their family farms and few students progressed to secondary schools (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2002, p. 11). With the loss of close-knit communities of manufacture and trade, urban children and youth

either worked in large factories, or worked on the streets (McIntosh, 1999), or engaged in criminal behaviour (Dechant, 2006, p. 21). Society then started to view the child as dependent and immature; as in need of “saving” through stronger guidance and learning in order to contribute to modern and increasingly urban, society (McIntosh, 1999, p. 127: Prentice, 2004, p. 32). Schooling, it was believed, could do something about these complex conditions.

With my nascent understanding of the history of schooling I wondered, could schooling be seen as a response to the changed beliefs about the nature of the child; that belief shaped by the drastically transformed world of the time and the realities that came to bear on families and cities (McIntosh, 1999)? If yes, could inclusion then also be seen as this, as an ongoing struggle to respond well to the rapid demands placed on us as a consequence of the whirlwind of modern society? Inclusion would then no longer simply be an initiative of Alberta Education over the past four years. It could, in its various instantiations over the past 100 years in Alberta, be seen as something more fundamental at play in human life in the modern age.

Also, the changed conceptualization of children as a result of life at that time reflects that knowledge or truth is a co-constitutive action or event. It reflects Gadamer’s quote on the historical nature of human *being*. Who we are is not isolatable purely objectively as a topic of investigation for the natural sciences, nor are we entirely subjects of our inner psyches, completely constituted in private inner worlds, once again objects of a sort for psychology to analyze. We are creatures whose being is an issue for us, those issues arising, as I articulated in chapter one, *right there in the middle of it*: of our lives in the

world (Gadamer, 2001, p. 48). Gadamer believed that an understanding of now could only occur because of the historical nature of knowing: knowing itself an act of what it is to be human (Gadamer, 2004, p. 252). The etymology of understanding or the traditional, historical images and notions of understanding seem to deeply resonate with this idea of being “in” or “beside” something in order to be able to grasp its possible meanings in the world:

Understand (v): Old English *understandan* "comprehend, grasp the idea of," probably literally "stand in the midst of," from *under* + *standan* "to stand" (see *stand*). If this is the meaning, the *under* is not the usual word meaning "beneath," but from Old English *under*, from PIE *\*nter-* "between, among" (cf. Sanskrit *antar* "among, between," Latin *inter* "between, among"). (Etymology Online, 2013)

As a hermeneutic researcher, I needed to continue cultivating an account of this historical nature of our being within the topic of inclusion.

### **Educational Aporia**

Scholarly documents relating to education in Alberta for troubled children and youth during the advent of modern schooling seem sparse, perhaps a reflection of the aporia present in Alberta’s early education system. If education had not considered certain populations of children and youth as educable (Dechant, 2006, pp. 18-22), for instance, or if marginalized groups did not respond to the call of government to be educated (Prentice, 2004, p.156, pp. 159-160), or if there was no money to provide particular kinds of services for certain populations of children and youth (Dechant, 2006, p. 18), or their families could not afford the “basics” (Prentice, 2004, p. 159), there would be little account of such

populations and hence, research into the populations would reveal their absences. Absence in one field does not necessarily imply complete absence from society, however. The richest document I was able to find relating precisely to children and youth in Alberta who would have been described as having severe EBD is a review of children's mental health services in the province, written in 2006 (Dechant).

The sources for that review found marginalized populations showing up in justice and social services documents, as well as historical accounts of the time, in general. As such, the constitution of certain populations of children and youth in particular ways-in this case, through justice and social service documents-would reflect part of the community's sense for children and youth, and society, too.

### **Neglected, Homeless, Delinquent**

In Canada, provisions for children with particular disabilities began in the 1900s (Lupart, 2008; Winzer, 2009). Services for the deaf and blind were the first provisions of a disabled population in Alberta. According to Conn-Blowers and Mcleod (1989), up until the late 1970s, blind children were schooled out of province, which the Alberta government paid for (as cited in Csapo & Goguen, p. 20). According to Lupart (2008), in Alberta, students with EBD were not included in these initial services, rather they were "...abandoned and set adrift in the local communities" (p. 4). They were mainly seen as poor, immigrant children who did not work (Lupart, 2008; Dechant, 2006). At the time, as it is today, these children were considered neglected or homeless:

As in other large urban centres, many factors led to the neglect of children. These included rapid growth with soaring property values forcing a large number of

working class people into overcrowded housing. The additional hardships of the business depression of 1913, the social disorganization brought about by World War 1 beginning in 1914, followed by the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919 profoundly affected family life (Dechant, 2006, p. 18).

These children were quickly stigmatized through a host of labels such as gutter snipe, black arab, waif, stray, and delinquent, for examples (Winzer, 2009, p. 166). Social welfare assistance in Edmonton and Calgary was scarce (Dechant, 2006, p. 17). In 1913, individual citizens came together and, modeling after Ontario, created Children's Aids Societies across Alberta, starting with Calgary. In 1920, the city of Calgary created its own children's aid department which assisted over 9000 children during its 11 years in operation (p. 18).

However, children and youth who suffered symptoms that we might today consider EBD were often treated as criminals, or they were left to the responsibility of their families (Dechant, 2006, p. 18). Society became increasingly concerned about youth crime and the social problems it created (Dechant, 2006; Prentice, 2004). This was also a national problem, and resulted in the *Juvenile Delinquents Act of Canada*. As Dechant (2006) reported, the use of the term delinquent in the act was intended to replace or "protect against the stigma associated with the label of 'criminal'" (p. 19). Society's response in the early 1900s was to intentionally change the language and procedures for dealing with youth on the streets, and it seems that this was intended to help society, overall.

Still, there are histories that kept an interpretation of a singular certainty of the day at play for me. For example, according to Lupart (2008), large groups of children ended up

in single facilities “...not much more than human warehouses that were dumping grounds for young children rejected by their families” (p. 4). Dechant (2006) wrote that the delinquency model was based on the prevailing medical model of the day which saw these children and youth’s problems as issues of neglect, abandonment, and “an indigent environment” (p.19). Juvenile court was intended to “identify and root out this sickness” (Dechant, 2006, p.19).

In 1908, education was involved in helping with the goals of justice in a small, isolated, and distant way. The Alberta *Industrial Schools Act* provided the rationale for providing “reformatory schooling” for boys in trouble. This work took place in Manitoba, at the “Industrial” school in Portage la Prairie. This Act was considered one of Alberta’s first pieces of welfare legislation (Dechant, 2006, p. 20). It also required every city of 10,000 or more to establish shelters for neglected children. Calgary’s Children’s Aid Society immediately responded by creating a shelter which housed, among many staff, a teacher from the Calgary School Board (Dechant, 2006, p. 20). Soon after, provincial homes were created for troubled youth, and became another option for juvenile courts in their decision making as legal guardians of children and youth (Dechant, 2006, p. 22).

Similar actions were taken across North America. These actions were part of the goal of the new industrial society to rehabilitate its abnormal populations, as well as to prevent the “disadvantage of all concerned” (Dechant, 2006, p. 28). There was not enough space or hygienic conditions in one and two-room school houses for children to thrive (Prentice, 2004, pp. 159-160). Some educators contributed to the closed spaces by doling out brutal conditions for students, resulting in physical and emotional abuse (Prentice,

2004, p. 160). These conditions, as well as beliefs in the social inefficiency of modern society were partially at play in the creation of the mental hygiene movement of the 1920s and its goal of creating happy and healthy children (Dechant, 2006, pp. 23-24).

The government response to institutionalize those not considered healthy and happy, and beyond cure of their sickness however, made me wonder if those who were institutionalized considered their lives any happier than they were before being contained for the “diminution of social distress and human suffering” (Clarence Hincks, Mental Hygiene Survey of the Province of Alberta 1921, as cited in Dechant, 2006, p. 28).

### **Eugenics**

In the story of children and youth with EBD in Alberta, there is the historical topic of eugenics, from the Greek meaning “well born” (Dechant, 2006, p. 147). It was a strongly supported movement in North America for decades, and it had a particular strength in Alberta because it was enacted in a form of legislation which was utilized to sterilize disabled children and youth, primarily (Dechant, 2006, p. 149). Forced sterilization remained in place as legislation in Alberta from 1921 – 1972 (Dechant, 2006, p. 30). At the time, the government largely interpreted students with severe EBD, and other certain disabilities as abnormal and subsequently immoral, which required “careful screening of immigrants and sterilization” and “suitable facilities” (Clarence Hincks, Mental Hygiene Survey of the Province of Alberta 1921, as cited in Dechant, 2006, p. 28). What role has eugenics played in our present want for a more inclusive education system? What responses arose from that popular and powerful influence?

“Feeble-mindedness” (Dechant, 2006; Lupart, 2008; Osgood, 2005) was a construct of psychology, and it formed part of an early progressive education movement, that movement deeply entrenched in the scientific method and industrialization (von Heyking, 2006, pp. 78-81). Feeble-mindedness was an official category in which to slate human beings, derived from mental measurement practices newly introduced into Canada through scholars who had been attending Binet and Simons’ conferences on the development of intelligence testing (Dechant, 2006, p. 26; see Dudley-Marling and Gurn, 2010 for critiques of the application of the bell curve to individuals, typically and predominantly through intelligence testing). Eugenics was an attempt to breed purity into society while also denying breeding to those deemed abnormal or disabled, particularly the feeble-minded (Dechant, 2006, p. 148). The determination of abnormality was made initially by the mental hygiene movement’s new-found committee and their application of intelligence tests to students whom teachers identified...

As troublesome, mischief making, or generally disturbing. They found troublesome children more prone to a low IQ. They then interviewed children in this troublesome category, a process that reinforced their belief that these children possessed inferior moral values. They argued for auxiliary classes to provide special training for children from good homes but not for the antisocial, whose defects and social class precluded their presence in public schools. Their solution was to segregate these children from society in isolated farm colonies. (McConnachie, 1987, as cited in Dechant, 2006, p. 28)

The practices of mandatory segregation and sterilization were sanctioned through the *Sexual Sterilization Act of Alberta* (Dechant, 2006, p. 30). The practice of sterilization was only recently eliminated from existing national legislation by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1986 (Lupart, 2008, p. 4), though it was repealed in Alberta in 1972 (Dechant, 2006, p. 30). Over 60% of those sterilized between 1921 and 1970 were children and youth up to 20 years of age (p. 30; for a more detailed and disturbing account of this particular history, see more of Dechant, 2006).

This dark history was supported and espoused as good for society by the national committee. This committee was known as the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene (CNCMH) of which Dr. Clarence Hincks, quoted above for his views on sterilization and containment, played an important part. He brought intelligence testing to Ontario, and created fear in society over the purported consequences of letting the “feeble-minded” continue to breed (Dechant, 2006, p. 27). Nellie McClung (1873-1951), popularly known for her advocacy of women’s rights in Alberta, played a pivotal role in supporting the eugenics legislation (Dechant, 2006, p. 149). Her advocacy, along with the support of the committee and other groups, attempted to make a strong link between feeble-mindedness and delinquency (Dechant, 2006, pp. 147-150). This work showed up in schools via Social Science textbooks:

As the organization of society becomes more complex, a new type of man is required, more tolerant, more adaptable, with better social as well as intellectual gifts and training. Every advance, however, leaves its train of stragglers, the feeble-minded, the criminal, the incompetent. It is quite certain that the future holds great

promise for the control and improvement of these types. (Seary & Paterson as cited in von Heyking, 2006, p. 81)

### **The Art of Strengthening**

The art of strengthening, according to Gadamer, requires us to be open to the possibility that others may be right, “that one really considers the weight of the other’s opinion” (2004, p. 361), which is a call to listening to what the conversations with texts and others say to us (Gadamer, Dutt, & Palmer, 2001, p. 39). The art of strengthening is moreover, the art of listening in order to ask questions of one another, including the traditions we renew in our society.

In asking questions, one is engaged in the art of thinking (Gadamer, 2004, p. 360). If this kind of thinking results in interpretations that questions the judgement of a culture and time, perhaps such interpretations shed light on our current places, in the middle of trying to understand, as it were. The situational nature of human life includes the pre-judgements or pre-givens within a society that constitute who we are. Gadamer’s hermeneutics restored the term prejudices to this meaning (p. 271) thereby giving them a fundamental and necessary place in how we think about and see our world.

Gadamer believed that, we simply do not stand behind or above or over the lives we are already living and within (Gadamer et al., 2001, p. 47), but we can get a sense of what we are within by trying to understand the past and how we belong to it. This mediated sense still does not entail that we escape how we are played by our traditions, and how they

continuously affect us, and yet taking historical account of one's culture does not "relieve oneself of the duty to disempower, where possible, prejudices that do not prove to be positive" (Gadamer et al., 2001, p. 43).

Thus, the art of strengthening does not imply the strengthening of another's words so that they are right but rather, so that the possibility is present for those words to be right, and they may not be, as well. At the same time, the art of strengthening entails understanding how it is that life may have been the way it was, as inherited, and perhaps taken for granted as right and true, while also in some ways being true of life now. In the play of history's influence on life now there is a need to make a balanced concession or judgement (Gadamer, 1999, p. 157).

Inclusion, in the dark shadow cast by eugenics and similarly minded programming in Alberta, takes on a new form. The dark history of not so long ago places inclusion within a larger horizon, one perhaps not expected in the current day to day talk surrounding the topic. The art of strengthening assists in giving an account of the past's entanglement in the responses of the present and future, though such strengthening does not entail a justification of the past. Questions persisted: How do I make sense of eugenics within the larger horizon of historical being? What account can be given of it that reflects the mediated place I find myself within?

### **Play's Danger**

The belief in, and support for, an agenda of racial purity and thus social harmony through a eugenics program cannot be seen as the practically wise thing to have done, at least from the perspective of the lessons history may have taught us for the present

moment. The common sense of the time seems to have been in gross error, though the program did not occur without heated debate (Dechant, 2006, p. 149). In those times however, society's most prominent thinkers and popular figures believed in the purported scientific link between low intelligence scores, youth delinquency, and social inefficiency. Society's leaders officially supported the idea and its intentional actions.

What is concurrently pedagogical and worth taking from the eugenics project in Alberta is the ongoing and necessary mode of being history plays in our lives. We can be taken in by this history, and as such, it has the character of "play" (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 102-110). Those playing are being played or tried (p. 106), so much so that in the seriousness of play, we can lose ourselves to the game at hand. Only then are we engaged in the true meaning of play.

Being engaged in the true meaning of play is, however, not a chosen state, as if we decide upfront how life will happen for us and life moves precisely the way we plan. Gadamer's use of play in his hermeneutics is intended to illuminate the ongoing, always present historical nature of knowledge as part of who and how we are. Play illuminates this shift in understanding knowledge from objects and things (epistemological) to active being in our lives (ontological), as if part of the game of life. He used play in the context of art and other aesthetic forms to show how play operates with and on us.

Gadamer's point however, was not just to show the play in aesthetics and thus re-illuminate their ongoing value in the world for us, so that we could interpret play as always something celebratory and true to be found in aesthetics. Play involves the tragic, too. Gadamer was giving an account of the nature of human understanding overall, in all facets

of life, including suffering. Play is a metaphor for our being in the world, and it can be risky and dangerous. The same holds true of our interpretations of our lives or more accurately, our interpretations play a constitutive role in our world and thus, our understandings. This is why Gadamer believed that “language is the house of being” (2004, p. 470). Thus, believing that one is holding steadfast to one’s intended “play” or plan for life, or interpretation is a delusion. This delusion loses Gadamer’s main point about understanding: human life is mediated temporally and thus it is always ongoing, which includes being open to and enacted by possibility and renewal. Understanding is affected and immersed in the world, this world for us that we know as time, as history (pp. 118-119).

The above paragraph can also be understood in our use of the word play. We often use the expression “the play of things” in various instantiations to describe complicated events that often happen beyond our wanting and doing. This is a most serious renewal of the concept play that Gadamer (2004) wanted to show was inherent to human life (pp. 250-254). Again, play, as a metaphor for describing our involvement in the world, serves to help us understand understanding by describing the fullness of our thickly enmeshed lives, and therefore must include all of human life, including the negative and positive senses of being played, and losing ourselves in its action. The metaphor is in contrast to a view of human life and the accumulation of truth as a means of having control over or construction of the world (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 36-37, p. 450). Play is both a reflection of human hope and tragedy.

The history of children and youth in Alberta, including the troubling eugenics movement, attuned me to the serious topic of the play of inclusion today and how at one time, the striving to make a peaceful society was fraught with danger, so much so that eugenics outplayed and prevailed over Albertan society (Gadamer, 2004, p. 106). This attunement takes place not from my subjective opinions or solely from the anecdotes of Mark and Trevor, or the accumulated data on students with EBD, though together they are phenomenon of the play at hand, connected and thus part of the play (Gadamer, 2004, p. 106). Rather, the topic of inclusion itself, tethered to a history full of these ties and kinships as if in movement with “other players” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 106), subjected me to its play and “is the work itself” (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 103-104) with its own measure. I am active in not only explicating an account of this play within this thesis, but also spectator and participant in it for how the topic played upon me when writing this thesis. It demanded that I continue going back and forth between historical texts, hermeneutics, and the interviews with the educators, and this writing (Gadamer, 2004, p. 106).

Hence, inclusion has become “a reality that surpasses” myself in its historical being (Gadamer, 2004, p. 109) and as it was transformed here it gained a structure that permitted a renewal of its possible interpretations. Inclusion is connected to and part of something that is “suddenly and as a whole something else” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 111). Hence, inclusion is not just the current want to have all students succeed or thrive in schools: it is also the story of specialized classes and the congregation or segregation of students. It is the ongoing story of students like Mark and James who struggle to belong in schools. It is the high school completion rate, the claim of a lack of resources and supports, and as I will

begin to show further on in the conversations with the educators in this study, it is also about teaching and learning, and communities of belonging. Inclusion is all of these occasions (Gadamer, 2004, pp.141-142) presenting themselves in their concrete and yet interwoven circumstances. This, my ongoing account of the play of inclusion has the possibility to supersede both myself and the reader because “the requirement that the play itself be intended in its meaningfulness is the same for both” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 110). There is something performative in this account that makes inclusion more than that which I can define up front, and then control (Gadamer, 2004, p. 141). Play is lost when it takes on the character of a rigid method up front but it is deeply pedagogical when its action takes methodical priority.

Thus, inclusion,

Cannot simply be isolated from the “contingency” of the chance conditions in which it appears, and where this kind of isolation occurs, the result is an abstraction that reduces the actual being of the work. It itself belongs to the world to which it represents itself. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 115)

My task at hand then, the explication of the play of the topic in this thesis, must continue as an act that “produces and brings to light what is otherwise constantly hidden and withdrawn” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 112) in the topic of inclusion today, with the caution for myself that this topic and my hermeneutic approach to it “is more than it knows of itself” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 115).

The common sense of the eugenics movements was more than it knew of itself, too. In the abstraction that occurred as a result of a certain belief in technology and progress, common sense was reduced to a mere contingency of the conditions in which eugenics appeared. The “playing field” of eugenics was “set by the nature” of the beliefs inherent to it, “far more...from within...than by what it comes up against” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 107). As a result, the field of that play was closed (Gadamer, 2004, p. 108). The common sense of the time may have prevailed, but an older and wiser sense of commonality was concealed by a passion for the truths the natural sciences could present before the culture of the day. That older sense was present, and comes forth again in inclusion, which is also part of the play for me: the part where the closed nature of the game opens up once again for me to see. Here in Gadamer’s use of play and its interpretation within this topic there is, once again, the notion of concealment and illumination in human life.

