Understanding how Ableism Impacts Inclusion of Autistic Children in ECE in New Zealand

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree
of

Doctor of Philosophy in Te Kura Toi Tangata Faculty of Education

at
The University of Waikato

By
Silky Sharma

2023

Abstract

Research shows that, despite the promise of inclusive early childhood education (ECE) in national and international legislation, disabled children and their families are still marginalised in ECE (Lyons, 2021; Macartney, 2011, 2019; Purdue, 2009). Recent work in Critical Disability Studies (CDS) and Disability Studies in Education (DSE) has connected this ongoing marginalisation of disabled children to the bias associated with ableism. Ableism is influenced by the ideology of normalcy, which produces the notion of a 'normal' child, and simultaneously conceptualises a disabled child as 'other' in relation to their rights and participation. However, ableism and its impact on excluding disabled children and their families in ECE have been given little acknowledgement (Love & Beneke, 2021; Macartney, 2019). To address this gap, this study investigates whether and how ableism operates in an ECE setting in New Zealand, in order to understand its impact on the inclusion of autistic children and their families. Additionally, this study explores how disability awareness and critical reflection on their practices can help teachers support inclusive practices for autistic children. The study also analyses key policy documents in early childhood education and special education.

This study adopted the theoretical frameworks of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) and ableism. DSE challenges ableist ideologies and practices that dehumanise disabled children and focuses on the role of educational settings and broader society in supporting inclusion (Baglieri & Bacon, 2020). The research uses two data sets i) two policy documents, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2017) and *Success for All* (MoE, 2010), and ii) a case study within an ECE setting. The methods used to collect case study data included individual interviews with staff as well as a parent of an autistic child; video recordings and observations of interactions with autistic children in the ECE setting; a teachers' focus group discussion; and analysis of documents written and used in the ECE setting. The analytical tools of thematic analysis and Fairclough's (1995, 2003) approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) were used to identify the discourses of ableism within both data sets. The thesis examines how these discourses as social practices disrupted the inclusion of autistic children.

The findings indicate evidence of ableism operating in ECE policies and interactions in the ECE setting via the dominant discourses of developmental psychology, the medical model of disability, special education, and neoliberalism, and indicate that these discourses inform disablist practices that negatively impact the inclusion of autistic children. The findings also highlight that disability awareness and providing space, time and collaborative support to teachers for critically reflecting on their practices can positively change their thinking towards autistic children and empower them to affect changes in their teaching. A key argument is that the theoretical understanding developed in this study draws attention to the importance of the DSE framework in recognising and challenging ableism and reorienting thinking around inclusion in ECE policy and practice. Accordingly, the study offers theoretical ideas that can be used to work against ableism and promote inclusive practice for autistic and other disabled children.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge those who have supported me in this research journey. This thesis has been a collective endeavour and would not have been possible without the support of the following people and organisations.

Thanks to my research participant, teachers, parents and children at Shemrock (ECE setting), for trusting me generously and sharing your experiences. I sincerely appreciate your time and interest in my research project.

To my excellent supervisor, thank you, Professor Linda Mitchell for undertaking this journey with me. Your wisdom, patience, guidance and critical feedback have challenged me to expand my thinking and academic writing skills. My deepest thanks to my second supervisor, Dr Janette Kelly-Ware, for joining me mid-way through this journey. Your continued faith in my academic ability and invaluable support pushed me gently yet persistently to complete my PhD. I also give sincere thanks to Associate Professor Patsie Frawley for your support and expert guidance in the final year of this journey. Your disability expertise has been invaluable in shaping this research project. A special thanks to Dr Carol Hamilton for your guidance and support in the initial stages of this journey.

I am grateful to the University of Waikato for honouring me with the Doctoral Scholarship that supported me financially and allowed me to focus on my studies.

I would like to thank Dr Olivera Kamenarac for her feedback on the initial analysis of my CDA of policy documents. Your feedback helped me to expand my thinking and offered points for self-reflection.

My deepest gratitude to my proof-reader, Dorothy Spiller. for your generous help and support in the final stages of my PhD. I would also like to thank Andrea Haines, Student Learning Tutor for her insightful guidance and support on my academic writing. I am grateful to Melanie Chivers, Academic Liaison Librarian for patiently supporting me with the formatting of this thesis.

I am thankful to my husband Vaibhav for his encouragement to pursue my dream of doing a PhD. I am thankful for your support, understanding, love and trust in my abilities even when

I lacked confidence. I appreciate your efforts in supporting and sharing the care responsibilities of our loving daughter Naomi.

To my lovely daughter Naomi, you have seen this journey right from the beginning with me. I was nervous about making the decision of having you while doing my PhD. However, your presence encouraged me even more to reach my study goals. We have had a challenging yet rewarding journey getting to this point.

To my parents, Kuljeet and Vijay and sister, Nancy, you are the reason for who I am today. Your continued support, love, and sacrifices helped me get through even rough phases of my life. You always inspired me in realising my abilities to pursue my career goals. Your guidance and support have been invaluable in this journey. To my dad, your experiences of disability are one of the reasons behind this PhD.

Lastly and importantly, to my friends, Fiona, Shweta, Galina and Mellisa, I thank you all in abundance for your support, guidance and love even on the most challenging days.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Glossary

Aotearoa:	The Māori name for New Zealand (Te Aka, n.d)
Kaiako:	Qualified and non-qualified teachers, parents and other adults who have care and education roles in ECE settings (MoE, 2017)
Māori:	The name for indigenous people of New Zealand (MoE, 2017)
Kōhanga reo:	Kōhanga Reo are ECE services licensed by the Ministry of Education. Kōhanga Reo are total immersion Māori language that build young children's and parents' knowledge of Te Reo Māori (language) and tikanga (culture), and are managed by whānau (extended family) (Education Counts, n.d)
Whānau:	Extended family, multigenerational group of relatives or group of people who work together on and for a common cause (MoE, 2017, p. 67)
Whanaungatanga:	Kinship, sense of whānau connection – a relationship through shared experiences and working together that provides people with a sense of belonging (MoE, 2017, p. 67)
Mana:	The power of being, authority, prestige, spiritual power, authority, status and control (MoE, 2017, p. 66)
Tamariki:	Children (Te Aka, n.d)
Kai:	Food (Te Aka, n.d)
Te reo Māori:	The Māori language (Te Aka, n.d)

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the research study. The chapter introduces the focus of this thesis and the theoretical perspectives I have adopted. I then explain the rationale for the study, and discuss the research context of inclusive early childhood education (ECE) for disabled learners in New Zealand. The research questions are established, and data collection and analytical methods are outlined. Finally, I describe my position as a researcher. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis.

Thesis Focus and Theoretical Framework

This study examines whether and how ableism operates in ECE in New Zealand and considers its impact on the inclusion of autistic children. The research inquiry employs the theoretical framework of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) and the concept of ableism. The definition of ableism in this study is drawn from Campbell's (2009) theorising of ableism as:

> a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human (p. 44).

Campbell's (2009) definition focusses on ableism in education with its expectations of 'ability' and a preference for 'normalcy'. These powerful mechanisms of ableism situate disabled children as 'other' and in need of remediation to conform to the perceived 'normalcy' of able-bodied children in the education system. DSE has been chosen as a theoretical framework to review the construct of ableism and question its exclusionary impact on autistic learners (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Baglieri et al., 2011a; Ferri & Bacon, 2011; Slee et al., 2019). DSE provides a framework to examine and resist ableism and opportunities to build and sustain inclusive education (Baglieri & Bacon, 2020). DSE encourages teachers to seek a transformative approach to resist the "hegemony of normalcy" and its related ableist beliefs which may dominate an education curriculum. DSE provides a lens to question norms about who belongs and who makes decisions about children's participation (Connor & Gabel, 2013). Employing DSE perspectives and using ableism as the main concept, I was interested in investigating whether and how ableism was visible in two ECE policies, and the beliefs of ECE teachers and interactions in an ECE setting. Additionally, I inquired into the experiences of parents of autistic children and the possible impacts of ableism on inclusion and exclusion experiences. I intended to encourage disability awareness and critical reflection on teaching practices to empower teachers to create an inclusive learning environment for autistic learners and to resist ableism.

The following section outlines the research context, and the relevant academic literature, and identifies gaps in ECE research on ableism.