### **An Older Common Sense, Concealed**

Eugenics was not right and, in the same thought, during that time, the common sense of the community saw it as the right thing to do. What complex conditions were present such that many of the people in the province of Alberta believed in and supported eugenics? Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* is partially an attempt to explain how the Enlightenment brought about a human pursuit of progress through natural science methods that often concealed what he claimed, is an inherent human “sense” necessary for human understanding as practical wisdom. This fundamental “sense” was the *sensus communis*: the binding human capability - already embracing “a sum of judgments and criteria for judgment that determines its contents” - (Gadamer, 2004, p. 28) that “founds community”

(p. 19) and was understood for its import in human life much more clearly in antiquity and throughout the humanist tradition, up to the modern age (Gadamer, 2004, p. 20).

In this history of Alberta, the tragic *sensus communis* of the past 100 years was a kind of common sense however this was a common sense that now seems to have been overly persuaded by the methods of the natural sciences. The apparent clarity and progress within the natural sciences and those who supported them could be seen as having had the powerful voice of saying, “If you only isolate, control, and sterilize those who you think trouble and impede society, you will bring about a society that thrives, and is peaceful.” An inherent sense for community was present then but in the pursuit of peaceful society, the methodology for enacting that ideal involved the pruning off of those branches of humanity deemed unhealthy, and thus healthy society did not include all of its members. To be healthy and maintain that health, it seems, was to eradicate the possibility of certain kinds of unhealthy human beings coming into the world. Purification was the answer to society’s ills. This kind of thinking and its inherent methodology, I offer, pre-dominated the common sense of the time, thereby concealing the moral demand to ask whether or not segregation and sterilization were good ideas. I suggest that the moral depravity within this way of seeing other human beings was concealed by a belief in human progress that in its time was seen as right and true by most people.

I believe Gadamer’s historical explication of the concealment of a more traditional common sense, and his renewal of that tradition, was one of the ways he showed the process and content of human understanding as inherently social and diverse, yet unified. He explicated an account of human understanding such that, in revealing something of the

historical pathways of human life together, he created the space in which we might re-view or once again see the importance of asking moral questions about those pathways human societies find themselves on, including today's notion of progress. The ethical asking can entail a return to or recovery of traditions inherent in human life and this can be of vital importance in understanding the historical being of human understanding.

The danger and play of hermeneutics perhaps resides in the fullness of what is both said and unsaid in the following statement: Humans never can reach final or pure essences or truths about how to proceed in the world. This is because we are essentially finite beings who move in perpetual cycles of memory and forgetting and thus, renewal. Perhaps Gadamer's call for a renewal or re-enlivening of the past as our historical being is also a return to our senses, to our memory, to that which brought us together, already: our common sense. Maybe a traditional common sense or, rather, the sense that common sense is cultivated in human ways of being together gets concealed in the play of various structures and systems in human life. I am reminded of how during the year of struggles with the students with EBD, Gary and I spent so much time talking about moving some of the students out of the specialized class and into more intensive settings. We seemed to be stuck or limited to only seeing that option. Once we realized that the students might have been telling us something about where they wanted to be and how they wanted to be seen and treated and educated, other possibilities were illuminated for us. At that moment, it then seemed strangely "commonsensical" to consider supporting them in community classrooms. We knew we were entering new territory but we also knew that there was something familiar about the idea of bringing all the students together. There was a tension

in arriving at this kind of in-between place (Gadamer, 2004, p. 295). This did not mean that this sense we had for what was right and true would entail up front that these classrooms would actually go well.

Thus, there is something of a call or reminder in *Truth and Method* to remember; to stop and catch myself in order to ask, “Was this particular pursuit of peaceful society a good idea to engage in? Why did it come about?” In the case of Gary and me, we were forced to ask ourselves, “Was the segregation of students with EBD in his school a good idea?” I asked this of myself and my work in special education, “What vestiges of the enlightenment’s notion of social harmony as an ongoing tradition still live in my work and what role does the enlightenment still play in how we strive to live in peace with one another in education?” I wondered if these questions reflected the ancient notion of *sensus communis* that Gadamer wanted to renew: the importance of wisdom over a purely modern sense of theoretical, expert power held by the scholar or scientist (pp. 18-19). Perhaps the wisdom of the community has been with us all along, especially in the human sciences though for a time it was largely concealed in being “replaced by science” (p. 19); in that concealment, terrible events ensued like eugenics.

Thus, in parallel to Gadamer’s process and content in *Truth and Method*, I am making a similar claim about Alberta’s treatment of students with EBD and other disabilities. I do so in order to bring forth the dynamic and complicated presence of the past 100 years within the topic of inclusion in education, today. In the context of Alberta and students with EBD, the vestiges of isolation or exclusion from “normal” life could be seen as still present or contemporaneous and taken for granted in the ways we categorize and

segregate students with severe EBD (see Gilham, 2012 for a more detailed interpretation of this position). On the other hand, students with EBD can be dangerous to themselves and others. Working with students who are extremely sensitive to the world can be intensely challenging. The balance between safety and community is often at play in this work, though the historical response to these practical realities clearly lacked balance. What about today then? Is the call for inclusion a human pointing to the past and present voiced in the declaration, “Look! We are not there yet! We have yet to gain our sense of proportion in all this!”? Is this also the voice of the struggles of the students in Gary’s specialized class?

The contemporary response to eugenics was both shock and denial (see Malacrida, 2006). The demand however, to do something with troubled children and youth took early form and was ever-increasing.

### **The Historical Demand**

In 1923, education attempted to respond to those children and youth who were believed to be uneducable in typical schools with the creation of its Red Deer facility, known as the Michener Centre. Children who presented with a range of intelligence scores and EBD were housed together, there. The school opened with 108 children. By 1927, it had a waiting list of 727 children. That demand created a pressure on local school systems to respond. In 1924, there were two special classes in Calgary “accommodating 30 subnormal children...in a two-room school” (Dechant, 2006, p. 34). In 1929, Mental Hygiene Clinics were established in Edmonton and Calgary. They were agencies “for the study and treatment of the whole child” (p. 36). Referrals came largely from schools. As a contemporaneous sign of the historical being of the topic of inclusion, while writing this

thesis, the Calgary Herald reported that The Michener Centre was going to be closed sometime in 2013 (Kleiss, 2013). There, in the presence of this study, stood a living vestige of that common sense of the past, pointing towards a society struggling to be inclusive. When I saw this article, as a matter of reading the online news every day, something of the fullness of the play of this topic further revealed itself as immanently close to my life and work in Alberta.

In the 1930s, there was an apparent shift away from connecting intelligence testing to EBD symptoms, towards a more holistic view of the child in relation to the world. Language of the time referred to children with EBD as “dumb...crazy...mad...bad...problem children” (Dechant, 2006, p. 40). Intelligence testing is still used in the categorization and placement of students in Alberta schools, however.

In the 1940s, post-war, a further shift was made towards working with children with EBD-then called “emotionally disturbed” (Dechant, 2006, p. 48) and “educably sub-normal” (Dechant, 2006, p. 49)-and their families, directly in communities, and often in schools. Mental health pilot projects occurred in some Alberta schools resulting in a new era of guidance officers and school counselling services (Dechant, 2006, p. 158; von Heyking, 2006, pp. 86-87). Medical personnel also began working in partnership with troubled children and their families (Dechant, 2006, p. 158). It was during this time too, according to von Heyking (2006) that psychology, particularly behaviourist principles, appeared directly in approaches to learning in Alberta’s schools (pp. 66-67, p. 87).

One pervasive theme in the historical literature continued to be an apparent lack of resources to meet the demands of a growing population of mentally “deficient” children

and youth. With the discovery of oil in Alberta there were soon to be more resources in the province than ever before. The aporia of an organized educational system for children with disabilities was about to be addressed, and not without inheriting the world that had been created earlier in response to students with EBD.

### **Exceptional Children**

In the 1950s and 1960s, youth crime had become a serious problem in urban centres (Dechant, 2006, p. 56). Parent advocacy groups arose in force, alongside an early series of rights movements (Lupart, 2008; von Heyking, 2006, p. 123). There was a demand for public schools to take on the education of children that had traditionally been abandoned to the warehouse style facility or highly specialized private or medical institutions (Conn-Blowers & Mcleod, 1989; Lupart, 2008; Valle & Connor, 2011). The province built both schools (von Heyking, 2006, p.124) based on vocational training in an effort to stem the tide of “drop-outs”, as well as jails for young offenders (Dechant, 2006, p 56). Some educators blamed the issues of youth crime and “drop-outs” on families and “declining moral standards” (von Heyking, 2006, p. 98). The demand on education and society had not waned; rather it seems to have increased, in spite of the new-found wealth of the province.

In Edmonton, many students with EBD were educated in the Glenrose School Hospital. Some families were upset that their children were moved from that facility and taught in public schools (Conn-Blowers & Mcleod, as cited in Csapo and Goguen, 1989, p. 21). Schools had become responsible for all children, though this was not officially mandated in Alberta until 1988 (Goguen, L., as cited in Csapo and Goguen, 1989, p. 162). A question of youth crime and its connection to adult crime was being asked, as was the

frustration general physicians were having in their daily practices with having 30% of their workload directed at children and youth with possible EBD, and little medical understanding of the causes and cures of those disabilities (Dechant, 2006, p. 59). In partial response, more specialized health units were established across the province. These units were designed specifically for students with severe EBD, who were sometimes very violent and aggressive (Dechant, 2006, pp. 71-72).

In Canada, the “5 box system” of referral, testing, labelling, placement, and programming for students with special education needs was created during the 1950s and 60s (Lupart, 2008, p. 5). The application of this system by educators and psychologists resulted in what Skrtic (1995) described as a separate, competing and parallel educational bureaucracy, known as special education, which is still present today. This 5 box system is still the main mode of determining disability in Alberta schools.

In the 1950s and 1960s, “warehoused” children and youth were placed in specialized schools and classrooms (Lupart & McKeough, 2009). This was seen as “precedent-setting practices” for schools (p. 16). Parents were “generally satisfied” with the segregated educational settings for their children (p. 17). It was also the 1950s when the first defined categories of emotional and behavioural disorder arose in Canada, and were used in schools (Winzer, 2009). For example, in 1950 there were 256 identified exceptional students in Alberta, in 16 different classrooms across the province, and only three categories of exceptionality recognized; one of them for students with “behavioural disorders.” There still existed the former specialized medical settings for children and youth

with symptoms of extreme EBD, and those services exist today, necessary in the face of often dire mental health challenges.

This avenue of supporting the most extreme cases was bolstered by the 1959 *Mental Diseases Act* which permitted hospitals to admit emotionally disturbed children in particular wards designed for their care (Dechant, 2006, p. 61). In Calgary today, school board teachers and support staff work in those hospital settings, providing education for students (currently at Dr. Gordon Townsend school in the Alberta Children's Hospital, the Young Adolescent Program at Foothills hospital, and the Adolescent Day Treatment Program at the former Holy Cross Hospital).

### **Special Education Arises**

The question, "What about education for all children?" was answered by this new special education system of "including" children through their categorization and placement in schools, often in segregated ways. By 1979, there were 23,701 special education students, 1720 "special" classes, and 15 categories in Alberta. This increase accelerated in 1992 when Alberta Education records showed 51,711 exceptional learning needs, and once again in 2002 at 77,200 students. The disability categories in the latter time frame increased from 15 to 20 (Lupart & McKeough, 2009, pp. 19-20). "By this time (1980), special education had become a huge, specialized, bureaucratic system, with its' own specialized programs, services, and personnel" (Lupart & McKeough, 2009, pp. 17-18).

The apparent need for special education has not showed signs of slowing down. According to Winzer (2011), "The period between 1998 to 2003 saw an increase of 64% in

identification of students with severe disabilities and an increase of 140% for students with mild/moderate disabilities, compared to a general increase in the school population of 5%” (as cited in Winzer & Mazurek, p. 51).

### **Mainstreaming and Integration**

However, during the 1970s, human rights’ movements, particularly the movement led by those labelled as “disabled,” there was a radical shift away from the segregated classrooms of special education (Conn-Blowers & Mcleod, 1989, as cited in Csapo & Goguen; Lupart, 2009). Segregated students were placed back in regular classrooms and received some supports in class, and from resource rooms. This movement has been described as mainstreaming or integration (Lupart & McKeough, 2009; Winzer, 2000, as cited in Winzer & Mazurek, p. 6).

Many families and educators believed the limited supports inherent to mainstreaming was akin to simply taking students out of specialized classrooms, and returning them to typical classrooms where many of them had already failed in the first place (Lupart & McKeough, 2009). Some early research at the time also suggested that discrimination from non-disabled peers deeply impacted the ability of students to thrive in schools (Johnson, 1950). This, along with teacher resistance and inflexible teaching, Madden and Slavin (1983) suggested, led to many school districts pulling back on mainstreaming (p. 521).

Students were then required to have individual education or program plans, currently known by the acronym, IPPs or IEPs (Conn-Blowers & Mcleod, 1989, as cited in Csapo & Goguen) which were to be created with the students, and their families. Similar

documents, known as Individualized Treatment Plans, were already present for families and children in Alberta's Health system in the 1950s (Dechant, 2006, p. 58). The IPPs were intended to strengthen the supports and services of regular classrooms by tracking and documenting what worked for students, as well as serve as an accountability measure to help educators program for their disabled students (Lupart & McKeough, 2009). Today, Alberta Education sees them as the central document where students with disabilities can work with their caregivers and educators to plan for their educational needs (Alberta Education, 2006) though, according to Winzer (2011) they are often not taken up seriously in schools (p. 58, as cited in Winzer & Mazurek). My experiences across schools also reflects Winzer's claim. The introduction of IPPs could also be seen as a response to the concerns of families and educators alike who did not want students simply re-integrated back into typical classrooms, without supports or educational plans.

As a further response to mainstreaming, students had access to a continuum of services built on what is known as the "cascade of services" model proposed by Evelyn Deno in 1974. The services could range from support directly in classes, to out of class support in specialized resource rooms, or intensive short-term professional support from therapists, for examples. This was also an answer for those families, students and educators who believed that, despite the best efforts contained within IPPs, there were students who required services and supports that exceeded what was possible in traditional classrooms, but at the same time wanted to "move toward less segregated, more socially inclusive support of the needs of failure-vulnerable children than had existed in the past" (Deno, 1994, p. 382). Deno claimed (1994), in reflecting on that time, that her work was concerned

with “the question of how a society can promote the best that every child has to offer” (p. 377). She noted how, even back then, resources were often distributed based on disability categories, rather than student need, a process she referred to as “the tail that wags the educational dog” (p. 379).

Today, the Canadian system has largely followed the American system by placing students in what are known as “Least Restrictive Environments-LRE” (Alberta Education, 2009): places closest to regular classrooms which meet the needs of the child. Through LRE there remains an emphasis on moving students to “typical” educational settings as quickly as possible, which is a more apt description of integration (Winzer & Mazurek, 2009, p. 6). Here too, in the cascade of services and the LRE responses, there is something of that want to make education work for all students, maybe as a response to how we once tried to make it work for most, but not all.

It is now possible to see mainstreaming and the subsequent changes in programming for students with EBD as an extreme though legitimate response to the monstrous program of eugenics and individual isolation from community. As if in recognition of what eugenics implied for education, and for Albertan society, there required an immediate and rapid turn from its horrible consequences. I wonder if this history further reveals inclusion’s entanglement as a response to both eugenics and mainstreaming. Could inclusion be an attempt at a wiser, measured, proportionate and thoughtful response to the needs of all students, educators and families? Is inclusion part of a pendulum swing of answers to and within and of our own historicity, as part of the play of an older *sensus communis* trying to recover within and among us?

Furthermore, is inclusion part of a want and hope for society similar to that which fueled the eugenics movement? Is the want for a peaceful and harmonious society still at play here? If yes, then as a renewed tradition inclusion could be seen to have surpassed itself in our wanting to have a social harmony that includes all human beings, as much as possible, regardless of their official or perceived disabilities or abnormalities. The more I found these questions and possibilities before me, the more I sensed that inclusion is indeed entangled in the very tradition it attempts to counter as a response. Thus, an important caution from Gadamer (2004) found direct application in this, my process of coming to understand the topic in this thesis: I needed to not fall into the “naïve self-esteem of the present moment” (p. xxi) by believing that my positioning and this thesis could judge once and for all what is best or what inclusion is. Not even my deep reliance on Gadamer’s wisdom could serve as a panacea.

### **Inclusion’s Interpretations**

In Alberta, from the streets, to reform schools, farms, warehouses and specialized medical institutions, then into special schools and classrooms, what is now popularly called inclusion can be seen as the practice of placing students into different kinds of institutional settings based on their perceived disability and/or academic performance status (Alberta Education, 2009), and returning them to community schools at a time when the people involved in these settings, which sometimes includes the student’s families, believe that students are ready to be in typical schools. Resonances with an older etymology for inclusion reveal themselves: “c.1600, from Latin *inclusionem* (nominative *inclusio*) "a shutting up, confinement,"” (Etymology Online, 2013). For a short time mainstreaming

seemed to be the practice of placing all students directly back into classrooms but, as Winzer (2009) pointed out, mainstreaming applied to only some children, “mainly those with mild disabilities” and a “target population...who often move from special classes into regular classes” (p. 6, as cited in Winzer & Mazurek).

The above predominant view on inclusion, now seen in its historical being, is perhaps why many scholars believe that what is currently called inclusion in most educational research and government documents is characterized as actions of segregation and integration or mainstreaming in and out of a “norm” of schooling which, they argue, is different from inclusion as the cultivation of conditions in which all students can thrive in schools, amongst one another (Slee, 2011; Thomas and Loxley, 2007; Valle & Connor, 2010 for examples). Rather than shape the student to fit the school or create separate places for student needs, schools and educators, it is argued, should be flexible, knowledgeable, and resourced well enough to adapt to the needs of all or at least, most learners (See Winzer, 2000, pp. 6-15; Winzer & Mazurek, 2011, pp. 44-61 for broad descriptions of general field of the inclusion debates in Canada and the world).

A concern at play in the current talk of inclusion centres around the inherited historical pre-judgements of the past 100 years; how that “play” might be inherent to our responses to difference such that educators are more likely to see EBD sickness in children and youth over and above other circumstances and concerns that might exacerbate their abilities to thrive in classrooms (for more on this see Gilham, 2012; Jardine, 2012). I spent many years entrenched in this prejudice or prejudgement, supporting it and doling out lists to educators of what to do for the EBD child. Through this way of seeing, it is possible, as

it was often the case for me in my work, to have a hyper-focus on the student of concern at the risk of not seeing what else may have been at play in the constitution of the student's struggles in school, including perhaps my own recommended strategies for the amelioration of student challenges.

This is where the stories of Trevor and Mark come back into this dialogue posing serious questions: would either of them have been seen as suffering from severe EBD had they been surrounded in particular kinds of educational settings that focussed on learning for all students, and the people in those settings intentionally refused to give precedence or priority to special education at the first sign of difficulty (See Jardine, Clifford, & Friesen, 2003, for just such a story)? I do not know, but I do wonder about this given the historical inheritances of our current ways of seeing and educating students with EBD. As their teacher, was there the possibility for me to see and be with them in a way that was more open or generous? Did I over-focus on what was wrong with them, at the expense of their learning? Did the special education class in Gary's school also have this character to it? What does the recognition of this past and my present work say about my want for a particular type of inclusion to come to fruition?

### **The “Sensus Communis” of Inclusion**

Whether the language is that of integration, mainstreaming, and even segregation, the complex, overlapping histories of the terms and their time periods in various institutions, especially in Alberta's educational system over the past several decades, seem to me to speak to an underlying and ongoing phenomenon of wanting to support, assist and

help children and youth. This hope for the future of our youth can now be re-claimed with a critique of normalization and schooling held carefully.

Important to this thesis and the subsequent details of the inclusive classrooms to come, is Gadamer's idea that it is the nature of human beings to be social or together, and that by the reason or reasonableness of an organized society there is a continuous process of trying to work life out (Gadamer, 2007, p. 289; 1982, pp. 76-77). Gadamer wrote that within the "questionableness" and misunderstanding inherent to human life "there are things that are naturally right" (2007, p. 289). This idea of a fundamental struggle to continue to work out the challenges of human life together, evidenced here in the ongoing phenomenon of the debate around inclusion and schooling for all children and youth, can now be seen as a traditional and original "sensus communis" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 17) of human life at play. Sensus communis is vitally central within Gadamer's hermeneutics and, as I will attempt to explicate here and throughout the rest of this thesis, it can be read as a central theme of the educator's stories of inclusion within their classrooms.

Gadamer reminded me that the human science's mode of knowing, and he would later claim, the mode of human knowing or understanding in general and in principle, can be grasped properly by returning to the humanist tradition's writings on sensus communis, or common sense (2004, p. 17). He begins his own hermeneutical conversation with the topic by introducing Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), an Italian philosopher who wrote in the humanist tradition. Gadamer wrote of Vico's sensus communis:

What gives the human will its direction is not the abstract universality of reason but the concrete universality represented by the community of a group, a people, a

nation, or the whole human race. Hence developing this communal sense is of decisive importance for living. (2004, p. 19)

According to Gadamer, human understanding of the world arises in our ability to see the “verisimilitude” (2004, p. 19) within topics, that is, in seeing how conversations in and of the world can connect in unified or familiar ways (2007, p. 419), such that when there is a focus on a topic like inclusion, the topic brings forth its kinship or, its likenesses with past projects and current *hopes* and *desires* for the future. Verisimilitude was described by Gadamer as “evident” (2004, p. 19), as if also a form of evidence. In doing so he reclaimed this kind of evidence that had been concealed in the passionate pursuit of science (Gadamer, 2004, p. 21).

This renewed or reclaimed form of evidence entails finding the right proportion of such worldly connections to the past within their present and concrete circumstances. Gadamer pulled forward once again the importance of practical wisdom in asking whether or not modern life can account for what society determines or knows to be “true and right” (2004, p. 19) about being with one another in the world. Knowledge of the true and right, once again, can find their import in tradition, history, and in the process of memory and forgetting. Gadamer’s re-claiming of tradition in this sense reflects truth as concealment and illumination rather than as only objective, verifiable and reproducible knowledge.

This form of evidence is an act of prudence (wisdom) while making an account of the evidence is an act of eloquence. “Prudentia and eloquentia” are two facets of the “wisdom of the ancients... we still cannot do without” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 18). The ability to ‘make sense’ and thus share in a common sense has this instinctive intuition for what is

“true and right” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 19) within it and “for that very reason cannot be replaced by science” (p. 19). The concrete universality of making sense of life in concrete situations towards a result of “the right thing” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 19) is not an act of placing the case like inclusion, under a general universal rule (eliminate the weak, for example) but rather, the working out of the case through what he calls, referring back to Aristotle, our “moral being” (p. 20). The moral attitude for doing what is right is something that develops in life. It is cultivated in dialogue or conversation with other people, primarily. As Gadamer (2004) wrote of this, referring to Vico’s work:

The *sensus communis* is the sense of what is right and of the common good that is to be found in all men; moreover, it is a sense that is acquired through living in the community and is determined by its structures and aims....because what is decisive is the circumstances....the sense of community mediates its own positive knowledge. (pp. 20-21)

Inclusion, as the expression of the *sensus communis* of human life-that want to be together and thrive-is, as it was “back then” in education in Alberta many years ago, original in its presentation (Gadamer, 2004, p. 135). The story of inclusion I have attempted to present cannot be “governed by the universal prescription of reason” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 21) so inherent to the logic of natural science methodology, and perhaps was most potent and tragic for children and youth in this province through the program of eugenics. Knowing of this and its place today in the topic of inclusion is the work of hermeneutics: “Youth demands images for its imagination and for forming its memory” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 19) and also “one needs, rather, convincing examples as only history can offer them”

(Gadamer, 2004, p. 21). The result of strong hermeneutic work can produce “a conviction as strong as that born from axioms” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 21). Inclusion can demand attention precisely because of its human entanglements, sufferings and struggles to attain, in each situation, a moral balance of and for community. Gary’s specialized and segregated classroom and their suffering points to this demand.

In the light or illumination of this chapter, inclusion has had an increase in being, that is, it contains “an indissoluble connection with its world” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 138), that world for me *as* historical in its being. What this chapter has intended to do, therefore, is enliven the topic through remembering what it is as historical being. This has, for me, further drawn my attention towards inclusion’s contemporaneous demand and importance.

### **Chapter Three: Hermeneutic Conversations**

I have suggested that the ideal of objective knowledge which dominates our concepts of knowledge, science, and truth, needs to be supplemented by the ideal of sharing in something, of participation. (Gadamer, 2001, p. 40)

#### **Openness, Vulnerability and Trust**

Near the end of that difficult school year Gary held his head in both of his hands and said he was not sure what to do for his specialized class come September. Gary described the situation:

*I think what constituted it here was my first year here of my principalship, my first year in the program here, as the year rolled on, umm, with the idea that these kids were supposed to be integrated when they were ready, umm, what we saw was a lot*

*of kind of breakdown in the classroom in terms of kids all being congregated together and kind of poking at each other and causing a lot of, umm, strain, and anxiety, and then there would be blow outs and then it would impact all the children and so on a day to day basis we had numerous things going on in there so it was a constant battle I felt and it really wasn't working. Hence I contacted you and we sat down and had a talk and I said "Chris, like, I don't know what else we can do here...it just doesn't seem to be working." (personal communication, August 28, 2012)*

During that original conversation I shared with Gary what I had learned of the topic of inclusion and the history of integration and mainstreaming: how they were often confused with inclusion, as if inclusion as helping all students thrive in their learning could be accomplished solely by putting all students together. Gary continued telling the story of the conversation between us:

*And so that's when you said, "Well, this is some of what I've been reading in getting ready for my PhD" and so as a result this is what current best practice says in the research, that, if you have a co-teaching model where those kids are fully integrated from the get go, where you have the two teachers working as a team to support one another, where there's one teacher who is fully responsible for those kids and has that training and is able to put out those fires and help those children deal with those issues and problem solve and strategize...as it's escalating and also afterwards if there's been some sort of climax afterwards so "OK, how do we approach this differently next time", build those skill sets, and that was the model*

*we went into the 2011/2012 school year with. And, that's how it all came about.*

(personal communication, August 28, 2012)

As Gary shared this story with me, I came to believe he was acknowledging his own vulnerability to the topic as if to say, “I am the leader of this school, and experienced, but this is beyond our wanting and doing. I don’t know what is best but I’m open to it.” I think Gary was also saying something about the trust within our working relationship. In that moment, much prior to now and the interviews for this thesis, we had cultivated a trust between us based on our work together that permitted us the space to admit to one another that there were times we did not know what to do.

Later, when we talked more about that year and how we came to want to try something different, Gary and his team described this state as “openness to vulnerability” (personal communication, Laura and Lydia, March 7, 2013; Gary and Laura, March 8, 2013). This capability to admit that even as experienced educators there are times that exceed our finite understanding is, according to Gadamer, essential to phronesis, or practical wisdom, and exemplary of human life (2004, pp. 350-351). The more one becomes experienced, the more one is open to learning about life as it presents itself in all its complex and unforeseen ways (Gadamer, 2001, p. 53). Gadamer considered this insight to be the “centrepiece of the whole book” (2001, p. 53; 2004, pp. 350-351).

This disposition for not knowing as a form of openness and humility suggests that part of the interpretation of inclusion as the cultivation of the conditions in which all students might thrive in classrooms, is also the story of educators’ inclusion into conversations with one another about what their limitations are as educators. Not knowing

what to do can cultivate the space to hear what can be done; for possibilities to emerge. This disposition has a speculative element to it, one that demonstrates itself in the person who asks questions not in order to dominate the conversation, but to genuinely hear what others have to say. For Gadamer this is what it is to live together in community, through and in language or conversation (2001, p. 56).

When Gary was not sure what to do he could have, after all, asked his supervisor to move the specialized class out of his school, or put pressure on me to move the most troublesome students elsewhere. I wonder if Gary chose to try to work through the suffering because he knew that the suffering was inclusive to everyone there. During that difficult year he had shared his belief in the inclusive spirit of his school community. In one conversation he stated,

*We value all these kids and they come to us with their little quirks and their baggage just like any other adult walking into this building...It's us as people trying to figure our way out in this world...There is a legacy here too because we've had a lot of different types of learners come through this building with the gifted program and the regular program...A lot of the gifted children come in with significant social and emotional issues...and so we've inherited that and the kids see that in this building and have been talked through that. (personal communication, August 28, 2012)*

He described seeing the students of the specialized class “as kids just like everyone else” (personal communication, August 28, 2012). His openness to share his vulnerability on behalf of what was right for everyone in the school was a call for the school community

to come together in order to be inclusive in their struggles. Was all of this an event that spoke to *sensus communis* as the want to be together, and the need to often suffer in actualizing that want? Was this act on Gary's part, including his statements on that time evidence of Gadamer's claim that this is what actually happens in the human sciences? Were these events reflective of the idea that for us there are "things that are naturally right" (Gadamer, 2007, p. 289)?

The many conversations I had with Gary and his team over the course of that year, as well as for this study, are based on a trust born out of our shared experiences of the suffering of children. We developed a common language between us (Gadamer, 2007, p. 371). That trust is inclusive in spirit, humanist in tradition, and sets down perhaps the most important condition for understanding to occur, perhaps as one of those conditions in human life that are naturally right: the ability to be open to what another person or text or experience says to us. This requires a suspension of what one believes to be true. As Gadamer wrote, "Indeed, a person who is not ready to put his or her own prejudices into question is also someone to whom there is no point in talking" (2001, p. 44).

Given the circumstances in which Gary and I found ourselves, as a course of both our shared work, and my graduate studies, I believe that what we talked about arose out of our own questioning of how we could be better for the children of that specialized classroom. This was a question of inclusion, and what that looked like in the context of their classroom and what it might look like in another kind of classroom. This included how we agreed on themes that arose in our conversations. Perhaps we were limited by our wanting and doing to tell a story of something better, of success, but such an approach to

the conversations would not bespeak the trust that had been built between us through a long year of trying to do well for the students and one another. As the story of the inclusive classrooms will tell, we were “bound to one another in a new community....transformed into a communion in which we did not remain what we were” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 371). This is the strength of conversation, and also recognition of what cultivates the *sensus communis* of inclusion.

### **Risk and Speculation**

In these disciplines we find something different from just arranging things in historical order. In them we come upon new insights. And that always means, also, that we are released from blindnesses that held us captive. (Gadamer, 2001, p. 53)

While Gary and I were situated in our need for something different than what he described as a “congregated setting,” Alberta Education had also been promoting inclusion as the responsibility of society to educate all children in typical classroom environments (Alberta Education, 2009). This was the result of recent and overwhelming feedback from the public and educators which stated that the deficit model inherent to disability and traditional special education was not helping students thrive in schools (Alberta Education, 2009a).

At that time I was not sure how Gary and his team would take up some of the information I had shared with them, or how their inclusive classrooms would play out, but I had come to believe that my work on behalf of school teams and students with EBD needed to be different from my traditional response to a situation like Gary’s. In the past, I would have worked with the school team to move the most challenging children, like James, to

other specialized settings. However, the story of Mark and students like him demanded that I shift away from that special education response, where appropriate. Still, the demand was not so strong that I would risk venturing forth like that with any school team. I worked in many schools and on behalf of many students in specialized classrooms. I wanted to share with many school teams what I was discovering on this adventure yet, I often sensed at some tacit level that the very idea of changing the nature of specialized classrooms would most likely have been met with outrage and a sense of preposterousness.

Being right in the middle of the work with Gary - having had many difficult conversations with him and his team that year, and realizing that, when he asked me about the following year, he was also exposing himself to something beyond our typical “wanting and doing” (Gadamer, 2004, p. xxvi) - had cultivated the conditions in which we could truly talk to one another about the topic. It was indeed an event for us both to find ourselves venturing forth with the idea of de-segregating a special education class. It was almost unspeakable to do so with students with severe EBD, especially at a time when the expansion of those classes was considered an appropriate response to the needs of students.

The circumstances of Gary’s specialized class also spoke to the need for a different response. As a tacit form of a traditional *sensus communis*, the suggestion on Gary’s part for something different from a special education response was “the act of the thing itself” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 459). Likewise, so was my response to him. It was not as if we had met with our own plans to propose. In the moment that we had realized it was time to consider the next year and what we could do, given the horizon of the past we had experienced, the conversation took a turn we did not expect (p. 385).

Our want for the students to be together and thrive in learning in Gary's school was a "coming into language of what has been said in the tradition: an event that is at once appropriation and interpretation" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 459). The tradition of *sensus communis* had spoke us, as it were. The right pathway was illuminated there before us because we had been addressed by the circumstances. We had to hear (Gadamer, 2004, p. 458) what the students were saying to us, and what we were saying in response to them. Gadamer (2004) believed that when we are addressed in this way-we are forced to question ourselves and the circumstances around us-tradition has arrived once more, and we can be united in our belonging to it (p. 458). I have appropriated and interpreted *sensus communis* as inclusion, as a hermeneutical act of expanding its possibilities, though perhaps it is more fitting to say that this is what inclusion led me to (p. 459). This interpretation could be an adventuring forth and return to "belonging" to what makes human life together possible (p. 458).

At the time, I remember experiencing a sense of risk in suggesting a co-operative teaching model to Gary. I also believed that sharing the information was the right decision on behalf of the students. The turn to that suggestion was speculative because it served as a blockage to my "cognitive habits" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 462) of answering questions like Gary's through a special education perspective. I felt "released from the blindnesses" (Gadamer, 2001, p. 53) that sometimes held me captive in my consultancy work.

The risk I felt was mixed with an anticipatory excitement for how what I suggested might be taken up by Gary and his team. My speculative hope and I propose Gary's hope too-evidenced in his decision to take on the cooperative teaching model (Valle & Connor,

2011) for the following year-was also well-aligned with what Alberta Education seemed to be describing as an inclusive educational system. The action of part to whole revealed itself in our participation in something very local-the work at Gary's school-while also reflecting a larger tradition at play and perhaps being renewed through Alberta Education. Our work participated within and was also productive (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 293, 296) of the tradition of inclusion as social harmony or student belonging because it was no longer bound by special education as segregation, for example. Our work was also proceeding from the "commonality that binds us to the tradition" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 293) of inclusion because it still held onto the need for supports and services for students with severe EBD and the desire to bring about success for students. Thus, our work for students was constantly being formed in our relation to this tradition "as a positive and productive condition enabling understanding" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 297). Given this, I offer that inclusion in the province and our particular application of it arose from within and as a response to all our historical entanglements in it.

## **Chapter Four: Inclusion Today, in Alberta**

### **Alberta Education's Struggles**

While Gary and I spoke of inclusion at his school, it seemed as if Alberta Education was shifting its position on inclusion sometimes in drastic and at other times, subtle ways. This provoked me to ask why Alberta Education had taken up inclusion specifically when it had, and how that might influence or shape inclusion's possibilities in classrooms. Inclusion has been around as an educational discourse for over 30 years in North America (Winzer, 2000, pp. 7-9; Winzer & Mazurek, 2011, pp. 44-61). Why had Alberta Education come to the discourse so late or, what may have prompted them to respond when they did? This story is important because Alberta Education's policies often have direct impact on the services and supports that students receive, especially students diagnosed with disabilities. Many of the people I worked with in education were anxious to see what Alberta Education would do under the new banner of an inclusive educational system, especially a banner that was claiming that the medical model of disability was not conducive to student thriving, and another system would be put in place for funding or supporting students with severe EBD (Alberta Education, 2009).<sup>5</sup>

### **The Economic Path to Inclusion**

In the fall of 2007, Alberta Education carried out a review of "severe disabilities profiles" which included students with severe EBD. At the time over 16,000 students were designated as having "severe disabilities" (Alberta Education, 2008). From 2001-2002 until

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<sup>5</sup> 71% of respondents to an Alberta Education special education reform initiative supported replacing disability based coding and labeling with the identification of learning supports, for example (Alberta, 2009a, p. 6)

the 2012-2013 school year, students identified with a severe disability were assigned provincial dollars separately from instructional block funding. Block funding goes towards both basic instructional costs and supports for mild/moderate categories of disability (Jahnukainen, 2011). In 2011-2012, a student with a severe disability was funded through an additional \$16,645 grant. These dollars went directly to school boards. School boards were then free to apply this money in the ways they chose. Typically, this money paid for system and school level support staff, specialized schools and classes, and resources. School boards desired this flexibility so they could best meet the needs of their unique populations (Jahnukainen, 2011). My position as a strategist came from this money.

Prior to the 2007 severe disabilities audit, there had been massive increases in students with severe disabilities (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011; Winzer, 2011, p. 51 as cited in Winzer & Mazurek). Writing about the codification category of EBD, Winzer (2011) referenced findings from the Canadian Institute of Child Health (2000): “The rates of behavioural and emotional problems for children aged 4 to 11 are “disturbingly high”, with 1 in 10 children exhibiting behaviour consistent with hyperactivity problems, conduct disorder, or an emotional disorder” (p. 52). The apparent correlation between the rise in severe disabilities (Winzer, 2011, as cited in Winzer & Mazurek, p. 51) and the attachment of dollars directly to the severe disability designation in Western school jurisdictions has been described as “bounty funding” (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011, p. 277).

The bounty phenomenon can be interpreted as the rapid rise in numbers of students identified as having disabilities because the funding on a per pupil model is the only mechanism through which schools, and school boards, can acquire additional funds to

support students. When school administrators are faced with student needs that go beyond their current resources, they are often left to work through those challenges in their schools, “as is” or, they start the “5 box” (Lupart, 2008, p. 5) referral process for student assessment in pursuit of student identification as disabled. This leads to ever-increasing demands on school psychologists to work on assessments. In turn the need for school psychologists to complete assessments is an additional strain on the resources of school boards, thus the bounty phenomenon perpetuates the disabling of students, in effect, producing further sickness in order to pay for students in need of support and the mechanism that works to produce that support. Ivan Illich (1926-2002) described this cyclical process of ever-increasing sickness production arising from what society believes is the anecdote to suffering, as iatrogenesis (See his 1976 work, *Limits to Medicine*). Thus, with the assignation of disability to individual students, and funding attached to the disability of those students, a resultant phenomenon in Alberta schools arose that one Alberta Education Manager described as the “find’em and fund’em” model (Alberta Education, 2013).