Research Context

The study was undertaken in Aotearoa New Zealand. New Zealand has a rich history of ECE provision that caters to the diverse needs of children and their families and has made significant academic contributions to the development of thinking and practices in ECE both locally and internationally (Shuker & Cherrington, 2016). New Zealand has a diverse range of ECE services, including part- and full-day community-based, not-for-profit and private centres. These services can either be teacher-led or parent/whānau-led (whānau means extended family) services (MoE, 2014a). Teacher-led services provide care and education for young children and are staffed by qualified teachers with recognised teaching qualifications in ECE. There are three teacher-led service types: education and care centres, kindergartens and home-based services. Parent/whānau-led services provide care and education for young children supervised by parents or teachers/kaiako who are specifically trained in philosophies and practices of that particular service. Parent/whānau-led services are playcentres, playgroups, Te Kōhanga Reo and Ngā Puna Kōhungahunga (MoE, 2014). The teaching and learning practices within all these ECE services are closely linked to *Te Whāriki*, the New Zealand ECE curriculum which was first developed in 1996 and revised in 2017. It is a mandatory curriculum for licensed ECE services, which cater for children aged 0 to 5 years (MoE, 2017). The setting chosen for the current study is a teacher-led privately-owned ECE setting located in a provincial city.

Inclusive Education and ECE in New Zealand: Defining the Research Problem

Inclusive education in ECE within New Zealand is understood as educational provision for all children that recognises cultural diversity, learners' rights and different abilities and does not discriminate on any of these grounds or on gender, social, and economic status (MoE, 2017). New Zealand’s educational philosophy is informed by international and national policies and legislation that advocate for the benefits of practising inclusion and protecting the rights of disabled children and their families/whānau to equal participation (Office of Disability Issues, 2001, 2016; United Nations General Assesmbly, 1989, 2006; UNESCO, 1994). As a part of their licence, ECE settings are required to have a responsive and inclusive environment to support children’s special needs (MoE, 2008). In addition to this legislation, the context of early childhood education for autistic and other disabled children in ECE is informed by *Te Whāriki* and the early intervention services. *Te Whāriki* is a foundation document that guides inclusive practices that support learning and active participation of all children in their ECE settings (MoE, 2017). Early intervention services are a component of an inclusive education policy, *Success for All,* that support the inclusion of disabled children through special education service provision (MoE, 2010).

Despite rights-based legislation and its social justice intent, scholarship has demonstrated that it has been difficult to achieve inclusive early childhood education (ECE) for disabled children (Gordon-Burns et al., 2020; Lyons, 2021; Macartney, 2011, 2016; Purdue, 2009). Research about inclusive education in ECE in New Zealand highlights various barriers to inclusion, including disabled children and their families experiencing difficulties accessing local and suitable ECE settings (Lyons, 2021; Macartney, 2011; Purdue, 2009), and the persistent view of disabled children as less competent than their non-disabled peers and in need of specialist care and support (Macartney, 2019; Purdue, 2009). Another barrier that may be encountered is the perception that education for disabled children is expensive and requires extra time and resources (Lyons, 2021; Purdue, 2009). A final reported barrier is that professional development for teachers is inadequate to help teachers support meaningful learning for disabled children (Macartney, 2011; Purdue, 2009). In order to identify the presence of exclusionary thinking and practices, emerging scholarship in disability studies highlights the value of exploring the bias of ableism (Campbell, 2009; Goodley, 2014).

Disability scholars argue that ableism plays an influential role in understanding why disabled children are excluded in their education settings (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Ferri & Bacon, 2011; Goodley, 2014, 2017; Hehir, 2005; Hodge & Runswick-Cole &, 2013; Love & Beneke, 2021). Investigating ableism "can also ignite further discussions on what constitutes 'disability,' including how institutions disable and respond to a diversity of bodies/minds" (Parekh, 2017, p. 324).

The importance of investigating the influence of ableism in ECE is highlighted by the lack of reference to, and discussion of ableism in schools, curricula and teacher education. Ableism is not prioritised to the same extent as other social justice issues like racism, sexism, and classism (Annamma et al., 2013; Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Lalvani, 2015; Lalvani & Broderick, 2016). Disability scholars contend that ableism should be central to any discussion of disability in schools and ECE**.** Although recent scholarship in New Zealand has discussed how ableism is a problematic issue for the education of disabled children (Lyons, 2021; Macartney, 2019), more generally ableism is given little attention in the discussion in ECE about disability oppression and social inequality issues. It is this gap that this study aims to address by investigating the presence and impact of ableism in ECE policies and practices, specifically in relation to the inclusion of autistic children in ECE.

Autism and Ableism

Autism, the focus of this study is informed by my professional experiences, where I have seen the inclusion and exclusion of autistic children and their families. To provide the framework for the investigation of the relationship between ableism and autism in this research, this section of the introduction briefly outlines the dominant historical and current conceptualisation of autism and how these understandings may provide evidence of ableism and its impacts on inclusive practices. Autism, like other diagnoses of children that label them as 'disabled', is predominantly framed within the medical discourse of disability. The term autism emerged with the interest in studying childhood that grew in the early decades of the 20th century. In the 1930s to 1940s, the conceptualisation of autism as a disorder began to form with Hans Asperger's paediatric practice and Leo Kanner's child psychiatry (Feinstein, 2010; Nadesan, 2005). Both Kanner and Asperger appropriated Bleuler's description of the schizophrenic's "autistic" style of thinking, which Bleuler had appropriated from Freud. Feinstein's (2010) work on the history of autism pointed out that Bleuler "originally included autism as one of what he called the four schizophrenias. “[This group] was united by ‘four As’- associated disturbance, affective disturbance, ambivalence and autism” (p. 6). In the conceptualisation of autism as a type of schizophrenia, autism is classified as a medical problem outside the ‘normal’ way of being and thinking.

Later, the term autism as a disorder was first articulated by Leo Kanner, an Austrian-born German-educated pioneer child psychiatrist, who by the 1930s was working in the United States. He first named autism as a separate condition in 1943 in a seminal article called “autistic disturbances of affective contact” about a group of children he was working with (Kanner, 1943). In this article, Kanner defines autism as a “fundamental disorder, inability to relate themselves in the ordinary ways to people and situations from the beginning of life” (Kanner, 1943, p. 242). In contrast to Bleuler’s understanding of autism as schizophrenia disorder, Kanner (1943) writes

> [Autism] is not, as in schizophrenic children and adults, from an initially present relationship. It is not a ‘withdrawal’ from formerly existing participation. There is from the start an extreme autistic aloneness that, whenever possible, disregards, ignores, shuts out anything that comes to the child from the outside (p. 242).

Meanwhile, in Vienna, Austria, Hans Asperger, a paediatrician was working with children with some of these characteristics. Asperger’s study was based on so called high functioning autistic children and focussed on perceived social and communication deficits in children (Attwood, 2008). Kanner’s and Asperger's work played an important role in categorising autism as a formal diagnostic category in the first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders [DSM III] (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1980; Attwood, 2008). Nadesan (2005) points out “this intellectual heritage engendered the assumption that autism was characterised by aloneness, solipsism” (p. 87), a view that remains dominant in our understanding of autism. The deficit understanding that autistic children have an inherent flaw within their bodies and minds that do not conform to the ‘ableist norm’ can be seen in a contemporary understanding of autism as stated in DSM V (APA, 2013). The latest DSM V defines autism as a single diagnostic category of ‘Autism Spectrum Disorder’. The term ‘spectrum’ emphasises that autism affects individuals in different ways. In the DSM V, Autism Spectrum Disorder is defined as an “impairment in social communication or social reciprocity, and impairment in restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour" (APA, 2013, p. 35), consisting of varying severities from mild to severe and low functioning to high functioning symptoms. Accordingly, the internationally adopted definition of 'Autism Spectrum Disorder' (ASD) in the DSM V repeats the deficit view of autism as a mental disorder that varies in degree and severity (Frigerio et al., 2017), and provides ways for neoliberal capitalist markets to offer remedies and grow businesses of special education intervention with the purpose of curing autism and commodifying human differences (Douglas et al., 2019; Mallet & Runswick-Cole, 2012). Based on the medical model of disability, the focus of the problem is then considered to lie within an autistic person and their embodied differences labelled as autistic, which makes treatment and intervention of the utmost importance in order to attain normality (Mc Guire, 2016; Shyman, 2016).