The 2007 severe audit required that school boards produce documentation to justify the severe disability codification of students, or to meet the burden of proof that all of their severe coded students actually qualified for funding. The province wanted to determine if school boards were consistently conforming to provincial policy. Criteria included an updated or current and appropriate diagnosis by qualified personnel, descriptions of how the disability affects or impacts a student in the learning environment, and identification of the types and intensity of supports provided to students (Alberta Education, 2008, p. 5).

The severe disabilities review brought into sharp focus a different state of affairs for me, and I think Alberta Education staff because of what they decided to do after they completed the review. The results of the review stated that forty-eight percent of the files submitted did not conform to Alberta Education's criteria or, forty-eight percent of the students that school boards claimed had severe disabilities codification did not meet the standards for that codification (Alberta Education, 2008). That represents almost 8000 students who should not have received the severe codification or disability status. As Alberta Education stated in its report:

The review results suggest that there is inconsistent application of special education severe disabilities coding criteria across the province, which raises questions about the interpretation and application of mild and moderate coding [as well]. Given the magnitude of these concerns, the results of the severe disabilities profile review are a catalyst for thorough examination of the overall special education framework.

(2008. p. 1)

This was the impetus for Alberta Education's publicly driven inquiry into special education in the province, known as *Setting the Direction* (Alberta Education, 2009) which led to its *Action on Inclusion* plan. Less than a year after the audit was completed, Alberta Education announced the establishment of working groups to propose policy, and initiated the first round of province-wide consultations with various stakeholders about reforming special education. I took part in providing feedback for that consultation process. The Minister of Education at the time, David Hancock, promised that the reform would include

“The development of policy, accountability measures and a funding mechanism” (Alberta Education, 2009).

While the *Setting the Direction* documentation (Alberta Education, 2009) speaks extensively to the need for the reformed system to support all students inclusively, the bounty phenomenon in Albertan schools, the subsequent review, and proposed reform measures speak to a parallel economic crisis surrounding the resources needed to appropriately and effectively support all students so that they can thrive in learning. Government costs on behalf of children and youth in Alberta have been an issue since the province was formed in 1905 (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2002; Dechant, 2006). This issue was acute in an original way with the use of an individual coding system and the dramatic increase in the numbers of students with special education codes within the province over the past 20 years.

### **Action on Inclusion**

The *Setting the Direction* consultations were broad and deep. The project resulted in a set of reform recommendations known as *Action on Inclusion*. *Action on Inclusion* spoke to a fundamental ethical shift in Alberta’s classrooms. Some important examples of the recommendations included:

Moving from tolerating difference to valuing diversity.

Moving from special education founded on a medical model based on the student’s diagnosis to [a practice] of understanding a student’s strengths and needs through [collaboration] in which teachers, parents, students and specialists...identify

supports and services that best match the student's strengths and needs. (Alberta Education, 2010a)

Importantly, *Action on Inclusion* was driven by this definition of inclusion:

One inclusive education system where each student is successful.

Inclusive education system: a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all students. Inclusive education in Alberta means a value-based approach to accepting responsibility for all students. It also means that all students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning environment or program of choice. (Alberta Education, 2010a)

Key in the above definition was the equitable opportunities for students to be included in the typical learning environment or program of choice. This statement reflected the possibility that Albertans could begin to see specialized settings and streamed course offerings, determined by coding/disability status and/or IQ score, as potentially inequitable or unjust, as sites and places of possible marginalization and segregation that, as chapter 2 revealed, belonged to the past, and may not be necessary or right in all cases, now, and in the future. Perhaps the above definition will require a more proportionate look at classrooms and educator practices prior to the placement of students. A sense of balance could ensue. The public and educators were already seeing this, I think, as the recommendations for the actions on inclusion came from the responses of the public, including educators. In seeing this possibility, alternative ways of seeing and being with students could arise from within the educational plans of school boards, much like what was happening for Gary and his team, and me.

### **Inclusion's Complexity**

In 2011-2012, a number of changes occurred on the Alberta Education website for inclusion which was confusing and difficult to follow. Alberta Education seemed to profoundly alter the ambitious scope and revolutionary intent of the *Action on Inclusion* project. In the spring of 2012, the *Action on Inclusion* website and the *Setting the Direction* materials were removed and replaced with this short and surprising statement: “*Action on Inclusion* no longer exists as a project or initiative, but the work continues as part of our collective practice to build an inclusive education system in Alberta” (Alberta Education, 2012, para. 4).

Months later, the *Action on Inclusion* webpages, its policy statements, and supporting resources were re-posted in the archives, along with a definition of inclusion that resembled the definition used during the reform period in 2009, notwithstanding an incredibly important change in adjectives. The 2009 definition promised to have students in “typical learning environments and programs of choice” (Alberta Education, 2010a). In the most recent (2012) definition, this statement was replaced by “appropriate learning environments.” Currently:

The goal of an inclusive education system is to provide all students with the most appropriate learning environments and opportunities for them to best achieve their potential. Some have said, this is what should already be happening in education, and they're right. However, some children, youth and their families do not feel that they have the same opportunities as their peers. (para. 6)

In Alberta, inclusion in the education system is about ensuring that each student belongs and receives a quality education no matter their ability, disability, language, cultural background, gender, or age. (Alberta, 2012, para. 8)

This change in definition returned Alberta Education to original special education policy which hinges on the notion of “Least Restrictive Environments-LRE” (Kauffman, Crockett, Gerber, & Landrum, 2007). Again, LRE is traditional special education legislation that permits students to be placed in different settings, at the discretion of school boards, which is currently based on student difference as pathology or disability. This educational legislation allows for a focus on learning but not setting. I offer that this is a limited horizon of understanding. Setting and learning, because of the historical and co-constructive nature of knowledge as being, simply cannot be separated from one another. LRE suggests that they can and what is important is purely the learning, as if the conditions for students with EBD to thrive in education could take place anywhere.

As these changes occurred, I wondered if the continued support of the LRE policy, clear to see in the newest and current definition of inclusion, was therefore a continuation of the traditional and parallel special education system of educating students with disabilities. Was this reinforcement of special education through the language of inclusion simply the maintenance of the old system under the discourse of inclusion that was already well under way in the western world (Winzer & Mazurek, 2011, p.1)? Feedback from the public during the *Setting the Direction* initiative suggests that Albertans did not want the traditional system to continue. This is evidenced in one of many summary statements garnered from public input: “If you say ALL students, you should mean ALL students”

(Alberta Education, 2009a, p. 14). Why did Alberta Education make this change? I was not alone in my wondering either. In the spring of 2012 the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association (2012) wrote that "we have consulted with our education stakeholders, yet we have heard nothing from government" (p. 59). At the time of this writing I was unsuccessful in my attempts to interview officials from Alberta Education however, recent changes documented on their website and elsewhere speak to more of what has possibly been at play.

### **School Reform**

In a recent professional development presentation with an Alberta Education Inclusive Education Manager, I was told that while the *Action on Inclusion* project was announced, the results from a larger consultation with the citizens of the province had just started to take shape which suggested that the entire school system needed reformation (Alberta Education, 2010b). Alberta Education put *Action on Inclusion* on hold while larger reforms were being discussed, the manager shared. Indeed, a province wide curriculum re-design is afoot, including a re-visioning of the values of education around core competencies, rather than curriculum objectives (Alberta Education, 2010b).

This re-visioning was known as the *Inspiring Action on Education Initiative* which included discussions with all Albertans about inclusion, curriculum, technology, parental and community engagement, to name a few of the many broad based areas Albertans considered important in an open discussion about the future of education in the province (Alberta Education, 2010b). *Setting the Direction*, Alberta Education claimed, "informed Inspiring Education" (2010b, p. 27), hinting that *Action on Inclusion* was no longer the

main focus for education reform in the province. Indeed, *Action on Inclusion* as it was outlined was put on hold while these larger reforms were being discussed. One outcome of this and several other initiatives by Alberta Education was the extensively revised School Act of December 10, 2012.

The current reform reminded me of the ongoing tension and pattern I found in the historical resources on the history of the past 100 years of education in Alberta (See Dechant, 2006; Prentice, 2006; von Heyking, 2006; Winzer, 2009 for examples): there seems to have *always* been multiple calls for reform and change in education. Those involved in education in Alberta seem to have always been engaged in ongoing conversations about the nature of schooling and doing what is best for children and youth. Perhaps the play of education in Alberta reflects a universal aspect of hermeneutics: we are always working through, whether in statements and actions of renewal or reform, the places we find ourselves right in the middle of. The constant push and pull of our historical being, through our understanding of histories and ideas illuminated and concealed, reveals the living, immersed, complex and often deeply interwoven fabric of human life. What counts for us as true and worthy of being and doing is always, already, ongoing. The topic that concerned me, like school success for students with severe EBD, revealed its temporal nature in my life, as part of who and how I am with other educators and students. The topic of inclusion speaks to the *sensus communis* of human life or, to the social nature of human being, and my nascent, emerging understanding that we are social beings trying to work through the ambiguities and struggles inherent to life. I suggest that the current school reform afoot in Alberta is yet again human understanding at play in education. This could also be seen as reflective of the nature of human understanding in general.

### **Where Is Inclusion in Alberta Education Now?**

Alberta Education's website for inclusion currently emphasizes a commitment to inclusive education (Alberta Education, 2013). It notes how change towards inclusive education takes time. For this year some significant changes have occurred. The coding criteria booklet (Alberta, 2012a), published yearly-which guides school boards through how they can assign disability status to students-no longer requires the severe emotional and behavioural disability codification process to include updated formal assessments from psychologists or psychiatrists after the first initial assessment. In the past, a formal reassessment was required every 3 years. This requirement, inherent to the bounty system, resulted in school board psychologists spending most of their time working on assessments. As early as 2001, Janzen and Carter (2001) wrote of the increased pressure on school psychologists to complete paperwork necessary for government funding. Specht (2013) argued that assessment has been one of the priorities for school psychologists. Unfortunately, that resource intense work on behalf of the acquisition of further resources for individually coded students did not measure up well against Alberta Education criteria: Most of the severe codes in the province came from the EBD category, and half of those failed the review of 2008.

Special education funding in Alberta would better serve students who are diagnosed with emotional and/or behavioural disabilities if there was a base level of funding provided that was not attached to coding. Schools would not have to engage in extensive, time-consuming coding processes in order to access needed resources. It is highly detrimental to meeting students' needs to have the funding system leading

the pedagogical decision-making, labelling students inappropriately and watering down the real meaning of ‘severe disability’ or ‘severe behavioural disturbance’, which has (and still is in many other countries/regions) been relatively rare and associated directly with mental illnesses. (Wishart & Jahnukainen, 2010, pp. 185-186)

This move by the province seems to suggest that they have seen how school resources can be put to better use by directly assisting all students in schools, rather than have psychologists constantly assessing particular students for disabilities. In one of Alberta’s urban public school boards, school psychologists can now be regularly found working alongside teachers in specialized classrooms, for example. Parrish’s (2001) major review of special education spending in the US (used by the *Setting the Direction* policy forming group) found that only about 62% of special education dollars went directly to students (p. 13). As of the 2012/2013 school year, school boards can use other informal means of re-assessment to help determine the best needs for students giving them the flexibility to direct resources to students.

Also in the 2012/2013 school year, the province stopped the per-pupil funding for severe disabilities and replaced it with an inclusive education funding initiative. This funding model is based on assumptions of what special needs services should be required to provide services for the entire student population. This is known as a census model:

Advantages associated with such a system are that it is very simple and has very limited administrative requirements. It also tends to allow a great deal of local flexibility in that it creates no fiscal incentive for putting a student in one placement

or category of disability over another. In the case of the census-basis for determining the flat grant amount, it also does not create an incentive for placing students in special education. (Parrish, 2001, p. 10)

This additional money for every student is allocated in block funding while extra funding is provided for differential factors. These factors are based on a formula that uses census data like the number of single-parent families and household incomes. There are disadvantages to the census model, which is perhaps why Alberta Education also included the differential model of extra inclusive funding. This funding attempts to account for regional differences in student populations like income levels and family composition. The census model runs the risk of coming under threat because dollars are no longer earmarked to particular students, however (Parrish, 2001).

### **A New Historical Horizon**

Perhaps a part of the reason why Alberta Education had moved away from *Action on Inclusion* had to do with memories of mainstreaming. The actions on inclusion, as they were stated, could have been seen as a return to something akin to the mainstreaming of the 1970s and 1980s. Perhaps Alberta Education received intense pressure from families and disability support groups who feared that inclusion was going to be interpreted as integration into an unchanged school system. Was there a fear of returning to the practices and policies of the past?

As well, in play within the larger historical horizon of inclusion in Alberta, Gary's students had not been successful in the specialized classroom, as he and his team have shared. As a school team we endeavoured the entire school year to help that classroom be a

place where the students could thrive. If not mainstreaming or specialized classroom, what were we to do? We were led to talk about how to create more inclusive classrooms for all learners. I saw Gary's situation as further ground upon which Alberta's special education review arose. The difficulty of trying to help all students thrive in classrooms could not be reduced solely to an economic crisis. Gary's specialized classroom was extremely well-funded.

Despite this resource intense setting, and with high school completion rates as they are, it is easy to see how difficult the situation may be for Alberta Education staff trying to find the balance or sense of right proportion for educating students with EBD. Whether supporting students in typical classrooms so they can thrive, or placing them into specialized classes, the high school completion rates and stories like Mark dominate the scene. Perhaps putting *Action on Inclusion* on hold in order to ask about the nature of schools in Alberta was the wise thing to do.

I then realized that the year-long experience with Gary and his team, and the students who struggled during that year became the pivot on which the research in this thesis hinged. We were in-between what we understood classrooms and pedagogy as: if not segregated or typical classrooms, then what? My suggestion to try a cooperative teaching model arose from inclusive education literature but I had no experience with such a model. At the time it seemed to be the best move given our want to avoid further segregation, and mainstreaming. I believe this is demonstrative of a coming together of the history of the segregated past for students with EBD, and the present situation with Gary and his team. Thus far in my thesis, I have attempted to profile one with the other. Gadamer (2001)

described the action that takes place as a result of this mediation, as “an annulling of both past and present and taken up into a higher form” (p. 48).

An understanding became present for us in those circumstances as “the gaining of a new historical horizon” (Gadamer, 2001, p.48). I was open to, as was Gary, trying a different approach. However, the practice of inclusion as this co-operative teaching model had yet to be worked out. That was the work of Gary and his team. In this study, the participants were chosen, in a sense, prior to my choosing because of the embedded nature of my work within the topic and the topic’s arising within our shared work. Hence, I now turn more directly to the participants and their stories of the inclusive classrooms. As a consultant and researcher I wondered what the classrooms looked like in practice. How might the team describe their pedagogy through the stories they would tell? How would the students of these new inclusive classrooms respond? What were the challenges of the cooperative teaching model?

These questions are a part of the greater question still at play in this thesis: how did these educators cultivate the conditions in which all students thrived together in learning? I now turn to the stories of the *sensus communis* cultivated in the inclusive classrooms, though I think that in some important ways, the account of the process of coming to the place of trying something different already makes a claim about this renewal or building anew of a *sensus communis*. In this way too then, the next chapter will attempt to fuse together the present and concrete circumstances of the inclusive classrooms with this account of the process of coming to the place where inclusive classrooms became possible for Gary’s team. The hermeneutics of inclusion now turns to the present study.

## Chapter Five: The Inclusive Classrooms

### Success

How did the inclusive classrooms at Gary's school play out that next school year? I met with Gary, Laura, and Lydia more than a year after the conversation with Gary about the possibilities. They had a full school year of the inclusive classrooms they could tell me about:

*In terms of... the heightened emotional outbursts...a kid you know, really crashing and burning. It was SIGNIFICANTLY decreased with this model or the year prior... The year prior I mean there were all kinds of things, the ambulance called the, the whole bit. Um, police coming numerous times, um, regular day to day occurrences where you know, kids were you know, had to go in the quiet room to chill out and they were throwing stuff around. Um, restraints, we saw hardly any of that once in a while we would have a child who would need to go to the quiet room, or need to take a lap around the library like any other child in a classroom who was experiencing difficulty. I think that was a huge success. Can you quantify it? I guess we could have had we kept numbers but if you look at it from one year to the next that is an astronomical difference. You can't even put a number on it. It was black and white. (personal communication, Gary, August 28, 2013)*

Laura said,

*I had one student in grade 6. She was not reading. She was reading a few site words at the beginning of this year. She ended (the year) off at the beginning of a grade 1 reading level! (She now has a) Love for reading! This girl wouldn't read at all. She*

*started off by not being able to identify numbers to 10. She can identify numbers to 100 now...and she can add and subtract double digit numbers, which is HUGE!*

(personal communication, August 28, 2013)

*The kids were so absolutely amazing and it still surprises me like, huh, we had a student that came into our program at the end of this year and might be experiencing...gender identity things and these kids were so amazing...the girl (student) would say different things (about her gender) and the kids didn't care like, they made sure she was included in their play groups – boys and girls – and sometimes she would only want to play with boys and sometimes only with girls. Now these kids were absolutely so amazing...and so patient. Do they see these kids as having different kinds of problems? Yes, but that's the environment of (this school). That we are diverse. That's what we celebrate here so you may need support in math and you might need support in shutting down. The kids themselves would find ways to get her (a student with anxiety) to come out of it....the community, it was absolutely inclusive. (personal communication, Laura, August 28, 2013)*

Lydia shared her perspective:

*It was very interesting how my kids really, really liked the others kids. Like they really latched on to them and just participated. They invited them to birthday parties they played with them after school....Um, yeah so it was really, I was really, I shouldn't say surprised but I was really excited that they um, they really kind of enveloped them and they really you know, helped them a lot. You know it was so*

*cute how my girls were so concerned about Leslie (a student with severe EBD and very low academic abilities) all the time. Like they'd be like "Oh Leslie don't worry we'll show you what to do we'll show you, we'll help to write it we'll help you to do this". Like they were always looking out for Leslie. (personal communication, March 7, 2013)*

James, the troubled student who often ran from the school, came up specifically:

*Oh my goodness James completely did a 180. I remember when he was in the school he was constantly getting into fights, arguments, he was you know, taking off... And then last year it's just like, (laughs) that was surprising because we had some new teachers and they were like "Really that's what he was like last year, really?" You know. "Him?" you know....it (the inclusive classroom) really benefitted him. (personal communication, Laura, March 7, 2013)*

Lydia also shared her fears for how parents might have reacted to the de-segregation of the specialized class:

*I was surprised by, one thing I was worried about...I was worried about how parents might act. I was worried about...you know...how do I explain this to parents and if parents come to me and say, "Why are these kids in class?" and things like that. Not once, the entire year did I have anything from parents, all year. (personal communication, March 7, 2013)*

The understanding Gary, Laura, and Lydia were articulating and the success they had described with such joy was extraordinary especially given that most teachers prefer to

not want to work with students with EBD in their classrooms (Cook, 2001) and the students they were working with had been placed into what was supposed to be a segregated special education classroom because of the severity of their disabilities.

### **The Cultivation of a Common Sense: Social Reason**

Smiling, filled with pride, Gary, Laura and Lydia continued to share with me the story of how, from the first day of school, the students had been thoughtfully and intentionally included in two cooperative teaching or “inclusive” classrooms and how successful that entire school year was. The classrooms were neither “typical” nor were they special education classrooms. Each classroom had a teacher (Lydia and Dave) as well as a shared cooperative teacher (Laura) and a full time support worker. A therapist and a counsellor visited the classrooms weekly and there were monthly visits from a pediatric psychiatrist. All the supports that were once dedicated to the segregated specialized classroom still existed and were applied across two classrooms for all students. In a school with approximately 500 students, these were two unique classrooms where the students with severe EBD were together in learning with the other students in their grades from within the school, from day one of school.

*We debated that at the end of last year...should we start them off in the (special education classroom) and then move them into the class when we felt they were ready but no, we decided they would start right in the classrooms. These would be their classrooms and this would be their community and I think this made a huge difference...in how they viewed themselves as a part of that community and how the other children viewed them. (personal communication, Laura, August 28, 2012)*

Lydia said:

*So they were starting off as basically as new kids. They didn't know at all that they were transition kids (students with severe EBD, author). We didn't talk about that at all. We just throughout the year I had several new students the year before come into the classroom and we always talked about how to welcome new kids. How to show them around and how to make them feel a part of the community. So when, that year last year when the transition kids came in it was just like new kids.*

(personal communication, March 7, 2013)

I wondered how Gary approached the teachers in the school in first place, given that the idea of de-segregating a specialized class for students with severe EBD was an event that I had not known to have happened in my ten years working in the school board, and the idea ran counter to the rationales for the need to place students in highly resourced and specialized classes. After all, the students had not been successful in classrooms in the past, so much so that teams of educators had determined the students required a specialized class.

Prior to the end of the troubling school year with the specialized class Gary told his school team about the shift that he was hoping to make towards inclusion and asked for...

*Anyone who would be willing to have the transitions kids come to their class...and the previous year we had the transitions program (special education class, author) in the school but they were in a separate room. So the majority of the time they were separate from the rest of the kids, except for little bits and pieces, they come in for*

*math or, I had a few kids for health, things like that, so I knew about the transitions kids already and I'd seen the program and umm...I...I saw how it was, what it was like, you know on the playground, you know in the school they were very separate from the rest of the kids so when Gary mentioned that they were going to be integrating them ALL into a class, he asked for two volunteers and in a moment of insanity I said "Sure" (laughs). No, I offered it and said I would be willing. I just put up my hand and said I would be willing to have some come in... (personal communication, Lydia, March 7, 2013)*

Laura interrupted:

*...and just to back up for a second, it was only Lydia and Dave who raised their hands so there were only two volunteers (teachers for the inclusive classrooms, author) and I think part of the reason for that is because of...what was happening the year before... (personal communication, March 7, 2013)*

Lydia and Dave were the only two teachers who also happened to sometimes have the students with severe EBD come into their classrooms the year prior, when there was constant crisis. They knew some of the students from being with them. In volunteering for the new classrooms Lydia and Dave perhaps demonstrated a more open and accepting sense or understanding for these students. This sense for the students illuminated itself in our further conversations. Lydia pointed to it when talking about the year before and how she would help her students understand the crises that seemed to be happening so often in the school:

*...yeah, they (the students with severe EBD, author) were very separated, on the playground they would be in one part of the yard where all away from the other kids, umm, in the school, the other kids didn't know them at all. They didn't know their names, they didn't understand who they were. We had a lot of conversations because there would be kids crying in the hallway or yelling and things like that that year. So we had a lot of conversations about, because kids had no clue who they were, they just saw these kids in the hallways and upset and...having meltdowns and so they did not understand what was going on umm so we just had conversations about them and about who they were and things like that but they were very separate. (personal communication, March 7, 2013)*

Prior to the year of the inclusive classrooms, Lydia was already cultivating an understanding in her students of the challenges and struggles and suffering that other students can face. She took the time to dialogue with her students about what they were hearing and seeing throughout the school. I propose that she nurtured her students in such a way that they could understand how difficult life might be like for their peers. This became very important in the inclusive classrooms because Lydia, as one of the teachers for the following year's inclusive classrooms, had most of her students return to her class from the year prior. That was when I realized that Gary's school often practiced looping (Gausted, 1998): teachers would stay with their students for a couple of years and then loop back down to the original grade from which they started.

Through the practice of looping relationships could be deeply fostered and nurtured; understanding could be cultivated longer term; stability and predictability could be felt by

both teachers and students. As Lydia shared, “We already had the relationship established, we already had the routines established, we already knew each other very well so we’d already had lots of conversations about new kids” (personal communication, March 7, 2013) In the traditional system of moving to different sets of students each year...

*It’s like learning all over again with these new kids and finally getting to a point where you really understand them and understand what they want and they need. Then having to get a whole other group again. (personal communication, Lydia, March 7, 2013)*

Looping itself was not a necessary condition for the cultivation of a common sense for being together, but it certainly seemed to create the space or the possibility for such cultivation. As Lydia described of her students in the inclusive classroom:

*My kids were great for that because I had them the previous year and they were very welcoming so they were very welcoming to new kids because we’ve had new kids in the class previously and we always talked about how to group people and how it feels to be in a school brand new and all of that so they were very willing to show them around and get to know them, and show them the routines and so they were very welcoming to them. They had no idea that there was any...you know, they just thought that they were part of the class and new students to our school. (personal communication, March 7, 2013)*

The experiences the children in Lydia’s class had the year before of witnessing student suffering and not understanding that suffering ended up being catalysts for

conversation. Those conversations perhaps led to ways of being with one another that spoke of or pointed to a common sense that could be described as inclusionary. During the year of the inclusive classrooms, some of the students with severe EBD did sometimes struggle, and they needed help. The students in the classrooms comported themselves well during those times, through their understanding, or their “silent agreement” (Gadamer, 2007, p. 97).

*Isaiah would have moments where he would explode, get upset, and of course at first the kids were like “Woah!” but then I was really surprised at how they adapted so quickly. When Isaiah would get upset...I remember vividly in my mind that one day where Isaiah lied down on the floor and was crying and kicking the tables, the kids literally, they were going to the lab, and they literally just got up and walked around him and left and went to the classroom, to the lab, like they did it and even he was kicking out, kicking the chairs, kicking the tables, and they were just, they got up, and they moved which, right, a couple of them looked at him but I was surprised because I thought they would stand there and stare at him “Oh my goodness” but they just quickly, they got used to it, they adapted, they noticed that everyone has challenges and that these kids had challenges and they just, adapted to them. (personal communication, Lydia, March 7, 2013)*

Lydia’s practice of sustaining and cultivating relationships and understanding with her students is also evidence of a *sensus communis* so central to hermeneutics. In hermeneutics the cultivation of one another is known as *bildung* (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 8-17) or the way of being cultured in the world. *Bildung* in the inclusive classrooms was the

human practice of being together in both suffering and joy. *Bildung* was also called social reason (Gadamer, 1982, pp. 69-87). According to Gadamer, social reason finds its roots in practice. Practice involves something-one another-and arises for us or is determined by us through our being together (1982, p. 82; 1996, pp. 147-148). My description here of this is cyclical, or almost tautological, evidence of the need to show how social reason arises: for social reason has its worth in being for its own sake, that is, in being for and of human beings who find themselves together. This idea has older links to the humanist tradition where life itself, with all its “different parts” was seen as *sensus communis* (Gadamer, 1996, p. 149). According to Gadamer, even the ancient Greeks understood that what makes us human and thrive together is the unity within and amongst us, which included our diversity: “Thus unity must be conceived as something differentiated” (p. 149).

In Lydia’s case, her pedagogy or way of being with her students demanded that, in the face of crisis, of being in situations that were stressful for both her and her students, there was a need to talk, to try and understand those alien but lived experiences. She took the time to stop teaching from the program of studies-which is her most manifest form of work she is required to do-and talked or laboured through another form of work: that of dealing with life as it arises within a community. She put off her immediate goals and attended to the needs of her students, sensing that the suffering in the hallways was their suffering, too. She could have responded by telling her students to close the door and not to worry about it, but she chose not to do this. Perhaps she felt that the presence of crisis in the school and her student’s awareness of it was a sign of what Gadamer (1996) described as disequilibrium in the community: life in the school for students did not have a balance or,

was unhealthy (Gadamer, 1996, p. 136). In order to help do her part, and to help her students do their parts for the imbalanced *sensus communis* or health of the school she needed to talk with her students about the ongoing crises. Through dialogue they could begin to understand that crisis and perhaps cultivate an appropriate response (Gadamer, 1996, p. 133). Indeed, during the next year their responses may very well have been part of the recovery of the *sensus communis* of the school.

We all need to learn once again that every disturbance in health, every complaint...is actually a sign telling us that we need to restore what is appropriate, that we must regain the balance of equilibrium. Ultimately, both disturbance and the overcoming of disturbance belong together. This fact is constitutive of life itself. (Gadamer, 1996, p. 136)

Lydia's tact, "a special sensitivity and sensitiveness to situations and how to behave in them" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 14) or ability to respond "true and right" (p. 19) as needed, is not a procedural or instrumental form of knowledge (Gadamer, 1996, p. 136). It cannot be gathered in the reading of textbooks or through the consultant's special education practices. It is a knowledge she had gained in living. According to Gadamer (1996), we live within communities and are therefore formed by our cultures. Disturbances and our recoveries from them are, once again, "constitutive of life itself" (Gadamer, 1996, p. 136). What is cultured in us is handed down as if a tradition: an unspoken tradition that is "tacit and unformulable" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 15) and often has the character of a "stillness of agreement" (Gadamer, 2007, p. 96) of what it is to be in the world with one another.

To be with one another, Lydia and Laura had to place their wants and desires on hold, to keep things at a distance (Gadamer, 2004, p. 15) in order to address the social needs of life together with the students or, to be socially reasonable as a community. In this way, Lydia's tactful, practical, proportionate, and reasonable response (Gadamer, 2004, p. 15) in such moments was part of the cultivation of a common sense for being well with one another. Lydia rose to this universal, or that which makes us human, distanced herself from the "particularity of immediate acceptance or rejection" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 73), and respected what did not "correspond to her own expectation or preference" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 73). Together with her students, their sense for what was true and right "receives its stamp from the commonalities of social life" such that her classroom "chooses and knows what belongs to it and what does not" (p. 73). The "practical reasonableness" found in their classroom commonalities is what called them to account as human beings, not pre-set rules or methodical approaches (Gadamer, 1999, p. 118). For the students in Lydia's classroom, the suffering they were both witness to and participated in became a commonality of social life because of Lydia's cultivation of understanding in them. Here again, the older Greek notion of *pathei mathos* is illuminated: from suffering comes a form of learning, as a sense that is both witnessed and participated.

I advance that it is this sense that can arise amidst the terrible difficulties and challenges within human life that can speak to a human universal of social reason for being together well. Social reason arises through *bildung* or the ways of being together that cultures us or cultivates us, as it did for Laura and Lydia, Gary and me, too. Here the metaphor of play reveals its relations to human understanding: in our educational lives we

were played by events and in this play there was also the space where we continued “playing” with and for one another, which often happened seriously, that is, as implicit moments of recognition and action, like Gary and me coming to understand we needed to do something different. We were essentially active in this ongoing process as play because we could and did talk to one another about the joys and sufferings of our particular circumstances in education. We got to know something of the field of life we found ourselves within, but it was not enough to be able to truly say we covered the field, as if we knew what to do fully and completely. There was great risk in all this. Life’s play was and is beyond our “wanting and doing” (Gadamer, 2004, p. xxvi). The practice of holding off on judgement, distancing ourselves somewhat, and acknowledging and respecting the difference of that which is foreign to us was perhaps reflective of practical wisdom, of how to be well in the light of the recognition that we could not outplay the circumstances or the “facticity” we found ourselves in (Gadamer, 2004, p. 254).

Tact was inherent to this careful knowing and it is pedagogical in how it was modelled and copied (Gadamer, 2004, p. 10) in the lives of Gary’s team and the students; it was learned in their ways of being together, through their suffering. Education can be a particularly important site for the cultivation of this social reason because of the ongoing tacit modelling that can occur between teachers and students, especially when students recognize this ability or disposition as worthy of listening to or, as having something to say to them. In this sense, teachers can have a positive authority, one that is accepted by students. It is this sense of authority that is “claimed by the teacher” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 281). Gary believed this tactful disposition was present throughout his school:

*And teachers do a lot of work around that as well. They do a lot of work. Like specific work around “Let’s stop, let’s do a class meeting, let’s do a sharing circle. Let’s make sure that we’re building that, that we’re talking that we’re open. It’s ok that we’re all different and we all have different needs but we all have different skills and let’s take a moment and highlight those. Let’s support each other and how can we support each other.” That’s kind of I think the climate of this school.*  
(personal communication, August 28, 2012)

Also:

*So I mean many times like I said at staff meetings, “This is what happening with this kid just be aware this is what you can say in the moment.” And so all, we were, we’re just as a staff a team about it really.* (personal communication, August 28, 2012)

I realized that in the inclusion of students with severe EBD in these particular classrooms there was a demand to respond well through the learning that took place in their collective suffering. The isolation of suffering can remove this demand and the possibility for the cultivation of a heightened and new horizon of understanding how to be well with one another in classrooms such that all students can learn.

It is this same development of a common, universal human sense, this shared common sense and abilities, I suggest, that led Gary and me to the understanding that we needed to do something different for all students. Perhaps it is this sense that led to mainstreaming and now inclusion in education. This sense in Lydia allowed the possibility

for her to have raised her hand to volunteer for the inclusive classrooms. Could this sense have led her to engage in an inclusive pedagogy with her students? Did this sense cultivate a pedagogy that took the form of stopping her class and talking about their collective suffering? Did it reveal to her the segregation of the students with EBD from all facets of school life? Could her noticing result in an unsaid openness to “what is other” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 15) such that she knew life for those students was not true and right about humans being together?

This deeply complicated weave of events as understandings intertwine to make a thread of common social sense that is participatory (Gadamer, 1982, p. 77) and exemplary of the hermeneutics of inclusion. The events within these classrooms and their importance for me are illuminated here. They speak to that which is often not articulable in technical or methodological terms but are shown in the ways Gary and his team were with one another and the students: through observing, or being an onlooker, or through participation (Gadamer, 1999, p. 31). Their ways were that of reason or being *reasonable* such that,

The more what is desirable is displayed for all in a way that is convincing to all, the more those involved discover themselves in this common reality; and to the extent human beings possess freedom in the positive sense, they have their true identity in that common reality. (Gadamer, 1999, p. 77)

### **“The value of not knowing”: Solidarity and Trust**

Practice is conducting oneself and acting in solidarity. Solidarity, however, is the decisive condition and basis of all social reason. (Gadamer, 1981, pp. 86-87)

Lydia shared her experience of the arrival of the students with severe EBD on the first day of school in the inclusive classrooms she helped create:

*I remember John was the first one that I pretty much met, I think. John was the first one who walked in and he was very friendly and outgoing and I was just like, WOW, he's just like all the other kids, like he was excited for the first day of school, you know, excited to see the classroom, things like that, and Isaiah came in and he was very very quiet and very shy and Leslie came in and she was very very hyper and excited and bubbly and really excited for the first day and so I think that was...can't remember...I think Tyrell came in...I remember George came in, he was like nodding and very nice and sweet and umm, they were just like all the other kids, excited for school at the start and very, very uh, eager and uh, the first day of school they were just great, they came in just like all the other kids and got their desks and had their routines and set their routines up and all that kind of stuff and they started off great, like the first few weeks, and even the first month was like "dream", they were just participating, involved, you know, they got to know the other kids...ummm and it was just, yeah, it went really well, and I think it all went smoothly for the most part. (personal communication, Lydia, March 7, 2013)*

She also shared her fear prior to the arrival of Laura, her co-operative teacher:

*I was like terrified, I didn't know who this person is, she's never been in the school before, I don't know what she's going to be like, I don't if she's just going to come in and take over or say that it has to be this way and this way. But she came in right away and she was like "it's completely upto you, like...how you do things, I'm not*

*here to change things, I'm here to just help, to support you" and things like that and "let me know if I can do this or this" and so right away, like, she came in with a willingness to help. (personal communication, Lydia, March 7, 2013)*

The willingness or openness to the other, in this case, Laura's tactful respect of and distancing towards Lydia created the condition or space in which the two could dialogue or enter a co-operative teaching relationship with one another, and the students (Gadamer, 2007, p. 96). The ground for trust was tilled through both of them being willing to listen to one another, despite their fears and uncertainties. Trust was further cultivated through those same fears and challenges arising in their classrooms, initially. Laura shared:

*I remember one day where I think I was out with...who knows what kid but you know, umm, that was one of our concerns before we did this was, what if...what if there's two crisis going on at the same time, how will we deal with that? ...I remember one time where I was out with someone...and so was the behaviour support worker, and umm, I think that John was having a really rough day and I came back because I was so worried that no one was supporting Lydia that she had all the other kids in there as well and I know John is "off" and so I went back and there's John sitting at her desk, on an i-pad and working away and it's just, and you know, it gave me like this, just sense of, relief and freedom to know that I can really sit and work through something with a grade 6 student and know that my grade 4 – 5s were totally taken care of and we never got to a place where we had to, I mean there was never a huge situation like, all year long, that we weren't able to handle together. (personal communication, March 7, 2013)*

Also,

*I think for me listening to us, we make it sound like it was all rainbows and dreams and clouds and it wasn't. It wasn't all the time. It was wonderful. There were moments where we felt stress sometimes. We felt a little bit overwhelmed with a couple of the kids. But we were able to talk to each other about it. (personal communication, March 7, 2013)*

The trust they cultivated came through their ability to recognize their own finite knowledge and skills. Trust was not just cultivated in one another but in the content of their work because it effected “the same disposition to believe something that can be brought about in other ways—e.g., by good reasons” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 281).

*We were able to go you know, “hey how about this kid” and you know “what should we do about them” and “like you know what I was really worried about this kid last night” or “I feel really stressed and fed up and frustrated” right?  
...Thinking like that, that speaks to our relationship in that we were open to be vulnerable. Like I'm not a superhero here I don't have the answers. Just to be able to say “I don't know what the hell I'm doing.” (laughing) (personal communication, Laura, March 7, 2013)*

Both Lydia and Laura then shared stories of their first years of teaching and how they cried at times over how lonely and unprepared they felt. They shared how they had a perception of being seen as weak and incompetent if they were to ask for help. Once Laura started team teaching her world opened up: “...and it was phenomenal. Then I could say to

her (team teacher) like, “What do I do” now we’re in this together so it’s not just about me not knowing the answers right. It’s “Here we are”.” (personal communication, March 7, 2013) Laura described this way of being as “The value of not knowing” (personal communication, March 7, 2013). This was a message they also gave to their students and new teachers to the school. Lydia shared:

*There’s a new teacher in my team this year and a lot of times I go to her and “Are you ok? Are you ok?” That was one of the first things I said to her and the other new teacher. I said “Don’t be afraid to ask someone else for help.” I said “Please ask for help because that’s the first thing that you need to know. That it’s ok to ask someone for help. That it’s ok not to know.”* (personal communication, March 7, 2013)

Lydia came to see Laura as a partner in teaching, as a participant who shared in the tasks of cultivating the young. They shared solidarity or “mutual responsibility” (Etymology Online, 2013) through being able to rely upon one another in the face of teaching’s difficulties, of not knowing what to do and being open to seeking and accepting help.