While the medical model of disability has been widely criticised, this model of pathologising disabled children is still manifested in many systems of society, including education, through ableist ideologies and discourses (Douglas, 2010; Douglas et al., 2019; Manalili, 2021). The medical framing of autism can reinforce ableist discourses that define embodied differences of autistic children as 'deviant' from what is deemed to be 'normal' or 'fully' human. As a result, autistic children and their families are expected to be involved in intervention programmes to normalise their differences (Douglas, 2010; Douglas et al., 2019). Within the current discourse on diversity and inclusion, ableism masks the discourse of inequality and marginalisation for autistic people by setting the benchmark of ability, bodily integrity, competence and normality (Woodfield et al., 2020). In the discourse of ableism, the autistic ways of being and communicating are considered as deficit and incompetent, and as a result, children face marginalisation and barriers to inclusion that devalue their differences (Manalili, 2021) (I will explore these matters further in Chapter Two, the Literature Review). Disability scholars note that inclusive education cannot be achieved if ableist discourses continue to underpin approaches and practices of inclusion (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013; Love & Beneke, 2021). Critical scholarship contends that research which aims to promote inclusive practices must contribute to understanding and dismantling the notion of ableism that upholds deficit practices in ECE (Love & Beneke, 2021). The power of medical discourses in conceptualising autism and the potential exclusionary impact of ableism highlights the importance of research that is designed to identify the presence and influence of these discourses, help to dismantle them and provide alternative ways of understanding inclusive education. It is these considerations that drive the current research inquiry and shape the research questions.

Research Questions

This study investigates whether and how ableism influences the educational policies and the everyday practices of teachers participating in an ECE setting in New Zealand. Supporting this aim, the research questions are as follows:

RQ 1. How do discourses of ableism frame the text and ideologies of inclusion in ECE policies in New Zealand?

RQ 2. How does ableism inform teachers' understandings, beliefs and practices for autistic children in an ECE setting?

RQ 3. What is the impact of ableism on families of autistic children?

RQ 4. How can disability and ableism awareness training and critical reflection on practice help teachers support inclusive practices for autistic children in an ECE setting? (Note that 'the teachers' as a collective term is used in this study to denote qualified and registered and non-registered teachers, a curriculum leader and an education support worker).

Research Design

To address these research questions, this study has adopted a qualitative case study methodology to explore whether and how ableism operates in an ECE setting, and the impacts on the inclusion of autistic children. This qualitative study uses two sets of data. The first data set consists of two policy documents- *Te Whāriki* -New Zealand ECE curriculum *and Success for All*-Inclusive education policy (MoE, 2017, 2010). The second data set is derived from a case study of an ECE setting. The case study of the ECE setting started with an introductory meeting for teachers. The aim of that meeting was to inform participants about the procedures of my study and give a presentation on disability awareness and ableism. The methods I used to collect data included individual interviews with teachers and a parent of an autistic child. I also conducted video observations, took photographs, and made field notes of interactions between autistic and other children and teachers, to examine how ableism might influence their interactions and teaching practices. The data collection processes also involved accessing and analysing documentation that framed practices in the ECE setting. Finally, a focus group discussion was conducted for teachers. During the focus group, the main themes from individual interviews and two videos that demonstrated ableist and inclusive practices were shown to teachers for their insights.

The study used multiple analytical approaches (thematic and critical discourse analysis) and interpretative frameworks (social constructionism, Disability Studies in Education) to analyse the data. Thematic analysis was broadly used to analyse the case study data to uncover recurrent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). Critical Discourse Analysis was then used to analyse whether themes were connected to wider social ideologies and the dominant discourses of disability that inform ableism (Fairclough, 1995, 2003). Disability Studies in Education as a theoretical framework was used for interpreting dominant discourses related to disability and ableism and suggesting alternative ways of reimagining inclusion in ECE.

Significance of Study

The findings of this thesis offer insights to policymakers, teachers and other education practitioners. This study gives them the tools to critically question their ableist ideologies and beliefs and its related disablist practices and thereby promote the full inclusion of autistic and other disabled children. I am also hopeful that my research will support parents of autistic children to understand the impacts that ableism can have on their family experiences and their children's education.

Notes on Terminology

I use the terms ‘disabled children and ‘autistic children’ in this thesis. In doing so, I place disability at the forefront, seeing disability as an individual identity, not separate from the individual. Overboe (2012) contends that “disabled has become a marker of the identity that the individual or group wish to highlight or call attention to” (p. 112). Baglieri and Lalvani (2020) note that people are working toward dismantling ableism and valuing the experiences and rights of disabled people and their families. Valuing individual experiences means we should recognise disability and impairment as attributes of a diverse society. Some autism activists also suggest using disability first language for autistic people who perceive their diagnosis as an accepted part of their identity (Botha et al., 2021; Goodall, 2019; Singer, 2017).

Alternatively, the term “people with disabilities” is also commonly used in the disability community by those who want to be recognised as people first. Overboe (2012) argues that using the term “people with disabilities emphasises the appendage problem as value is placed on the individual initially and disability comes second to it; rather than disability being an essential part of the self” (p. 27-28). Some cultural groups also have preferences and values attached to their language to recognise disabled people. For example, Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, emphasise the importance of disabled people being identified as Māori first. However, Baglieri and Lalvani (2020) suggest that instead of erasing the word disability or using the words with negative connotations like ‘special’, ‘exceptional’, ‘challenged’ and other negative vocabulary, we can either use the term ‘people with disabilities’ or ‘disabled people’ to initiate conversations around disability in society. My use of disability first language in this thesis supports my argument that disability is a difference in being rather than negative and tragic. It does not mean that person first language should not be used. I believe different people have different preferences and values attached to the language they want to be recognised. Therefore, it is important in our interactions with disabled people to ask about their preferences.

The following section discusses the experiences that provided the personal motivation for this research inquiry.

Locating the Researcher

My personal and professional experiences inform the focus of this study. My understanding of disability was shaped by my personal experiences of having a family member with a disability and professional experiences as a special education teacher. I was eight years old when my dad lost his eyesight in an accident and became blind. That was a turning point for my family. We tried all the available medical treatments to fix his disability. When medical treatment failed, we finally accepted the truth that he may have to live his life as a blind person. However, there were many barriers to be faced in this journey. As my dad acquired the disability later in his life, he missed the sense of freedom he had enjoyed before, and he felt that his impairment had limited his life in so many ways. The most significant barrier he faced was other people’s negative and pitying attitudes. People usually saw him as someone needing condolence and called his impairment a misfortune for our family. There were also structural barriers. He could not go anywhere alone because of the inaccessibility of the environment. I saw him feeling guilty and internalising negative attitudes of society, which impacted his self-esteem. However, as a child, I did not know what I could do to make my dad feel better.

We always encouraged my father to feel empowered in the way he is, and his presence is invaluable in our life. Being a support person for my dad, I felt privileged and had a sense of duty as non-disabled person to help in the disability community. These experiences inspired me to pursue my postgraduate degree in Human Development with a specialisation in disability studies. In my postgraduate studies, we were introduced to human development theories and special education approaches. Moreover, we were also taught about social, cultural and rights-based approaches to understanding disability, and ableism. These alternative perspectives helped me to refine my understanding of disability as a social construction rather than something that needs fixing. In addition, my knowledge of disability was further shaped through my professional experiences. In my home country of India, disabled children have equal rights to participate in mainstream education settings. However, the practices of inclusion for disabled children are still shaped by special education perspectives. Children are mostly physically included in their classroom but the responsibility for their learning is given to special education teachers. In some schools, children considered to have severe disabilities are separated and placed in a self-contained classroom.

In my professional experiences as a special education teacher, I was expected to identify children’s differences through assessments and support them to ensure that they were accommodated in classroom learning routines. In my role, every day, I saw children trying their hardest to keep up with their non-disabled peers. I also saw parents struggling to spend their time and financial resources to reduce their children’s differences through medical interventions so that their children could have mainstream education experiences. As I did not hold a position of power in my school, my suggestions as a special education teacher about adapting the education context and making changes in teaching pedagogies were usually not given preference.

The knowledge of special education continued to influence my practices, and I started to feel the negative effects of these practices. I reflected on these discourses and questioned my practices and wondered how I could change them. I embarked on this journey of change, expanding my reading on disability studies, and I came across Fiona Kumari Campbell's (2009) article on ableism. Understanding ableism helped me understand the ableist privileges that 'normal' people like me experience in society, which can give them power over those who are disabled. Reading about ableism, I realised how ableism could remain unrecognised in our pedagogical practices and correspondingly exert a powerful influence on our everyday lives. My understanding of ableism at that time was limited, but my personal interest was a motivation for this research inquiry.

The following section sets out the structure of this thesis.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter Two presents the theoretical framework used to interpret and analyse data in this study. In this chapter, I engage with the medical and social models and the approaches of disability studies that provide a foundation for understanding disablism and ableism. The chapter discusses the choice of Disability Studies in Education as a theoretical framework, and ableism as analytical tool for this study.

Chapter Three comprises the literature review for this study. The chapter aims to critically reflect on the literature that supports understanding how ableism operates in ECE policies and practices and the impact of ableism on ECE for autistic and other disabled children. I select and critique the literature that provides the context for the study by exploring dominant discourses and themes (developmental, neoliberalism, and special education) related to ableism in ECE. Furthermore, the chapter critically reflects on disability studies literature that provides an alternative view of understanding disability, autism and inclusive education.

Chapter Four discusses the methodology and research design for this study. The first section of this chapter justifies the use of qualitative case study research methodology. The rationale for using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and thematic analysis as methods of data analysis is provided. The second section of Chapter Four considers the two sets of data (policy documents and a case study of an ECE setting) used in this study. The methods employed for data collection and the introduction of research participants are given. The chapter also discusses the issues and procedures related to ethics.

Chapters Five, Six, Seven, and Eight comprise the analysis of the findings. Chapter Five discusses the CDA of two policy documents (*Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) and *Success for All* (MoE, 2014). The CDA of policy documents analyses whether and how discourses of disability and ableism are exhibited in the texts of these two policy documents, and how the influence of these discourses on practices in ECE settings might disrupt the inclusion of autistic and other disabled children.

Chapter Six discusses the findings from the case study of an ECE setting. This chapter explores teachers' understanding of disability, beliefs about inclusion and their experiences of facilitating inclusive education for autistic children. Considering this, I explored how these understandings and experiences might be informed by ableism.

Chapter Seven explores how ableism operates in interactions at an ECE setting, and how these may inform us about disablist practices. Parents' experiences and teachers' perspectives of parents' experiences of ECE services for their autistic child are analysed for the possible impacts of ableism.

Chapter Eight examines how disability awareness and critical reflection on their practices helped teachers in this study to bring about changes in their thinking and practices in favour of inclusive education.

Chapter Nine brings together the findings of this thesis in the form of themes. The main themes are summarised in relation to the research questions, theoretical perspectives and literature review used to inform this study.

Chapter Ten provides a concluding discussion for this thesis. This chapter discusses some key implications for policy and practices. Considering this, I discuss how this study's theoretical perspectives and findings offer policymakers, teachers, and other education practitioners several ways to reorient their understanding of inclusive education and to resist ableism in

ECE. I also discuss the contribution to knowledge in the field. Recognising the limitations of this study, I provide some suggestions for future research.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Perspectives

Chapter Overview

This chapter explains the theoretical perspectives that underpin this study. The study adopts social constructionism as a research paradigm and Disability Studies in Education (DSE) as a theoretical framework. I discuss how disability has traditionally been understood and responded to through the medical and the social model of disability. The approaches of disability studies and Critical Disability Studies (CDS) are drawn on to understand the key theoretical perspectives of disablism and ableism. I then situate my study within the theoretical framework of DSE, and provide a justification for its use. Drawing from the conceptual understanding of CDS, DSE aims to counter "ableist traditions, structures and cultures of education and to suggest how education might be otherwise" (Slee et al., 2019, p. 1). The chapter ends with a discussion of how I employ ableism as an analytical tool for this study. Ableism is about the entrenched ideas, system of beliefs, and ideologies that privilege culturally constructed notions of an able body and mind and 'other' disabled people because disability is seen as an undeniable and unacceptable lived/human experience.

Social Constructionism as a Research Paradigm for this Study

Paradigms provide frameworks for understanding the world. They shape what we see and help us to interpret what we see (Morrow & Torres, 1995). Paradigms are "a combination of meta-theoretical and methodological assumptions about how to develop a cumulative tradition of research" (Morrow & Torres, 1995, pp. 24–25). Paradigms are underpinned by different philosophical assumptions and worldviews. Positivism is a philosophical stance that sees social reality as objective and maintains that knowledge can be gained through measurable and scientific facts. By contrast, constructionism considers that reality is a social construct and sees knowledge as constructed through social interactions (Burr, 2015). This study used social constructionism as a research paradigm.

This study was underpinned by a social constructionist paradigm. In this research, a social constructionist paradigm enables exploration of how the ideas of 'normal', 'ability' and 'ableness' have been constructed and evolved through social interaction. The work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) is recognised as a landmark in developing social constructionist theory. Berger and Luckmann (1966) raised questions about how reality and knowledge are constructed and come to have significance for society. Berger and Luckmann's (1966) understanding of the social construction of reality is based on the following beliefs. First, social interaction between people creates social institutions and individual beliefs about the nature of reality. Second, the nature of reality is not fixed and can be deconstructed through social interactions by reconstituting social institutions and individual beliefs. Therefore, social interactions of all kinds, especially language are central to the notion of social constructionism.

Informed by the social constructionist paradigm, this study sees language as an essential tool in constructing and perpetuating knowledge and understandings of disability in society. Accordingly, the concept of disability is not seen as a permanent, fixed or objective reality, but rather a fluid category produced and reproduced through various histories, social structures, cultures, and interactions. Moreover, social constructionist perspectives demonstrate that conceptions of normality, 'normal' and ableness are part of our shared societal views about what constitutes our humanity. When a group of people believes that specific ways of being, having a body, thinking, and emotions are the 'norm', then this 'norm' as a human template is exchanged through the medium of language in social interactions and accepted as a truth that remains unquestioned in society. Thus, the social constructionist paradigm in this study allowed me to explore how the understanding of disability and beliefs and practices for autistic children in an ECE setting are informed by socially constructed notions of ability and ableness.

The following section discusses models used for understanding disability.

Models of Understanding Disability

Models for understanding disability consist of multiple theories that can be built on constructivist or positivist philosophical stances or both (Gabel & Peters, 2004). A theory is a conceptualised framework, and a model is a depiction or representation to explain a theory. Two dominant models in the Western world have been used to understand disability; the medical and the social model. Each of these models is shaped by different theories and philosophical stances.

The Medical Model of Disability

The medical model of disability is built on positivist assumptions about the nature of reality. The medical model conceptualises disability as an individual limitation, biological problem or pathology and in need of cure or remediation. Shakespeare (2010) notes that the medical model of disability sees disability as a deficit located within individuals' minds and bodies. Correspondingly, approaches to responding to disability using the medical model focus on reducing the impact of impairment through interventions, treatments and therapies (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020). One of the progenitors of the social model of disability, Mike Oliver (1996), used the term 'the individual' model to highlight this focus of the medical model. He argued that "there is no such thing as the medical model of disability, there is instead, an individual model of disability of which medicalisation is one significant component" (p. 31). Oliver argued that this emphasis defined disability as a problem residing within an individual body and mind, and ignored the impact of social and institutional barriers in constructing disability. As a result, the historical, cultural, economic and political conditions that shape human beings are disregarded (Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012; Sherry, 2006).

Disability scholars argue that in the nexus of individualised and medical knowledge, disability is cast as an essentialist condition, and disabled people are treated as objects. Under the medical model, medical measures and interventions used for fixing the person are preferred to evaluating the influences of social contexts on the experiences of disabled people. As the power of medical professionals increased over time, the medical model became a hegemonic and ideological position through which the importance of normality was emphasised (Linton, 1998; Sherry, 2006). Thus, medical professionals held the power to determine what is normal/abnormal and disregarded the impact that the binary of normal/abnormal can have on disabled people (Goodley, 2017).