*I honestly couldn’t ask for a better partner than I had last year. Because I was so stressed. Like I said I was so stressed about this person coming into my room, and what the heck was I thinking that I let this happen. But um, she was a partner, she wasn’t a person who came in or was like, “Ok, I’ll do this” or “I’ll do this” or you know just do one thing or a couple of things, she was a partner. She took control. She went in, she stepped in she, we shared ideas. We came up with things together*

*and, and I think that every classroom could benefit from that you know. Having a partner to share the load. To share the load. Because with so many kids with so many needs, it wasn't just the transition kids. My kids last year were very sensitive kids and had lots of anxiety, and very emotional and um, to balance that all out, if I didn't have Laura there it would have been, it would have been just a year of stress and a year of worry. But instead it was a year of successes I think. (personal communication, March 7, 2013)*

A similar relationship was developed with David, the other inclusive classroom teacher, which permitted them to interchange their roles with one another:

*So it was that interchangeable, so these kids knew that they had support from many adults and many team members. It wasn't just me, it was we were a team here. So also with that I was able to work with those community kids right. Um, to bring out small groups and to work in academics. So it wasn't just my kids that might be low in math but it was also kids in the community right. That I could be able to sit down and work with or give another teacher that role. Many times especially in grade 6 that teacher um, he was just really into it. Like brilliant with my kids that were in there had such a good relationship and I relied on him so often to just say "Please sit down and talk with this one guy, this one student" and he would just you know, be right there for me. So that was huge. Then knowing that I had the admin support as well. It just, that's what made it work really, just that team approach and the, and the kids were feeling successful. (personal communication, Laura, August 28, 2012)*

I asked Gary about his role supporting the students:

*“X” (the school’s assistant principal) and I supported whenever and where ever we could. Yes this meant that we were sometimes spending time trying to trouble shoot with students and sometimes this meant spending time just trying to calm them down or take their minds off of things. I remember that one student was easily distracted from her heightened state by talking about birds or nature. This allowed her to unplug long enough to often bring her down and then you could trouble shoot with her. I would also play chess with her or James then found that we could talk about things as they calmed down. I believe that the two teachers who had these students were also seen as go to people by the students. (personal communication, April 1, 2013)*

Laura added:

*In addition to the support of admin, the other grade 6 teacher was a huge support to my grade 6 girls. They sometimes spent time in her classroom. She also had an EA (educational assistant) in there that was amazing with the girls. Our EA that stepped in while our support worker was away had an amazing relationship with one of the girls. All of the teachers supported our kids, just like we do with all the kids at this school. It's a community of care and inclusion. I also gave quick staff presentations/significant updates on each student and provided the entire staff with a picture and a strategy for each student. (personal communication, April 1, 2013)*

Perhaps the *sensus communis* that bound Gary and his school team together in solidarity, as “interdependent” (Etymology Online, 2013) was based on the recognition of their struggles the year prior to support the students with severe EBD in a specialized classroom. Maybe they recognized their limitations and at once, their strength in working through those limitations together, in a more communal and inclusive way. In solidarity they cultivated abilities or susceptibilities to help all students thrive in learning. Through their awareness of their individual limitations but new-found strength as a community, they became more conscious of their freedom to be with the students in learning, rather than crisis. Laura said, “We saw success everyday” (personal communication, August 28, 2012).

Now, in the consciousness of freedom that arises from ability...individual being is always surpassed by what is common. Ability founds solidarity. Solidarity in ability, responsibility in one’s profession, and the knowledge that I share with others and allow others to control, are all forms of solidarity that refer back to the one inherent, fundamental possibility that man has of aligning himself with, or even, of making friends with, himself and the world, through working. (Gadamer, 1998, p. 113)

Gary and his team were not the masters or constructors of learning for their students rather, they were constantly humbled by the needs of students and hence open and responsive to what was needed (Gadamer, 2004, p. 351). They worked through their struggles, cultivating and comporting themselves and the students, as they ventured forth with the inclusive classrooms. I offer that their ability to rely on one another and disposition of openness and humility brought them together. There was a social reason at play for them which bound

them in solidarity and perhaps sounded like, “We are better together.” Their openness to one another permitted possibilities for them to respond in the ways the children needed.

*Some of the other kids need to talk about it right? They need to talk it through, they needed someone to talk them through it. So to just kinda go “Ok, you’re ok, just calm down” and then I’m gonna go back to teaching. It was so much better to have someone there to kind of leave the room with them, sit down with them, talk about it, go through it with them. (personal communication, Laura, March 7, 2013)*

*It was so much easier because it’s so hard when you’re teaching 25, 26 children and someone is having an issue at the back of the classroom and someone’s upset to kinda go “Ok guys entertain yourselves while I go take care of this.” (personal communication, Lydia, March 7, 2013)*

This ability to respond, and to do so well was not a universal rule in application however. The universal common sense they had cultivated was more akin to a tacit trust, and silent agreement for interdependence or solidarity they had with one another, and the children, too:

*I think a large part of it is because the way you (Lydia) and I acted and reacted in those situations you know, it was a community of trust and they knew it was going to be OK with Isaiah, they knew it was going to be OK for them so they could trust that and continue on with their learning and their work. (personal communication, Laura, March 7, 2013)*

That trust demanded that they understand their students and their needs; that they tactfully responded to each situation in right proportion and this required them to be open to always trying something new with the students.

*I think we worked off of each other and whoever was in the moment , like I can remember you know, like Lauren having meltdowns and things like that with different activities and I would show her different ways like, I still remember showing her story boards and she would not want to write at all or do any story writing like that and so I showed her this online program of taking pictures and creating a story with that and she just went off with it right, she just took off with it, she just ...and really enjoyed doing that so it was like finding, you know, what worked for them and then getting it to work, right. (personal communication, Lydia, March 7, 2013)*

Lydia and Laura had developed an ongoing style of communication that often only required a “look” and at other times, more intentional conversation. This was cultivated in their shared work. Lydia said:

*A lot of times she (Laura) would pull out kids and work with them. I had a lot of very highly anxious kids and a lot of emotional kids as well so, she worked with them as well, so umm, right away once I think we got to know...I got to know the transition kids more and she got to know my kids more we started to develop the eye, (laughs) like, when John would have his moments of trying to gather excuses for why he’s not doing something we would look at each other like, “Again- uh.” (personal communication, Lydia, March 7, 2013)*

*It's kind of like whenever we found it (something that worked), so when Lydia found something I would say, what did you do with John? Like how did you get him to do this work? And she would just tell me and I would try it the next time. (personal communication, Laura, March 7, 2013)*

Each student was different, requiring different approaches:

*...like for example Leslie, you had to be really soft with her, talk easily with her, talk her through what she was feeling whereas with John you had to be direct with him and say "this needs to be done and this needs to be done by this time" umm, so it was just like any other kid, you have those kids, - it's just like any other kid- you have those kids where you need that more softer approach because they are very emotional, very anxious type kids and you have those kids that chose, not always to make the best decisions so you have to be direct with them and give them the consequences of their choices right, so it's like any other student, you have to figure out what works with them and then use that. (personal communication, Lydia, March 7, 2013)*

*I really think that that was a "play as you go situation." Changed I think for different kids; different responses changed and so when we found something that worked I would talk about it with my transition team and then I would talk about it with Lydia. And umm, so we would all be using the same language and we would all be on the same page when we found something that worked. (personal communication, March 7, 2013)*

I think Lydia and Laura have described the hermeneutic circle of dialogue as understanding. Their common sense was not a final arbiter or rule of what to do rather, it was on ongoing cycle of silent agreements that were “built up as the commonality of an orientation to the world” or *classroom* (Gadamer, 2007, p. 96) leading them “again and again...into a reconstruction of agreement in understanding” (p. 96). They could not sustain an ongoing and healthy cultivation of trust as *sensus communis* by just placing on the classroom wall a set of rules or privileges (See Gilham, 2012a for a story of what can happen when this becomes central to a classroom’s common sense). *Bildung* had to be continuously built up and in that building up, social reason arose for them:

The commonality between the partners is so very strong that the point is no longer the fact that I think this and you think that, but rather it involves the shared interpretation of the world which makes moral and social solidarity possible. What is right and is recognized as right by both sides requires by its very nature the commonality that is built up when human beings understand each other. (Gadamer, 2007, p. 96)

Lydia and Laura’s understanding of this process and how important it was to their work did not arrive immediately. Lydia wanted to know what to do upfront, prior to the arrival of the students, but she learned this was not how understanding another human being works:

*That’s what I really struggled with in the beginning like, how do you deal with these things? But, (laughs) and I kept, and I think now that’s what a lot of teachers, they come to me and they come to you (Laura) and they say “If they do this, what do you*

*say?” “When they are acting like this, what do you do?” You can’t (answer them). You have to figure out what works for that kid and you know, problem solve as you go, right. There’s no exactly, OK, follow this method exactly step by step by step.*  
(personal communication, March 7, 2013)

When students did not seem engaged or interested in learning, Laura would spend time with them, asking questions about why they were not interested or engaged because,

*I really don’t feel that kids don’t care. They do care and they want to be a part of everything...when they say they don’t care something else is at play and so I want to help them get through that, whatever it is.* (personal communication, Laura, October 17, 2012)

She shared that these respectful conversations were not an attempt on her part to force learning on students but more akin to explorations of why the students felt genuinely disinterested. Most students were able to share their anxieties and felt short-comings over the topics, which Laura could then support. She often felt that in listening to students and acting accordingly, she helped create relationships of trust. Once this trust was established, students were more engaged or more likely to approach her with their concerns.

*I think the relationship is what gets you through those times where it’s hard to approach the work or where it’s that moment where they (students) might bolt or where you need to sit down and be proactive with a kid...that’s where the relationships come in.* (personal communication, Laura, August 28, 2012)

Again, I advance that trust was necessary to hold this in-between, often uncomfortable openness to how the children would arrive each day and what they would demand of the world. A release of the grip on the perceived importance of clear and certain understanding or knowledge was needed because “solidarity is a form of experiencing the world and social reality which one cannot bring about and make possible through objectivistic plans” (Gadamer, 2007, p. 271). In this way, I suggest there was a *return* or *re-illumination* of common sense for Lydia and Laura, and that sense was also recovered and formed within their partnership or friendship (p. 271).

*I think you have to, number one, trust yourself, and trust your instincts and your intuition. I think that is a huge part of teaching and then number two, you have to trust your team because you will always have a team and you have to trust your team, and then, and trust the kid.* (personal communication, Laura, March 7, 2013)

Laura trusts her intuition, she said. She trusts her sense: her common sense or social reason for being with other human beings, including students with severe challenges. That sense has been an ongoing cultivation through her life in education and it is reflective of a practical wisdom that “determines in the light of such knowledge what should be done here and now” in the “concrete reality of the case” or situation before her (Gadamer, 2007, p. 285).

### **The Case of Isaiah: Listening, Whispering, Understanding**

*I called her the Isaiah whisperer because you know what, I, I, you know it was my first year in X (special education class) and I still don't ever claim to have the answers to anything right, and I think it has to do with personality as well, right*

*and, approach, and Lydia was just amazing with this one boy and I would try my bag of tricks and not get anywhere and (begins to whisper) Emily was just so quiet and somehow (back to normal voice) he would be doing his work and moving on and I just don't know how she did it so we would give each other that kind of eye, you know, like "oh, I've got this situation you take the class or can you please try this one and I'll take the class so I think it was definitely that team aspect. (personal communication, Laura, March 7, 2013)*

The solidarity between Laura and Lydia was evident in our conversations. As I listened to and read over the transcripts, I realized how fluid and interdependent the two had become. Our conversation about Isaiah revealed their solidarity within a common sense, as a social reason at play in meeting Isaiah's needs. Lydia and Laura's tact, and judgment and educational "know-how" are evinced in this conversation, as is the tacit, implicit moments of understanding, often left unsaid, that build up and form community. For these reasons, I have placed the short conversation (personal communication, Laura, Lydia & Chris, March 7, 2013) here because it is a phenomenon of solidarity that points to practice as practical wisdom and the *sensus communis* they cultivated:

*Chris: Tell me more about Isaiah. Earlier you called Lydia "The Isaiah Whisperer." What's that all about?*

*Laura: So Isaiah came to us from "X" (a behavior class for students with severe EBD at another school) so he learned a lot of kind of structured things. He was diagnosed as um, ODD, (Oppositional Defiance Disorder)...and um, and had like ADHD and anxiety as well. But um, so that's what we had queries of (Autism) spectrum stuff. But anyways that doesn't*

*matter, um, but what we kind of were really seeing ah, was the ODD code or the resistance to engage. So I could never get him to engage or to get out of, to let go of that and to even move on or to sometimes switch tasks or to - he had a big resistance to writing anything down or sometimes even just participate. With me he was, he would just sit there.*

*Lydia: (laughing) I know....I just didn't have a specific example but I can't think of anything that I did.*

*Chris: So, so right from the start it seemed to go well for you and Isaiah?*

*Lydia: Yeah, I think we just,*

*Laura: You know I think it was...*

*Lydia: I can't think of a specific example though like of what I said or what I did. It wasn't, I don't know.*

*Laura: I think that you just had a way of approaching him, and it was, in the end I think we realized that Isaiah was lacking so many basic,*

*Lydia: Basic yeah...*

*Laura: ...basic skills. I think that was why his wall was up and why he was so resistant. We never really agreed with this ODD<sup>6</sup> diagnosis. Because we just felt that why isn't he doing it? But Lydia had a way of getting in and finding out why. Why don't you want to engage and so what is it about this task? "Well I don't understand, I can't read this number." Oh so then Lydia's got 5 tools in front of him because she's academically like*

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<sup>6</sup> Oppositional Defiant Disorder

*ridiculous like with tools and different ways to approach curriculum right. So then she's got five tools in front of him, now he can find out what this number is, now he can engage. I think that's...*

*Lydia: A lot of time I think um, it was the getting started so if I sat down and I just started it with him I wrote for him. A lot of times it was writing for him or just listening to him say what he wanted to do first. Um, cuz I think a lot of times he would get that blockage of getting started and not wanting to do it so he would choose not to do it. It was positive feedback a lot of going up to him and going "Oh look what you did" and "Look at how great that is." And drawing things he preferred to draw. So but I don't think it was, I don't know, it's not a secret...Like I don't know, like she (Laura) keeps saying that it's one thing but...I don't know what it was. We just kind of, I don't know, I felt like I understood how he was feeling.*

*Chris: Yeah and then so if you were, ok so you've already alluded to that. If you were Isaiah what do you think he might say about it?*

*Lydia: What he might say about it?*

*Chris: Yeah, yeah, if he could reflect back years later and say what was it about you that...based on the experiences you had with Isaiah what do you think he might say?*

*Lydia: He might say like "She understood me a little bit she helped me".*

*Laura: I would add to that I would say "She heard me."*

*Lydia: She heard me.*

Chris: *She heard. She heard me even though I couldn't say it in so many words.*

Lydia: *Yeah.*

Laura: *He couldn't communicate it very well right. He couldn't get it...*

Lydia: *No.*

Chris: *So there was something about...*

Lydia: *There was something, there was something that just, it was stopping him from being able to communicate and participate with. But it's interesting how, one of my other kids really grasped onto him. I don't wanna say the name but one of my other students really grasped onto him and they became best friends. They hung out together and they played together after school and he was the only one that really latched on to Isaiah right. They became really good friends.*

Chris: *This was a student not from the typical X (special education) class.*

Lydia: *No. This was one of my kids from my class yeah.*

Chris: *So would that be another fundamental reason perhaps why he thrived in that environment too.*

Lydia: *I think so.*

Laura: *I think so.*

Both Laura and Lydia, as educators, showed a deep hermeneutic understanding of pedagogy, I suggest, in their ability to see beyond the student resistances and refusals to

engage in school work. Their cultivation of friendships, as well as student belonging through listening and whispering speak to this pedagogy. They revealed their own “rigor” for being with children in their ability to keep their immediate judgement at a distance and instead, maintain a “special effort” through “uninterrupted listening” to what Isaiah and other students had to say (Gadamer, 2004, p. 461). Perhaps their patience and calm persistence in such circumstances also modeled for the students how to be well with one another, thus further cultivating the *sensus communis* in their classrooms.

To maintain their composure, Lydia and Laura believed that they had yet to hear or ask more of the student in order to understand their refusals. Holding judgment at a distance like that while continuing to inquire or wonder evinces a speculative element in their ways of being with students. Through this speculative disposition, or openness to what the students had to ask and say, Laura and Lydia were addressed by the events in their classrooms. Hearing and listening to questions and concerns that arose from students, whether explicitly asked or expressed in their actions, created the space in which a *sensus communis* of belonging could continue to be cultivated. In this regards, Lydia and Laura’s belief in being able to acknowledge their limits and ask one another about their practices in the light of the student’s needs reflected the hermeneutic importance of the question: “the questioner becomes the one who is questioned” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 457). As Gadamer (2004) wrote of belonging:

If we are trying to define the idea of belonging as accurately as possible, we must take into account of the particular dialectic implied in hearing. It is not just that he

who hears is also addressed, but also that he who is addressed must hear whether he wants to or not. (p. 458)

Belonging is brought about by tradition's addressing us... (p. 458)

Perhaps Laura and Lydia had come to recognize that their students were full of possibilities and their job as educators was to help the students discover those possibilities. The cultivation of understanding amongst them was ongoing: Bildung was there in the events of listening and whispering to Isaiah. I offer that this was the tradition addressing them. Social reason, *sensus communis*, and *bildung* were their ways of being together in which they came to thrive. Perhaps those ways were concealed by special education's practices and structures and the student's responses to those structures, like segregation, illuminated or cultivated *sensus communis* anew in us all. Lydia and Laura's story of Isaiah revealed a human tradition of common sense for being together in both crisis and peace. They worked through their time together by being open to what addressed them as educators.

In their story of Isaiah, there was also explicit mention of his learning: understanding his learning needs in order to help him overcome his obstacles and blockages or his sense of alienation from education. I wondered what learning possibilities could arise when educators approach learning as an ongoing conversation with their students and the topics of study.

## Learning Possibilities

*If you're providing the kids with rich engaging tasks that are meaningful and they can see connections with, um, I think that even allows them to take those risks a lot more than if there's another worksheet and you know this is boring and, and see the connection and kind of wanna do it, dig in my heels. (personal communication, Gary, August 28, 2012)*

*Because the work is open and because it is inquiry there are multiple entry points so we never had to really worry, "Here's a worksheet we're going to do. How are we going to modify the worksheet?" It was never about that, it was about bigger ideas, it was about problem solving, it was about building things...so there were so many ways we could enter it, even in math...when you have an open, good problem, anyone can enter that. (personal communication, Laura, August 28, 2012)*

Laura's words, "open," "inquiry," "big ideas," and "multiple entry points" to "an open, good problem" speak about the nature of knowledge, of the disciplines in schools like math and science that, when held in certain ways allow learners to enter them. Her words point to the hermeneutic play of understanding and the importance of the hermeneutic logic of the question (Gadamer, 2004, p. 457). I asked her and Lydia to talk about pedagogy in their classroom. They shared their stories of how they went about entering the field of two topics in particular: trees and garbage.