The Medical Model and Special Education in Early Childhood Education

Disability scholars argue that the approaches of the medical model have influenced practices in education (Fisher & Goodley, 2007; Goodley, 2018; Lalvani, 2015b). An example is the field of special education. Special education as a field emerged in the 1960s to 1970s and was mainly influenced by behavioural and developmental psychology and other approaches to medicine (Freedman, 2016). Special education had connections with the medical model of understanding disability because of its focus on diagnosing or labelling and promoting remediation practices for disability (Freedman, 2016). Accordingly, the field of special education, where disability is viewed as a matter of individual deficits that can be fixed through special education interventions, is derived from the scientific knowledge of development and behavioural psychology that draws on the medical model. From this perspective, disability is characterised as a problem or deficit found in some students, not others (Freedman, 2016).

Scholars note that the medical conceptualisation of disability in the ECE context can influence teachers' expectations and attitudes toward disabled children (Jenson, 2018; MacArthur, 2009; Purdue, 2006). In her theoretical paper on disability and inclusion discourses in ECE, Jenson (2018) argues that when the medical understanding of disability influences ECE teachers and other education practitioners, they may negatively judge children's abilities to perform classroom activities. She contends that ECE teachers and other practitioners who are influenced by the medical model see disability as a problem arising from children's impairments rather than the barriers in their ECE settings. Hence, the focus of education is on remediating impairments to make the children 'normal' (MacArthur, 2009). education is on remediating impairments to make the children 'normal' (MacArthur, 2009). In New Zealand, Purdue's (2004) study used a case study approach to explore exclusion and inclusion in three ECE settings and found that a major barrier facing disabled children and their families in accessing ECE involved the belief system of special education and lack of resources. Within the frame of special education, adults describe children with disabilities as different, needing a special curriculum and taking teachers' time and attention away from non-disabled children in classrooms (see also Purdue, 2009). This study provides further insights into how the understanding of disability and inclusion from disability studies perspectives may help early childhood teachers to progress inclusion in early childhood settings and wider communities.

The current study takes a critical stance toward perspectives of special education underpinned by medical and behavioural approaches.

The Family of Social Models of Disability

The first statement that formed the basis of the social model of disability was in the Fundamental Principles of Disability, which was written and published as a result of a discussion between two disability organisations, the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) and the Disability Alliance in the United Kingdom (Shakespeare, 2006). This document describes the disabled people-led organisations' position on disability:

> In our view, it is society which disabled physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairment, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society (UPIAS, 1975, p. 3).

To understand this conceptualisation of disability, the statement further explains:

> To understand this, it is necessary to grasp the distinction between the physical impairment and the social situation, called 'disability', of people with such impairment. Thus we define impairment as lacking all or part of a limb, or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body and disability as the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation that takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities (UPIAS, 1975 as cited in Oliver, 1996, p. 22).

As highlighted in the above quote, it is important to note that these organisations were using this approach with a focus on physical disability and within the context of lived experiences of people with physical disabilities largely within the UK context.

The UPIAS's conceptualisation was further advanced by Mark Oliver, a physically disabled academic from the UK. Oliver (1990) coined the term 'social creationist' to describe the British social model of disability. The British social model of disability is informed by materialist approaches associated with social constructionism. Tom Shakespeare, a disabled academic who has engaged in analysis and theorising about disability notes that the development of the social model was a radical step in disability politics, shifting focus from disability as a medical condition that resides within the individual to issues of social injustice (Shakespeare, 2006). The social model of disability is built on the assumption that disability could be eradicated if society changed its negative attitudes toward disability. The argument is that society fails to address the cultural, ideological, environmental, and political barriers that disabled people face. Hence, disability was brought into the ‘world of politics’, and the goal became to eliminate social and economic inequalities for disabled people (Davis, 2002).

In the ECE context, the social model of disability provides a strong basis for understanding inclusion as its shifts from the individual child to the disabling environment and the role of inaccessible education contexts and teaching practices in marginalising disabled children. Jenson (2018) notes that in an ECE context influenced by the social model of disability, “a child is not automatically categorised and associated with their disability but given the opportunity to work and play alongside their peers and perhaps exceed expectations, without the weight of a label” (p. 55). The social model of disability supports the view of inclusive education that aims to remove disabling factors in an educational context (Armstrong et al., 2010; MacArthur, 2009). Disabling barriers in ECE could be negative attitudes, an inaccessible structural environment, and an inadequate adaptation of teaching pedagogy to the needs of disabled children (Thornton & Underwood, 2012).

Critiques of the Social Model

An influential critique of the social model that is important for this study is the focus of the social model of disability on physical disability and disregard for the lived experiences. The social model has been critiqued for its distinction between the ideas of ‘impairment’ and ‘disability’. This split is viewed as problematic because it presents a distinction between impairment and disability as a dichotomy/dualism in which one part (disability) is more visible and valorised, whilst it tends to leave the other part (impairment) marginalised and silent (Crow, 1996; Hughes & Paterson, 1997; Tremain, 2001; Thomas, 1999, 2007, 2010). Thomas (2010) argued that impairment experiences are important because “Impairment may also become disability through the experience of structural oppression; cultural stereotypes, attitudes, bureaucratic hierarchies, market mechanisms, and all that is pertaining to how society is structured and organized” (pp. 42-43). Owens (2014) argues that the social model excludes people with cognitive and other acquired impairments and how their impairment experiences may impact the restriction of their activity, which may not be similar to people with physical impairments. In this way, the social model disregards the diversity of impairment experiences and assumes that all disabled people experience oppression. Another critique of the social model of disability important for this study is that the lived experiences of children are not given attention in the model as it is mainly considered from an adult perspective. Scholars have critiqued the social model for its lack of attention to disabled children's experiences. The lived experiences of disabled children are important to acknowledge the diversity of children's experiences and how these experiences impact children's inclusion and learning in ECE (Connor & Stalker, 2007; Curran & Runswick-Cole, 2014; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010; Underwood et al., 2012). The debate around the absence of individual impairment experiences in the social model of disability has continued for the past three decades. The debate has led to the emergence of other models that highlight relational and bio-psycho-social understandings of disability. Moreover, these models consider the impairment experiences of disabled people and the intersection between disability and environment, culture, race, gender and other marginalised identities.

The ICF Model of Understanding Disability

A model that provides a common language among practitioners and researchers to describe disability and human functioning is the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF). ICF is built on a bio-psycho-social approach and attempts to synthesise both medical and social models of disability (WHO, 2001, 2007). ICF as a framework is used for "describing and organizing information on functioning and disability [that] provides a standard language and conceptual basis for the definition and measurement of health and disability" (Centre for Disease Control, 2015, p. 1). ICF is a framework of the United Nations social classification and provides a valuable basis for monitoring the elements of the UNCRPD (United Nations General Assembly, 2006). ICF is also considered an appropriate instrument for the formation and implementation of national and international human rights mandates (WHO, 2001).

The ICF model describes individual functioning as a dynamic interaction between health conditions and environmental factors. In the ICF, disability is described in terms of body functioning, and any limitation in body functioning that restricts a person's participation in everyday life is considered an impairment or health condition. The physical and social and environmental factors are considered barriers or facilitators for a person's functioning and are seen to impact their experiences. According to the ICF model, in interactions between a child and environmental factors, if a child faces restrictions in participating in any life activity they should be able to participate and engage in, then the problem in their bodily functioning arises. The child should then be provided with interventions to support them to achieve the maximum level of functioning and protect their right to participate in everyday life (Adolfsson et al., 2018).

However, disability scholars have been critical of the ICF model for its description of impairment as a biological problem located within the individual body (Gibson, 2016; Imrie, 2004; Mosleh, 2019). Gibson (2016) argues that language used to describe impairment as a health condition in ICF can produce the dichotomy of normal /abnormal, where the impaired body is considered biologically inferior compared to the normal body. Such projection privileges the able body as ideal, and anything that deviates from such bodily perfection is considered abnormal and in need of fixing. From Critical Disability Studies' perspectives (described later in this chapter), the ICF model reinforces the ableist ideology that describes the disabled body as lacking and 'other' compared to the able body, and these perspectives can stigmatise disabled people rather than support their rights to participate (Mosleh, 2019).

The Relational and Interactional Models

A model that retains the social and cultural understanding of disability is the Nordic relational model which had its beginning in a 1967 White paper of the Norwegian government (Tossebro, 2004). The Nordic relational model was developed to promote community participation of disabled people. The model sees disability as relational, contextual, and a mismatch between the person and the environment (Tossebro, 2004). The Nordic relational model of disability as an interaction between a person with impairment and social, economic, cultural and political barriers can be seen in the work of Thomas (2007) and the interactional model of disability of Shakespeare (2006, 2013). The work of Thomas is particularly important in developing a definition of disability that considers the effects of people's lived experiences of impairment. The Nordic relational understanding of disability that recognises the interaction of impairment and disabling barriers of social and economic arrangements in society is also reflected in the framework of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD] which notes that disability is "an evolving concept" (p. 1) and states:

> Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (United Nations General Assembly, 2006, p. 4).

The UNCRPD definition provides a relational understanding of disability as the interactions of people with impairment with various social, economic, political and cultural barriers in society and the manner in which these barriers prevent disabled people’s equal participation in society. Moreover, the Convention portrays disability as an “evolving concept”, which means there is no fixed understanding of disability. This view proposes an understanding of disability as a fluid category that can change. Thus, disability as an “evolving concept” in UNCRPD provides scope for understanding disability from interdisciplinary and multidimensional perspectives. UNCRPD delivers the platform for developing the human rights model of disability, which is currently affirmed by governments worldwide. Scholars argue that the social-relational model acknowledges the diversity of lived experience of disability and provides a deeper understanding of the barriers to disabled children's participation and its negative effects on children, which can result in their exclusion in ECE settings (MacKenzie et al., 2016; Stalker & Connor, 2007; Underwood et al., 2012). Aligning with the social-relational model of disability, this study explores how ableism might inform the dynamic of interactions between autistic children and teachers, children and the physical context of an ECE setting. The research examines how these interactions may create disabling practices for autistic children, and can lead to their exclusion. (These will be explored later in the section on ableism and disablism). Another model that is important for this study is the human rights model.

Human Rights Model

Degener (2016) notes that the human rights model provides a foundation for, and promotes the value of developing disability and inclusive education policies internationally. The human rights model also has a significant impact on disability and inclusive education policy and practices in New Zealand (MoE, 2010; Office of Disability Issues, 2016). Lawson and Beckett (2021) describe the human rights model as an approach that recognises the social, civil, educational, cultural, political, and economic rights of all people regardless of their disability and impairment. Unlike the social model of disability, the human rights model considers the impairment experiences of disabled people and puts disabled people in control of making decisions about every aspect of their lives (Degener, 2016). Moreover, the human rights model recognises the role of various identities such as culture, age, gender, race, and religion in the context of disability and their intersections (Degener, 2016). The human rights approach in ECE encourages equitable access to quality teaching and learning, and requires the active participation of disabled children in learning and social activities alongside their peers (Mathwasa & Sibanda, 2021). Moreover, the human-rights approach insists that the inclusion of disabled children in ECE settings requires the provision of suitable support to ensure equitable delivery of quality education, learning opportunities and a right to education (United Nations of General Assembly, 1998; 2006; Mathwasa & Sibanda, 2021).

Māori Views of Disability

Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand. This study is conducted in New Zealand. Therefore, it is important to consider Māori views of disability. The Māori term to describe disability is Tāngata whaikaha', which is used for two or more people with disabilities (Therese King, 2019). Tibbles (2016) notes that

> Tāngata whaikaha means people who are determined to do well, or is certainly a goal that they reach for. It fits nicely with the goals and aims of people with disabilities who are determined in some way to do well and create opportunities for themselves as opposed to being labelled, as in the past (as cited in the Ministry of Health, 2018, p. 4).

Whaikaha is also the name for the Ministry of Disabled People established on 1/July/ 2022. The Ministry was set up to transform the disability system and give voices to disabled people in line with Enabling Good Lives Principles (EGL) (Ministry of Disabled People, n.d). The EGL approach is intended to provide tāngata whaikaha (disabled people) and their whānau (extended family) greater choice, control and flexibility in terms of the support they receive and the lives they lead (Enabling Good Lives New Zealand, n.d). Moreover, the EGL approach outlines an aspiration-based personal plan for all support services. It is led by the preferences, aspirations, strengths and needs of disabled people and their families (Enabling Good Lives New Zealand, n.d).

Another umbrella term used for Māori people with disabilities is Whānau Hauā (Hickey & Wilson, 2017). Hickey and Wilson (2017) note that Whānau Hauā sees disability not as residing within a disabled individual but as a result of societal barriers. However, unlike the social model of disability, Whānau Hauā recognises the cultural values and responsibility of whānau/ family to support the individual with a disability. Furthermore, Whānua Hauā does not see disability as defining individuals and their whānau, but rather as something positioned in the background and moving in and out of focus according to situations in everyday life. Thus, Whānau Hauā is a collective endeavour of the disabled individuals and their families where they all strive to achieve changes in institutional and social barriers to disability (Hickey & Wilson, 2017).

In summary, Māori views of disability are holistic and focus on the importance of collaborative relationships and responsibilities of family members toward disabled people, which are not recognised in dominant models of understanding disability, the medical and the social model of disability (Hickey, 2015). Understanding Māori views of disability also helps to recognise other disablement factors that impact Māori experiences of disability arising from colonisation, racism, and social-economic status (Hickey, 2015).

The following section discusses disability studies and the subfield, Critical Disability Studies, which are important for understanding the concepts of disablism and ableism.

Disability Studies and Critical Disability Studies

The early work of disability studies started with examining the link between body and impairment and disability and was used to study discrimination against and exclusion of disabled people (Goodley, 2013). In line with the social-relational model of disability, scholars within disability studies reject the firm distinction between disability and impairment created by the social model of disability and argued for the impairment effects to be considered alongside disabling factors (Goodley, 2013; Thomas, 2010). Other scholars extended the scope of disability studies in the area of Critical Disability Studies (CDS), which partly developed in response to the dominance of the materialist approaches to understanding disability (Goodley, 2017). The work of a number of different CDS scholars demonstrates the breadth of critical perspectives that CDS has brought to the understanding of disability. Dolmage (2017) asserts that the field of CDS adopts "a critical approach to disability, grounded in disability rights and foregrounding the experiences and perspectives of people with disabilities, maintaining that disability is a political and cultural identity, not simply a medical condition" (p. 5). CDS scholars extend the disability studies perspectives to examine the construction of normalcy and "its discursive impact on societal responses to impairment" (Oliver & Barnes, 2012, p. 180). Some of the intersectional work under CDS which is important to understand and examine ableism relates to 'normative bodies' (Shildrick, 2009), 'compulsory able-bodiedness' (McRuer, 2006), and 'normalcy' (Davis, 1995). Within CDS, building on post-conventional theory, Shildrick (2009) refuted the division of impairment and disability and reconceptualises the body as a cultural and corporeal product. Shildrick (2009) argued that in society normative bodies are considered as biologically given and fully functional bodies, which create implicit standards for nonnormative bodies. As a result, non-normative bodies are assessed against ideals of bodily perfection. Another example of intersectional work in CDS is that of the feminist and disability theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, who used a cultural lens to understand disability. Garland-Thomson (2002) wrote:

> Disability—like gender—is a concept that pervades all aspects of culture: its structuring institutions, social identities, cultural practices, political positions, historical communities, and the shared human experience of embodiment (p. 4)

In understanding disability exclusion, Garland-Thomson (1997) referred to the term "normate" as a subject position of perfect, healthy and non-disabled that is used to interpret bodily and cognitive differences, therefore excluding people with a non-normative embodiment. Garland-Thomson's concept of 'normate' signifies disabled bodies and minds as outside and 'Other' than 'normal' embodiment, which is an important area to analyse for this study. These concepts of Garland-Thomson were taken further by Campbell's work on ableism (Goodley, 2013).