**“Trees”<sup>7</sup>**

To begin the topic on trees, Laura facilitated a “questcussion”—a discussion where the students were encouraged to ask questions about trees, any questions, which were then recorded on sticky notes and placed on chart paper hung around the classroom. The students looked at all the questions in order to place them into general themes. Themes emerged, evidence of commonalities surrounding the topic. Together, as a diverse community gathered together around the topic of trees, the students generated an overall guiding question: “What would the world be like without trees?” Inherent to this question was their sense of belonging to the world, to each other within a community. Perhaps this too was part of the *sensus communis* of their classroom as a place of being with knowledge as it was situated in their lives, within meaningful and curiosity-arousing contexts.

Put differently, the children asked an ethical question of themselves and the world: In the face of humanity’s ability to eradicate trees, and perhaps a sense that they live within a scarcity of trees, what would life be like for humans without them? Their common sense to be together in the world and how being together involves trees and nature for example, seemed to arrive through the question. The question addressed them in such a way that they belonged to it, as if they were forced to hear it, even though they were the ones asking the question. The topic of trees had something to ask of them.

The students then proposed answers as “theories” to this guiding question using their current knowledge of trees, and the relationships they had with trees. Their theories

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<sup>7</sup> “Trees” came from a telephone conversation I had with Laura. I took notes during our conversation. I did not record the conversation. Laura read this section and confirmed that my paraphrasing of this content was accurate to her memory of the unit (April 1, 2013).

were derived from what they had gathered *from experience*. Hence, their “theories” had the character of not being abstract thoughts derived from methodical approaches to trees.

Rather, their theories were inherently of their lives and this was evidenced in their ways of coming to ask questions about trees (Gadamer, 1996, pp. 1-6; 1998, p. 20). In turn, the sudden question arose that asked something of them, instead. Their possible answers to the guiding question showed that the arrival of such possibilities happened after they had gathered together to speculatively hear and listen to what the topic said to them.

Lydia and Laura’s ongoing cultivation of a *sensus communis* was not an isolated application for student behaviour management. The *sensus communis* was unified with and for, and of, learning, as belonging to the topic of trees. In the same way Lydia and Laura cultivated their own listening and hearing so too did they cultivate this in their pedagogy, and in the children. This pedagogy has “learned to think along with the viewpoint of the other and try to come to an understanding about is meant and what is held in common” (Gadamer, 1998, p. 35).

The class shared their various theories and discussed them with the goal of formulating new and deeper questions around the guiding question, as part of yet another way of community building within the topic. This third cycle permitted them to dig deeper into their own curiosity surrounding the topic and its guiding question. Finally, students chose one of their deep questions to guide their particular inquiry into trees. Some students worked in groups, others in pairs, and some on their own. Laura shared that once students started to do the research, each project looked very different because they were given many

options through which to explore and present their findings, and yet each topic centered on trees and the question of a world without them.

*My kids were strong in some academic areas right and then there were also children in the community program that would struggle. Like these kids are everywhere right and that's how, that's how you have to teach. (personal communication, Laura, August 28, 2012)*

Laura recognized the need for some of the students to experience being with trees and talking about trees after the question writing, as part of their “theory-making” inquiry work. Perhaps as a result of the student’s lives without trees, or their inability to bring forth memories and curiosity for trees within a classroom, she decided she needed to take several students outside to the school garden. There, they walked among and felt the trees as they talked about them. Laura asked the students questions about their experiences with trees. While they walked among the trees the students shared their stories of playing in trees, too. They created, to the best of their abilities, the conditions through which their past lived contexts with trees could emerge to help form their anticipations of the future, of the possible answers to the question. Learning had taken on the character of a horizon of understanding. Those students were then able to ask questions in relation to their experiences of being among the trees, and subsequently talking about them. The historical being of their knowledge was opened up in the event Laura facilitated for them.

In doing this perhaps Laura recognized that some students, not just those with severe EBD, needed to see, feel, hear, and smell trees in order to tap into their lived experiences; their knowledge about trees. Maybe this was the first time they had taken on

trees as a topic worthy of their curiosity. Perhaps in being with trees, more questions arose for the students. She did share that she needed to do this to engage them or to evoke their curiosity by moving outside the confines of isolated, traditional learning. As Gary shared:

*If you are providing the kids with rich, engaging tasks that are meaningful and they can see connections with, that allows them to take those risks a lot more...you know, here's another worksheet and you know this is boring and I don't see the connection and I don't want to do it and I'm going to dig in my heels. (personal communication, August 28, 2012)*

Laura had the sense to cultivate a space in which students could nurture their own experiences with subject matter, like trees, and thus form their own questions and curiosities. Wondering about trees was not imposed from Laura and Lydia rather curiosity emerged within carefully facilitated conditions of student engagement.

*The classes were about honouring ideas...were about going and exploring...were flexible to delve into someone's interest...everyone was valued and I felt that gave them that ownership, that confidence, that feeling that "what I say matters" and ...connecting them to experiences...usually that was how I had to engage my kids last year, was put it in a way that it was about their experience, it was about something they knew that would bring them in. (personal communication, Laura, October 16, 2012)*

Learning possibilities emerged from these conditions or spaces in which students could make sense of topics. Perhaps learning took on the nature of an adventure for the students, because of Laura and Lydia's approach to pedagogy.

*Our focus and our goal um, was academics, was engaging in curriculum. So what are we looking at, what might we need to modify for all the different kids right? How are we approaching this and then let's go. If there's a meltdown we deal with it but our focus was learning.* (personal communication, Laura, March 7, 2013)

All the students had been gathered together as they needed to be, in all their diversity, in order to empower them to re-capture their curiosity about the natural world. Within the carefully nurtured spaces Laura and her fellow teachers created, students found the room to explore the topic. Their work was not about letting the students run about doing whatever they wanted, either. Laura and the rest of her team needed to know the students well in order to help cultivate the spaces in which they could all grow around the topic of learning before them.

For example, Laura did some direct teaching about trees with a small group of students based on the prior knowledge they had shared with her during the question making, and the tree exploring exercise. At the investigative and reporting levels, students then used various technologies and software products, which enabled them to represent their learning. One of the students in the small group drew a series of pictures, which told a story about a world without trees. She used a laptop to take photos of the pictures she drew. She then placed the digital photos into a movie, and recorded her voice as narrator of the story she had created. Another student created a research report for his theory, while

another made an online story booklet, similar to a comic strip or graphic novel. Other students made animation videos while others created plays. There were a variety of representations of understanding based on the variety of questions students had about trees and their preferred ways of expressing their understanding. This approach reflected the diversity of the topic itself, too.

I think that, through all this, the questions that arose for the students were not simply ones of choice. Trees in the student's lives evoked questions, curiosities, and concerns. The topic of trees had something to say to the students, and Laura and her team helped the students to listen. In this way, knowledge was connected as a diverse field that lived as part of the embodied lives of students in the world. The students, by way of their various questions, entered the discipline or topic and they explored that diverse place. In these acts of entering from where they were, and what they came to as a group, they were making sense of trees within meaningful lived contexts. They had built a diverse but shared community of understanding around the topic. I offer that the *bildung* or formation of the *sensus communis* in the inclusive classrooms centered on the speculative openness to one another and their topics of interest. Lydia and Laura's pedagogy reflects this speculative space or playfulness.

Thus, the work of the inclusive classrooms revealed that a discipline of knowledge like science, and a topic like trees, is not a singular line of progressing curriculum objectives to conquer or check-off, like an assembly line model of further progressive production which the teacher must push students through, without student questions or divergences. Lydia and Laura's cultivation of speculative openness in their students

brought forth questions that were in turn shaped into diverse learning adventures. These adventures reflected the diversity of the topic, of knowledge itself. In such adventures, curriculum objectives arose and were thus accounted for without having to begin methodically to isolate the learning objectives.

“Trees” became more compelling to the students the deeper they asked about them, and listened to what they said to them, and what they said to one another. Rather than solely becoming filled with knowledge, the students gathered around, and overflowed with curiosity, for trees. They also became more open or susceptible to learning, more compelled to trees in their world (Jardine, 2012, p. 125) through their ongoing conversations. The spaces for asking and learning about trees expanded, and learning had become an event of communal cultivation and formation. This, I suggest, was deeply inclusive which is also at the same time hermeneutic in that “the theme and object of research (learning) are actually constituted by the motivation of the inquiry” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 285). This was inclusion as the cultivation of and belonging to learning possibilities. Laura hints at something of this too, of the need to be together in learning in solidarity in order to be engaged with one another, to be well:

*I really feel that our jobs as teachers is not to plan out the year in each subject area and say “First we’re going to do this, and then this, and then this.” It’s our job to support and push students by including different areas we do need to cover-there is a curriculum we do need to cover-but our job is to weave that in, to bring in different parts as we move through and the kids lead through following their interests. (personal communication, Laura, October 30, 2012)*

In the inclusive classrooms learning was thus not to be pre-empted by curriculum objectives and rigid plans, just as the students were not able to be pre-empted by the logic and methods of behaviour management applied in isolation. As Gary said:

*I believe that the connection lies between them feeling supported in a regular classroom where they can take those risks. Whereas before, they're in that little segregated congregated setting and there's so many fires that have to be put out that the emotional part of it causes so much tension and anxiety in the room that it causes problems with all the academics. It forces that stuff almost to the back burner for a lot of the kids. (personal communication, August 28, 2012)*

Being inclusive in education required an understanding of the importance of conversation or dialogue with and between students in order to open up or bring forth what students knew and were curious about, including what their own fears were in learning. Learning possibilities flourished within Laura's sense for asking "What shall we do given the dialogue that we are with the topic and one another?" As a result, students thrived in their learning:

*Both of my grade 6's came up to grade level in their reading. One got like all 4's in math and math was a bit of a struggle before. Like just totally successful all of them. Like my, some of my grade 5's were totally at grade level and marked in the same way as the other children. I didn't mark them differently but you're held to a standard right, so I didn't make them any differently. Two of them were reading at a grade 1 level both came up to an end of grade 3 level in grade 4 and 5. (personal communication, Laura, August 28, 2012)*

### **The Performance of “Garbage”**

Again, the conversations I had with Laura and Lydia brought forth their solidarity. In one conversation, I asked them about the trees unit again, hoping to explore the topic more. Unexpectedly, they started to talk about a unit they did on garbage, formally known as *Waste in our World* in the Alberta program of studies. They started off slowly, their memories trying to recall that which was memorable from more than a year prior. As they continued to share, to fumble with the story of their inquiry into garbage, it was as if the memorable began to open up once more, fully present and alive for them. They quickened their pace, jumping in on one another, cutting each other off, laughing, smiling, re-living and enlivening those experiences. They were in the present moment of understanding while recalling the past. They had in some ways re-opened anew their horizon of understanding that past, and therefore, recognized, joyfully, the depth of their pedagogy in that unit. It was like a performance for me because I too seemed to be taken in by the story. I was filled with images of what they described, as if there, a part of it, and thus, in the performance of the play before me, or, in the conversation that became a storied performance, beyond our wanting and doing, I was also participant and hence, came to understand something about their work, about inquiry and learning. I remember leaving there wanting to be back in a classroom to try *that*.

The full import of my earlier explication of Gadamer’s notion of play then connected for me in the writing of this. The dialogue that we had become performed itself, as an event of understanding not only the hints of the richness of the topic of garbage, ironically enough, but the richness of teaching and learning and living with children. All of

this wove together into the ongoing fabric of this hermeneutics of inclusion. The play of it all outpaced my ability to type it into my own words: the re-experience of the conversation as a re-living or participation in their unit on garbage and what that spoke about for including all students in learning was present, vivid, and experienced. In listening to the audio recording and writing this I felt as if my horizon of understanding inclusion had expanded and deepened. Inclusion once again surpassed me, took me out on its adventure and returned me. What follows is that passionate performance that surpassed Lydia and Laura too (personal communication, Laura, Lydia & Chris, March 7, 2013).

Lydia: *I think about um, I think about waste in our world.*

Laura: *Oh yeah the landfill and all that stuff they liked that yeah.*

Chris: *Can I prod you, can you try and recall some of that?*

Laura: *Yeah we did the,*

Lydia: *oh the videos,*

Laura: *we did the, tons of different things so Lydia like...*

Lydia: *Oh yeah that's right I forgot about that.*

Laura: *We opened up you know, we talked about, we asked them...*

Lydia: *That's right...*

Laura: *...What are your questions, what are you interested - here are, first how started I think we dumped garbage everywhere right?*

Lydia: *Yeah so, so we took the garbage bins and we dumped it all on their desks first..., and gave them gloves and said go through, go through.*

Chris: *Good. Keep going.*

Lydia: *We made a big list of, we made a big list of um, what we found and what we discovered and we made, you know questions of “Why is happening, how to resolve it” bla bla. Then we um, and then that was the fun part where we said “Ok, now we’re to learn about um, how to help this problem, what are some ways that we can show our learning?” So that’s when they came up with all these ideas and we put them all on the board. And they, they narrowed them down to a fund raiser, a um, movie a video, and*

Laura: *They made a website.*

Lydia: *website, they did the huge model, one group did a huge model...*

Laura: *They did tons of stuff it was awesome.*

Lydia: *So then what they did is they decided which one they were more um, more interested in, so which kind of drew their attention right?*

Laura: *So they came up with the ideas and then they could choose which ones to go with.*

Lydia: *We narrowed it down because there was so many, we narrowed then we took a vote,*

Laura: *Ok, yeah.*

Lydia: *What were the big ones that we wanted to go with.*

Chris: *So it couldn’t be anything.*

Lydia: *No it couldn't be anything we had to narrow it down because it would have been too much. So then we took each of the groups, Laura took the*

Laura: *Model group.*

Lydia: *Model group because she was in art and I did the fundraiser group and the website group. So they each went off and they had to do their own research they had to find out what they wanted to include what did they wanna show, what did they wanna say, what did they wanna, you know, how to get the message out there that this is a problem. Right? So it turned out really well, they all enjoyed it.*

Laura: *All of the kids were engaged, also "X" (students with severe EBD) but all of the kids*

Lydia: *Yeah.*

Laura: *...were engaged all of the "X" kids were I think in different groups.*

Lydia: *Oh they were all mixed up...*

Laura: *Yeah.*

Lydia: *"Jake" was in the model group so he really got into the, the designs of it first and drawing what he was gonna put on there. Then they put the paper mache over the model and then they painted it. So he got into the painting and then they had to make trees out of clay and they got those little pieces to put on and they painted the good side and the bad side of the water, and pollution and so forth. Leslie was in the website group so she really got into-*

Laura: *She really was...*

Lydia: *...she really got involved in that. I remember that she got really into that.*

Laura: *She really got involved with that. I remember that.*

Lydia: *She was giving ideas on the website and what pictures to put in.*

Laura: *...so Isaiah was in the fundraiser group.*

Lydia: *Yes he was.*

Laura: *Because we ended up not doing a fundraiser because last year we had so many volunteers that the school was saying we had too many fundraisers to go out at one time. So the kids decided to do a promotion you know, display throughout the school of what could make people aware.*

Lydia: *Yeah, yeah...So I was involved in making posters and he worked on that that poster for hours and hours and hours. (Laughing)*

Laura: *Yeah.*

Lydia: *It was a beautiful poster (laughing). That's only one example of a thousand. Like that's one example of a thousand...*

Chris: *That's great.*

Lydia: *...where kids were taking ownership of their learning.*

Laura: *...it went really well and we went to the landfill and we got see leach and that was great for them because they could just see the impact of garbage environment. So yeah, they really went for it right. They were even filming like outside on the playground,*

Lydia: *Umhm.*

Laura: *and in the school areas and yeah. Their videos turned out really nice.*

Lydia: *Yeah*

Laura: *Then we had a big celebration that day and we...*

Lydia: *Did we connect the robotics to that or was that something..*

Laura: *We had robotics in there where leach had to be where they go into OH! They went, they had to design how the robot would go into the landfill and dig underneath for the leach. So to study the leach because we talked about leach. Leach was the word of the year.*

Lydia: *Oh yeah.*

Laura: *We made our own landfills.*

Lydia: *That's right we made our own landfills and ah,*

Over talk and more laughing...

Chris: *What's amazing from sitting here is the joy in recognizing how good that was.*

Lydia: *Yeah.*

Laura: *Cuz in the moment you don't think, cuz in the moment it's chaos right, it's in chaos because everyone is doing something, everyone is learning.*

Chris: *Yeah.*

Lydia: *It's only afterwards you go back and go "Wow look at how much they were able to do and accomplish right?"*

This performance brought forward the notion of truth within human understanding as concealment and illumination, forgetting and memory:

Memory must be formed: for memory is not memory for anything and everything. One has a memory for some things, and not for others; one wants to preserve one thing in memory and banish another...only by forgetting does the mind have the possibility of total renewal, the capacity to see everything with fresh eyes, so that what is long familiar fuses with the new into a many leveled unity. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 14)

Thus, in this conversation "what invites our attention is how true it is" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 113) and how in that recognition,

Is rather the joy of knowing more than is already familiar. In recognition what we know emerges, as if illuminated, from the contingent and variable circumstances that condition it; it is grasped in its essence. It is known as something. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 113)

That something, perhaps, is the shared participation in the performance of profoundly inclusive pedagogy. I was reminded that pedagogy like this, from the Greek word paideia “still retains a reference to the child’s stage of life, to pais, and play (paidia)” (Gadamer, 1999, p. 17). That playful participation was present for me, Laura and Lydia. We had been placed in the conversation such that we lingered in the sense of being “completely absorbed in conversation” and thus we were “completely there in it” (Gadamer, 2007, p. 211). The conversation itself relived the pedagogy of Lydia and Laura’s classrooms. The essence of inclusion for them in that place and time and circumstances presented itself before us as paidia paideia or the performance of a playful pedagogy. I believe a restored sensus communis for a playful pedagogy is exemplified within both “*Trees*” and “*The Performance of Garbage*.”

## Chapter Six: The Return From Adventure

### “Learners and Capable”

*It's seeing themselves as learners and capable. That they are able to tackle the problems that any other person has and they can handle it and they now have the skills, when they start to feel a little anxious about even being able to go into a classroom you know, "I can do this. I can do this." (personal communication, Gary, August 28, 2012)*

...there really is no such thing as “the normal child”: instead, there are children, with varying capabilities and varying impediments, all of whom need individualized attention as their capabilities are developed. (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 210)

The complete turn or shift from a segregated and specialized classroom to a communal or inclusive classroom, as I have tried to show, required the supports of the specialized classroom but also a certain way of seeing and being with students. Gary and his team believed that the students with severe EBD could thrive in learning and with others. As Gary stated, this was about seeing the children “as learners and capable.” This way of seeing children and youth, especially those with severe EBD is, in my view, a tremendous leap in the face of the kinds of challenges Gary and his team, and the children, suffered the year before. These children had severe issues in schools prior to arriving at Gary’s school. They had a history. The histories of children’s lives in schools can, rightfully so, it seems to me, cause us concern and sometimes, even fear. Holding steadfast to the belief in children as “learners and capable” (personal communication, Gary, August 28, 2012) was at one point tested during the year of the inclusive classrooms.