Davis (1995, 2013) also argued for the importance of shifting our gaze away from the standpoint of what is dominant and considered to be 'normal'. Davis traced the emergence of the statistical average in the twentieth-century theories of humanity, the population and psychological understandings of human development to describe how the concepts of 'norm' and 'normalcy' which came to be important for understanding disability oppression. He argued that the history of the concept of normalcy helps us understand the social and cultural construction of 'norm' and provides a legitimised way of judging bodies and minds outside that norm (Davies, 1995, 2013). Normalcy means that those who best fit into that constructed norm hold power over those who deviate from the norm (Davis, 1995, 2013). Davis (2013) used the analogy of how we have discussed race to make his argument, saying that “much work in disability has focused on disabled people as an object of study as the study of the race focused on people of colour” (p. 1). However, in recent scholarship on race, attention has shifted to white supremacy and intersectionality. Similarly, he argued that to understand ‘disability’, we must begin by examining the idea of ‘normalcy’ and practices associated with the dominant hegemony of able-bodied people. That is because “the problem is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that ‘normalcy’ is constructed to create the problem of the disabled person” (Davis, 2013, p. 1). Similarly, situating her work within CDS, Campbell (2009) argued that for understanding and theorising disability, one also needs to concentrate on what “the study of disability tells us about the production, operation and maintenance of ableism” (p. 4). The following section discusses the concept of ableism and disablism and their use in the current study.

Ableism and Disablism

Like racism and sexism, Thomas (2007) defines disablism as “a form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being” (p. 73). In Thomas's (2007) view, disablism occurs when people with impairment interact with social and cultural barriers in the environment. However, unlike the social model, disablism considers the effect of impairment as embodied differences in the functioning of body and mind from what is deemed to be ‘normal’ in society. The theorising of disablism is taken further by Goodley (2016), who defines disablism as a set of practices and experiences that “exclude, eradicate and neutralise those individuals, bodies and minds and community practices that fail to fit the capitalist imperative society” (xi). On the other hand, ableism is an ideology that prioritises hidden standards of social, cultural and political standards that promote ‘ableist normativity’ (Campbell, 2009, p. 7) or an ideology of ability that systematically diminishes disability. Instead of focussing on the negative construct of disability, “ableism makes ablebodiedness, and able-mindedness compulsory” (Dolmage, 2017, p. 7), and as a result, disability is then seen as an ‘inferior state of being’. Attending to the theorisation of the social-relational view of disability, ableism implores us to examine the prevailing social, political, and cultural conditions that privilege ability as a marker of human accomplishment and progression

(Goodley, 2017). Ableism is more in line with terms such as whiteness and patriarchy (Mallet & Runswick-Cole, 2014).

A consequence of ableism is disablism. In studying disability discrimination, the terms ableism and disablism can be co-constructed and interwoven. It is impossible to theorise disablism and examine disablist practices without interrogating ableism (Goodley, 2016, 2018). Thus, understanding the link between ableism and disablism is important for this study to challenge the ways in which autistic children are marginalised in the ECE context. For example, ableism can be seen in the system of beliefs, interactions and ideologies in policies that underpin the understanding of ability and normalcy, and may result in disablism. Disablism can be seen in ECE practices that signify the barriers to autistic children's participation because their embodied differences do not meet the idea of 'normal embodiment'. Campbell (2019) defined normal embodiment as an understanding of the "normal mind, the pace and tenor of thinking and kinds of emotions that are suitable to express" (p. 13). The manner in which this idea of normal embodiment produces autistic children as 'others' in the ECE context is foundational for this study.

Critical Ableism Studies as an Conceptual Tool for this Study

The current study draws on Fiona Kumari Campbell's (2001, 2008, 2009, 2012; 2013, 2018, 2019) work on ableism which has been revolutionary in disability studies. Campbell (2001) brings together knowledge of politics, culture, and law to define ableism as:

> a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human (p. 44).

Drawing from Campbell's work, I understand that ableism is sustained in beliefs, practices and environments that privilege and show preferences for able-bodied ways of being, thereby producing disability as 'other' and 'deviant'. In this way, ableism in ECE can inform everyday processes and practices of teaching and learning that value and express ability and ableness as an essential characteristic of a valued and productive learner. As a result, disabled learners are seen as an inferior and in an undesirable state of being in an educational context. However, the idea of ability and ableism is not static and is shaped by the social, cultural, and political contexts of particular circumstances. Broadly, Campbell's (2009) conceptual understanding of ableism is based on two elements: 1) the notion of the 'normal' individual and what is considered as fully human, and 2) the constitutional divide between normal/fully human and not normal or not fully human. The following section unpacks these two components of ableism.

The Notion of the 'Normal' Individual

The idea of normal is central to the concept of ableism. Campbell (2009) notes that disability continues to "secure the performative enactment of the normal" (p. 12). She writes that:

> An ableist imaginary tells us what a healthy body means – a normal mind, the pace and tenor of thinking and the kinds of emotions and affect that are suitable to express. Of course, these 'fictional' characteristics of corporeality are promoted as an ideal, conditioned and contoured by time and place (Campbell, 2019, p. 147).

Ableism denotes the meaning of 'norm' or 'corporeal standard', which arguably neglects the body's conceptualisation that falls outside that 'norm' (Campbell, 2009). In this way, the notion of the normal individual always creates the idea of the 'abnormal' person who lapses into deficiency (Campbell, 2018). The idea of a normal individual is important for understanding disability and how disabled people are treated. The history of conceptualisation of the term 'normal' started with the term 'average' in statistics. This term's application to human beings positioned man as an 'ideal' who possesses all the good qualities given by God (Davis, 1997). However, the enlightenment concept of the 'ideal' man was replaced with the term 'normal people' in Western culture during the 19th century (Hacking, 1999). According to Davis (1997, 2013), the concept 'norm' or 'normal' implies that most people have the same characteristics; therefore, they should be part of the 'norm'. Davis (1997, 2013) describes how the concept of 'normal' was historically articulated through the standard bell-shaped curve; the majority of the population falls within the middle of the curve, representing the norm, while those who are marginal fall within either side of the curve. The tail of the curve represents the people who are outside the 'norm'. Disabled people are represented at the tail of the curve as those who fall outside what is considered 'normal'– the majority of the population (Davies, 1997, 2013). The bell curve symbolises the "tyranny of the norm" (Davis, 2013, p. 3).

Measuring children in relation to the norm enabled children to be classified, divided and ordered into binary categories of ‘disabled’ and ‘normal’ (Tremain, 2005). This classification was noted by key authors who used statistical analysis to assess the individual’s level of intelligence (IQ) (Gould, 1996; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). The work of Alfred Binet was influential in the field of statistical analysis to asses intelligence which was first translated into English by Goddard (1908). Gould (1996) notes that Binet’s work was important in developing tests of intelligence and reasoning to classify children with special educational needs. However, Gould (1996) argues that Binet was concerned that the results of his intelligence test could also become a reason for excluding disabled children from the mainstem education setting. In the current era, the bell curve is used widely in the field of psychology in measuring children’s intelligence and diagnostic processes for identifying disabilities (WHO, 2011). However, scholars note that the process of categorisation that values a particular way of being and body (the normal) can have implications for how children are treated and educated (Gibson, 2016; Hacking, 2002; Mosleh & Gibson, 2022; Vale & Connor, 2011). Accordingly, defining the concept of ‘normal’ leads to the second element of ableism.

The Constitutional Divide between Normal/Fully Human and not Normal

Campbell (2013) describes “constitutions are related to the structure or attributes of an entity which shapes a characterisation” (p. 9). Ableism elevates with the interests of the dominant group (majority population) that places abled-bodied people in power positions, thereby creating a social difference. An effect of ableism is that when the ideology of ability and ableism gets embedded into society's social, cultural, and institutional consciousness, one group's dominance over the other seems acceptable and an unquestioned ideal. Ableism is evident when the social relations, order and structures serve the interests of and are maintained by those who can pass the ‘norm’. Thus, those who best fit the perceived ‘norm’ sustain power over those who deviate from the ‘norm’. In this way, the ‘norm’ reinforces the tendency to remediate the differences of those who deviate from the ‘norm’. Accordingly, creating and maintaining a constitutional divide between ‘normal’ and ‘disabled’, “ableism assists in the government of disability ensuring that populations that appear dis-ordered become ordered, mapped and distinct” (Campbell, 2019, p. 150). Ableism as a practice in Western society demands self-improvement and the expectation is that disabled people manage their disability in order to be independent and autonomous individuals to meet the ‘norm’ of being fully human (Campbell, 2019).