Gary and Laura told me the story of a student placed in their inclusive classroom—a student with severe EBD—near the end of the school year. They were told upfront by several school board employees, prior to the student’s arrival, that this student would be extremely difficult to work with, and would not thrive in their inclusive classroom setting. Gary admitted being “scared” of the stories that were perpetuated around this student, and how this might play out for them once the student arrived:

*Gary: We had some really complex kids. I mean the last one that came out of the Children’s Hospital had been there numerous times in the last little while. Crashed and burned. All kinds of issues. Came here and oh my goodness...*

*Laura: Flourished.*

*Gary: Like I don’t know if you call it, ok, it’s a fresh start, new school, amazing shazamm everything went great.*

*Laura: The way the previous teachers that were working with that student um, just this year...*

*Gary: We were scared.*

*Laura: ...just last year, we were worried...*

*Gary: I was scared....*

*Chris: Because you heard all the stories.*

*Gary: Oh all the stories.*

Laura: *Oh my goodness.*

Gary: *And we got this student and...it was amazing. I'm like perfect yeah. I thought, I was really worried. I was just wow. It was amazing....*

Laura: *Oh yeah. Like amazing, like um, like for example the stories were that she would come into the class screaming and would fold and wouldn't engage in any work and was on the teacher the whole entire day. For example she came in, she made a ton of friends right away, she was never around me ever and she was engaged in, she was loving, loving academics. So she made comments like "I was just waiting to be bullied but it just seems like everyone's accepting me here."*

Gary: *And I don't know also if this is just my perception of it, but I saw self-confidence...that I didn't anticipate.*

Chris: *In that student.*

Gary: *...in that child coming into the school. I thought ok, here's a kid that's pretty broken and how do we help this child?...I mean how do you say from one year to the next you've got this kid who in a setting like that, first of all wouldn't even go in the classroom to being able to go into the classroom. To be able to engage in small group activities, then to be able to put their hand up and volunteer.*

Laura: *Go to an outdoor school and to go in front of all these and sing a song in front of,*

Gary: *Hundreds...*

Laura: *(laughing) this was a girl who wouldn't even walk into a class room.*

Gary: *Same person.*

Laura: *She wouldn't even walk into a classroom....And it's more about their relationship I feel like all these kids had at the end of this year, felt that they had a good relationship with the school. I feel like many of them hadn't in the past. Like do you feel good about coming to school and you look forward to coming to school. Like one of our kids um, that I've taught for three years, he um, he loved coming to school. He loved school you know. (personal communication, Chris, Gary & Laura, August 28, 2012)*

The *sensus communis* cultivated in the inclusive classrooms had this implicit or tacit sense of acceptance within them, evidenced in the ways children were taken in by other children, and not bullied, for example. In the face of what they were led to believe and thought would be a very difficult student to be with, just the opposite revealed itself. In the light of an atmosphere of belonging, the student's disability seemed to disappear. The fears Gary and Laura felt with the arrival of the student were thwarted. I wonder if this was because they had been well into forming or cultivating a sense for the children, despite severe disabilities, as "learners and capable." This ongoing formation (*bildung*) helped create the conditions in which the students could be capable learners. Perhaps Gary and his team's belief in the children as capable learners over and above seeing them as disabled helped open up free spaces or possibilities for being together in learning.

### **Future Possibility: The Capabilities Approach**

The students in the inclusive classrooms had the freedom to be learners without fear of bullying or stigma. As Martha Nussbaum, a contemporary philosopher who writes about human capabilities and social justice wrote:

A just society...would not stigmatize these children and stunt their development; it would support their health, education, and full participation in social and even, when possible, political life. (2006, p. 100)

Nussbaum's work on social justice through what she called the capabilities approach (2006) has a kinship with solidarity through social reason or a renewed common sense found in Gadamer's hermeneutics. In her work, the task of society is to create the freedoms, or as Gadamer called them, the "free spaces" in which people can thrive together to find "new solidarities" (1992, p. 59 in Gadamer, Misgeld & Nicholson). Her work suggested the need for a social and moral responsibility to create freedoms for people to be able to choose or be healthy and well with one another, as Gary and his team did for their students.

In Gary's classrooms, the students knew they would be listened to, and their voices would be heard. In times of crisis they knew they would be safe and treated well. Furthermore, the students also had the free spaces to inquire and engage in topics in ways that made sense to them, and provoked them. They were given the free spaces in which to ask questions and then pursue those questions, not just as isolated moments of study, but as conversations with one another and their topics. The students thrived when their possibilities for wonderment and curiosity were evoked. Did the *sensus communis* of the

inclusive classrooms-the conditions or free spaces for thriving-cultivate a felt safety and trust in one another and in learning? I propose that the children felt free to *be*. The possibilities for being something different than only severely disabled arose. Perhaps critical to such cultivation were Gary and his team trusting in and eventually seeing the students as full of possibilities. The word “capable” is etymologically linked to the Greek word *dunamis* (Reindal, 2009), which refers to possibilities and potentialities.

Etymologically, capability is also:

from Middle French *capable* or directly from Late Latin *capabilis* "receptive; able to grasp or hold," used by theologians, from Latin *capax* "able to hold much, broad, wide, roomy;" also "receptive, fit for;" adjectival form of *capere* "to grasp, lay hold, take, catch; undertake; take in, hold; be large enough for; comprehend. (Capability Etymology Online, 2013)

Capability as possibility, as capaciousness and receptivity, as Gary and his team cultivating themselves and their students through their openness to one another, in order to comprehend one another, has this deep kinship with the cultivation of free spaces that lead to solidarity and a renewed common sense for one another in the inclusive classrooms.

This “seeing students as capable” on the part of Gary’s team was not a matter of simply changing their attitudes. From the suffering of the previous year to the ongoing success they saw “everyday” (personal communication, Laura, August 28, 2012), the cultivation of their way of seeing and being with the students could be seen as occurring hand in hand with the student’s thriving. I offer that this was a dependent co-arising. Lydia and Laura’s fears spoke to an ongoing formation of trust in the students, which then

perhaps began to find a silent agreement amongst them: the students were learners and they were capable. In being together right from the start the community developed its common sense. They thrived socially, emotionally, and in learning. Put differently, the conversation that they all were had become a true conversation, that is, they were together in solidarity in seeing one another as full of possibility, as being capable of saying something to one another about how they could be well together, and learn together. The conversation also had the space to let the children suffer and recover from that suffering amongst one another or with an educator. They were open to hearing what each other had to say, even in the face of the severe disabilities the students had.

Laura believed the students “*saw it as they had two teachers in there with a new teacher in there*” (personal communication, August 28, 2012) and when the students struggled they were supported in the classroom together, and those conversations took place as ways of cultivating their capabilities for being together well:

*We’re...gonna practice these skills...right as they’re happening, right when you’re experiencing (them) and then we can tackle it right there.*

*We believed that dealing with the issues in real time, ah, and being able to work with that child as they were dealing with the issue is better than um, you know, pushing it aside or else you know, having them in a congregated setting where they’re poking at each other and really, you know, causing escalation in one another....OK, so that didn’t go so well this time so what can we do differently next time, that’s something that starts to occur. You know, “Let’s talk about that, let’s*

*strategize let's problem solve.... it's all of us together working together." I think that's critical.* (personal communication, Laura, August 28, 2012)

Laura also taught health or problem solving strategies throughout the year to all the students in the inclusive classrooms: "I also taught health and I think that made a huge difference because we all used the same language, we were all using the same strategies" (personal communication, October 17, 2010). She emphasized however that the application of that work needed to take place in the contexts in which the crises occurred:

*Addressing these things (crisis or issues) as they come up is the curriculum is how to teach, it doesn't have to be every Thursday when "this is health" but it's embedded and its throughout and its important...because that sets the ground for everything else you do and that's important in life.* (personal communication, October 17, 2012)

In the capabilities approach, what Gary and his team had cultivated was a freedom or free space for being that is akin to what Nussbaum described as "Affiliation."

- a. Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)
- b. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails

provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin. (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 77)

Through the free space to affiliate with one another,

*I think it created a climate where they (the students with severe EBD) were just part of the regular classroom, these were just kids like everybody else. They were just you know dealing with something, who isn't dealing with something? So I guess that's the way it was approached. (personal communication, Gary, August 28, 2012)*

I shared with Laura some of the capabilities in Nussbaum's list. She responded:

*I really think that last year (pause) it changed these kids. I got constant feedback around them being in the classroom...and what a difference it made for them...They love being in that classroom and they love the teacher and they love doing everything else the other students are doing.... ...so I had a student...the year before it got to, they were picking up the student, carrying her, dragging her kicking and screaming to the "calm room." (personal communication, October 17, 2012)*

During the year of the inclusive project, this student was surrounded by 28 other students, and academic demands, and the same expectations as everyone else yet,

*There wasn't one time where she was running around the library screaming. There wasn't one time...She came, **she came** to the calm room once when she was crying...she was doing amazing and she was engaging in academic work. (personal communication, Laura, October 17, 2012).*

Perhaps the capabilities approach could be a way for educators, including educational administrators, to continue talking about an inclusive education system. As I reflect back on chapter four and the contemporaneous nature of inclusion for Alberta Education, including what I think must be a very difficult place for those inclusive education managers to be in, Nussbaum and Gadamer's work offers possible ways to talk anew about inclusion, as does this work here. When Laura and I talked about the inclusive classrooms with Nussbaum's capabilities in mind, she stated:

*I think my year would have been such a different year if I didn't have the freedom...to have the freedom to support when it was needed so things didn't build up to get to that place where someone's needing to run around the library screaming. So I can watch, I'm in there, I'm supporting, I'm watching her body language, noticing something is going on here, I can intervene here and I can do it in a moment. We can problem solve right in that moment to calm things before they get big...that made a huge difference for me....in terms of academics the parents were also like "wow" look at the work you've done. Look how much you've done...things were very open for these kids and I think they surprised themselves.*

(personal communication, October 17, 2013)

The capaciousness or freedom that came with the student's ability to affiliate well with one another, and their learning was not prescribed up front as a set of rights however, in conjunction with thickly detailed practices of classrooms like those at Gary's school, I wonder if Nussbaum's capabilities hold the possibility to be enlivened in other educational settings.

### **The Hermeneutics of Inclusion**

All discourse is such that the thing meant can be shown from various sides and thus allows of being repeated in various ways. This is the kind of conclusiveness which expresses itself in a powerfully persuasive way without being a compelling proof. (Gadamer, 2007, p. 417)

I have used the title “The Hermeneutics of Inclusion” to intentionally point to the interpretability of the topic, or to open up inclusion to a reading that is possible and thus, reflective of how it can be in the world through and with and for us. Inclusion had its own facticity (Gadamer, 2004, p. 249) in Gary’s school that co-constituted this particular interpretation of inclusion. That facticity is already past, present, and future in multiple ways. Thus, the ways inclusion can be read do not permit a final, conclusive series of statements. The topic is *already* here and at once ongoing. My work in this thesis has been an attempt to open up some of the character of the being of inclusion in education in Alberta, in the world I inhabit with others, including students like Mark and Trevor, and teachers like Lydia and Laura and their administrator, Gary.

I have tried to illuminate some of inclusion’s facticity in an eloquent way, as an act of *prudentia*. Thus, my composition of the hermeneutics of inclusion has been an act of composing myself given my positioning right there in the middle of it, “thrown” as it were, and also “projecting” my own ideas of inclusion (Gadamer, 2004, p. 254). Thus, the co-constitutive nature of this conversation had the spirit of an adventure. Prior to this final thesis, I struggled to find some sense of silent agreement with the topic. Often, the tangle of the threads that can possibly compose the topic seemed too great to weave together well.

Much was left unsaid. A much darker composition was easier to find and I wrote it but it was not reflective of understanding rather, it was blame and frustration and single-sided.

Now I think the hermeneutics of inclusion in this study has unconcealed the possibilities for cultivating *sensus communis* as social reason such that students with severe emotional and behavioural disabilities could not only thrive in learning but also seem to no longer be so severely disabled. Through illuminating this as inclusion maybe I have handed down a tradition of belonging (Gadamer, 2004, p. 285), or perhaps it was handed over to me, staking its claim upon me. Regardless, the tradition of belonging in Gary's inclusive classrooms was cultivated anew. I am privileged to have participated in the event of inclusion at their school. Perhaps, Gary and his team and I were adequate to the student's demands before us.

For now, I have cultivated a sense of "silent agreement" through the conversations that arose in this thesis, but only for now (Gadamer, 2007, p. 97). Questions already linger on the horizon, projecting myself into further possibilities for inclusion. This moment feels like I am just getting started and also at the end of a long arduous journey. This is evidence that the never-ending task of human understanding always involves struggling towards finding the right words that "come a little closer to the matter at issue" (Gadamer, 2007, p. 417).

On the other hand, the hermeneutics of inclusion can be dangerous. The *sensus communis* I explicated in this study could be taken up as the "real thing" to focus on, as if in taking up *sensus communis* as an object in and of itself, inclusion could be universalized everywhere all the time. It is tempting, still, for me to idealize inclusion this way. Such an

interpretation would take the topic out of its worldly character; out of its rich and entangled and finite living places like that of the inclusive classrooms at Gary's school.

The formation or cultivation of the *sensus communis* in Gary's school *is* human understanding, and thus cannot be simply replicated in another setting as if understanding arrives prior to its formation or cultivation. It is the formation in its concrete circumstances that makes the difference (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 20-21). The *bildung* that was the already and ongoing process of inclusion for Gary and his team constituted itself in that world: inclusion is that classroom, as interpreted by me here, as well as all its other historical entanglements I have tried to weave together sensibly.

An adventure, however, interrupts the customary course of events, but is positively and significantly related to the context which it interrupts. Thus an adventure lets life be felt as a whole, in its breadth and in its strength. Here lies the fascination of an adventure. It removes the conditions and obligations of everyday life. It ventures out into the uncertain....But at the same time it knows that, as an adventure, it is exceptional and thus remains related to the return of the everyday, into which the adventure cannot be taken. Thus the adventure is "undergone," like a test or trial from which one emerges enriched and more mature. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 60)

Similar to the way Gadamer ended *Truth and Method*, I have returned home from the hermeneutics of inclusion having arrived too late (2004, p. 484). Perhaps because of that I am more adequately composed for the future horizons of inclusion.

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## **Appendix A: Consent Forms**

### **Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:**

Christopher M Gilham, Doctoral Candidate

Faculty of Education Graduate Division of Educational Research

403-245-0519 or cmgilham@hotmail.com

### **Supervisor:**

Dr. James Field, Associate Professor

Faculty of Education

403-220-7455 or jfield@ucalgary.ca

### **Title of Project:**

Code 42: What Ought we to do About Students with Severe Emotional – Behavioural Disabilities?

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for indicating that you would be interested in participating in this research. Please take the time to read this carefully. This form outlines the purpose of this study, what you will be asked to do, the type of data that will be collected and how the data will be managed. It also will explain how your name and how any information that you share will be kept confidential. This consent form is only part of the process of informed consent. If you require any further clarification about the information in this form, or about this study please feel to contact me at any time.

The planned time frame for the collection of data is from mid-September to mid-December, 2012. The data will then be compiled and the estimated time for the completion of my doctoral dissertation is April, 2013. Please note that all of our meetings together will occur at a time and place that is mutually agreeable between the two of us.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study. The Calgary Board of Education Accountability Services Specialist has also approved this study.

### **Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of this study is to investigate educator's experience of severe emotional and behavioural disabilities (EBD). In hermeneutics, this includes examining the historical, social and linguistic contexts for the phenomenon.

The objective in this study is to examine EBD through engaging in deep meaningful conversations with educators to understand what it is like to help these students flourish. Through the narratives generated, the study wishes to examine both the challenges and the successes of working with EBD students.

The aim of this study is to help us understand how we have and can continue to make a just life for students with EBD and those who work with them.

Your participation in this study will support the broadening of understanding of this topic in educational research and assist me in the collection of data for my PhD dissertation. As well, it would be my hope, that your involvement will also provide you with an opportunity to broaden and potentially deepen your experience and understanding as a classroom educator.

### **What Will I Be Asked To Do?**

I propose to meet with you at least once to a possible maximum of three separate occasions.

Our conversation will be facilitated through the following guiding questions / task:

- 1) In as much detail as possible, please describe an experience or two that you had with a student with EBD.
- 2) What issues did you face in this work?
- 3) What were the conditions in which you and this student had both challenges and success in your classroom?
- 4) How were those conditions fostered by you, the student, the student's peers, the school community, or others around the student?
- 5) What is your understanding of Inclusion?
- 6) What is the understanding of Inclusion as you believe Alberta Learning and your school board envision it?
- 7) What are the challenges with these visions? What are the Strengths?
- 8) What do you believe are the next best steps for Inclusion?

Between interviews I will share my research writing to date with you via email. You have the option of adding additional input via email responses or for the next times we meet.

### **What Happens to the Information I Provide?**

All of the information gathered will be treated with strictest confidence. No one except you and the researcher will be allowed to see or hear any of the transcribed interviews or the interview recordings. If you wish, I will provide you with an electronic copy of the interview transcriptions and recordings. Participant data will be identified by pseudonym in the writing of the research and the transcribing of the audio recordings. No schools, school divisions/boards will be identified in the final reporting of the data.

The researcher's data will be kept in a locked cabinet accessible only by the researcher; digital data will be password protected on the researcher's computer. Once analyzed, the data will be archived for five years, and may be used for further related research by the researcher relating to teaching, learning or pedagogy. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are free to discontinue your participation at any time during the study. Any data collected up to the point of your withdrawal from this study will be retained and used in the research project and/or in future related documents such as scholarly papers or general interest publications.

Please choose a pseudonym for yourself.

The pseudonym I choose for myself is:

### **Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?**

There is minimal risk in this study, and no more than you would experience in your encounters in your everyday life. In the unlikely event that conversations lead to feelings of distress on your part, please be assured that your participation is voluntary and if for any reason you wish to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time. If however you may feel that any of the conversations involved in this study lead you to feel the need to seek further emotional support. I would recommend that you access the Calgary Board of Education's (CBE) Employee Health Resource Centre at 403 777-7788.

This is a confidential service that is available to all CBE employees.

### **Signatures (written consent)**

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate in the research.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name and email: (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: Christopher Gilham

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Questions/Concerns**

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Mr. Christopher M. Gilham,

Faculty of Education, Graduate Division of Educational Research

403-245-0519 or cmgilham@hotmail.com

and

Dr. James Field

Faculty of Education

403-220-7455 or jfield@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Senior Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-3782; email rburrows@ucalgary.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

**Appendix B: Co-Author Consent Form**

As coauthor of

Gilham, C. and Williamson, WJ. (2013) Inclusion's Confusion in Alberta. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. DOI 10.1080/13603116.2013.802025

I hereby consent to Christopher Gilham including portions of the article in his doctoral dissertation.

Walter John Williamson

June 12, 2013