Ableism could be seen in the educational context through policies, ideologies and beliefs that value the ‘normalcy’ of ableness and marginalise those who are perceived as different (Annamma et al., 2013; Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020). Thus, understanding how ableism reinforces the norm of ‘ableness’ in ECE policy and practice requires understanding and critiquing the idea of ‘typical’ or ‘normal’ child development underpinning the disciplinary knowledge of developmental psychology and special education (Love & Beneke, 2021; Mosleh & Gibson, 2022). The discourse of developmental psychology provides an empirical ground to understand the ‘normal’ child, therefore providing justification for categorising children’s bodies as ‘normal’ and ‘disabled’. Furthermore, special education practices reinforce the deficit view of disability by labelling children and ensuring that children who fall outside the developmental norms are remediated to be like their able-bodied counterparts. These ideas will be further explored in Chapter Three. The following section discusses DSE as a theoretical framework for this study.

Disability Studies in Education

Slee et al. (2019) argued that “disability studies in education emerged from a long and sadly continuing resistance against the oppression of children and young people with disabilities in and through education” (p. 2). The longstanding discrimination against disabled children can be found in perspectives and practices of special education. Within traditional special education beliefs, disabled children are identified as “uneducable” and different in their ‘bodies’ and ‘minds’ whom special education experts should teach outside the regular school settings (Slee et al., 2019). With the introduction of the social model of disability in 1990, special education scholars in Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the United States started focussing on the social and political problems that disabled people encounter in their everyday lives. This focus shifted disability research from special education to disability studies’ perspectives and critical theory methodology. Also, in 1999, thirty disability scholars worldwide gathered for The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH) conference to develop alternative perspectives to scientific knowledge of special education practices in education. The scholars shared different visions of theorising disability and experiences of disabled people from various social theories and approaches. The conference resulted in a new interest group called Disability Studies in Education (Baglieri et al., 2011b).

DSE emerged as an alternative perspective to the special education practices of labelling and segregation of children in schools (Freedman, 2016). DSE scholars argued that the knowledge base of special education and its associated practices is problematic for inclusive education practices as this thinking created a restrictive learning environment for disabled children (Connor et al., 2008; Freedman, 2016; Slee et al., 2019). However, Slee et al. (2019) argued that the exclusion of disabled children is not solely the outcome of special education practices but involves co-dependence between special and regular schooling. This relationship has been strengthened over the years through the special education practices of identifying and managing children’s differences to accommodate disabled children in regular schools. An example of this can be seen in the current discourse of inclusion which seems to support the political rights of disabled children to equitable education while continuing with the special education practices of identification and remediation of disability.

Like Critical Disability Studies, DSE is not underpinned by any single theoretical framework. Underpinning DSE are theories that inform a particular concern about the oppression of disabled children in and through education (Taylor, 2008). Acknowledging the critiques of the social model of disability and drawing from the interdisciplinary field of Critical Disability Studies, DSE has adopted diverse perspectives that aim to develop actions and practices to improve the lives of disabled people (Slee et al., 2019).

The diversity of approaches underpinning DSE does not impede the existence of key themes that recognise that “disability is a social phenomenon” (Taylor, 2008, p. xiii) that is manifested in interactions between the social context and different bodies and minds (Baglieri et al., 2011b). The perspective is that “disability is best understood by listening to disabled people tell about their lives, and giving attention to how different factors in contexts shape an individual’s experience of disability” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 245). Accordingly, DSE rejects the understanding of disability as an individual deficit that needs fixing and reconceptualises disability as a social, cultural, political, material and historical phenomenon, enabling a view of disability as a difference and part of human experiences rather than as a medical problem (Ferri & Connor, 2005).

Disability Studies in Education and Inclusive Education

Theoretically significant for this study is the link between DSE and inclusion. Many disability scholars have recognised the importance of DSE perspectives in understanding inclusion. Morton (2014) notes that DSE provides a valuable framework to understand inclusion by identifying and resisting exclusionary practices and developing inclusive practices in policy and teaching resources to make inclusion more sustainable. DSE “provides new spaces in which to manoeuvre, re-framing theory, reflecting on and (potentially) shifting [inclusive] practice in classrooms, schools, and national policies and guidelines” (Morton et al., 2021, p. 1).

Conceptually, inclusive education from the DSE perspective is aligned with a social justice education agenda, which strives toward creating a society in which all children have equitable access to meaningful learning, a feeling of belonging and equal distribution of educational resources (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). Therefore, DSE scholars aim to promote social justice, and equitable and inclusive education opportunities for disabled children in all aspects of life. In practice, “a DSE perspective sees the educational environment, as opposed to students with disabilities, as the "problem" and calls for a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach to education or the design of instructional materials and activities that allows the learning goals to be achievable by individuals with wide differences in their abilities and backgrounds” (Wilson, 2017, p. 1). Unlike traditional special education approaches that focus on the individual child, UDL focuses on modifying the learning environment, infrastructure, and teaching curriculum to reduce barriers to ensure that all children's learning needs are met (Rose et al., 2006).

The conceptual understanding of DSE and the practical implications are also discussed by Connor et al. (2008). They note that inclusive education from the DSE perspective sees disability as identity, part of human diversity and a multicultural curriculum that recognises the experiences of disabled people and promotes their contribution to education activities. Thus, research using DSE perspectives should identify and encourage the lived experiences of disabled people and their families. DSE also adopts a critical stance toward research methodologies that objectify and marginalise disabled people. Therefore, DSE supports research that focuses on social, political, and cultural understandings of disability and unpacks the medical and special education perspectives of disability in policy, law and education settings (Connor et al., 2008).

Studying Ableism through a Disability Studies in Education Lens

Disability scholars have used the DSE framework to analyse the processes and practices of ableism in education (Annamma et al., 2013; Baglieri et al., 2011a; Bacon & Baglieri, 2021; Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020). DSE scholars note that DSE perspectives demand that researchers are critical of assumptions and practices that privilege able-bodied children in schools (Kafer, 2013; McRuer, 2006). Baglieri et al. (2011a) believed that the project of DSE demands that scholars "turn the tables on the enforcement of normalcy to expose the pathology of pathologising school children" (p. 2141). Similarly, another DSE scholar, Barton (2000), pointed out that "inclusive education is not only about the rights of disabled children, [but it is] part of a wider critique of that which constitutes itself as normal" (p. 11). From a DSE viewpoint, if we do not acknowledge the existence of ableist assumptions and privileges, we continue to focus on the marginalisation of disabled children and leave the centre of that marginalisation, the construct of 'normal' unattended (Baglieri et al., 2011a). Revealing the construct of 'normal' is important for this study in exploring ableism and examining the reasons why and how autistic children are positioned as 'others' in ECE policies and practices.

Disability scholars note that DSE provides a valuable lens for teachers and education practitioners to question the practices that perpetuate the 'myth' of normal children, providing opportunities to critically reflect on their teaching practices (Baglieri et al., 2011a). Likewise, Ferri and Bacon (2011) highlight the importance of DSE in ECE. These scholars argued that DSE allows teachers to rethink the constructs of normalcy, thus challenging ableism and creating spaces for students to do the same (Ferri & Bacon, 2011). In this regard, DSE provides a commitment to undoing the damage caused to disabled children by ableist discourses and practices that prevent equitable education opportunities in schools and society (Annamma et al., 2013; Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Brantlinger, 2009; Valle & Connor, 2011).

DSE provides a critical framework for disrupting ideas of 'normal' in education and could work towards subverting ableist values in society. Accordingly, inclusive education from the DSE lens suggests the transformation of curriculum, pedagogy, physical environment, and practices in ECE settings to ensure that differences of all children are recognised and valued. Therefore, DSE is a valuable framework for this study to examine and question the discourses of ableism that are used to measure ‘bodies’ and ‘minds’ which fall outside the norm. Concurring with and situating this research within the framework of DSE and using ableism as an analytical lens, I examine ableist discourses that privilege ‘able-bodiedness’ and ‘able-mindedness’ in ECE policies, and beliefs of teachers and interactions within an ECE setting. This study also examines how this system of ideologies, beliefs and interactions inform disablist practices for autistic children.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed how I adopted social constructionism as a research paradigm to understand disability as a social and relational concept. Therefore, I took a critical stance toward the positivist paradigm underlying medical and special education perspectives of understanding disability. The chapter has discussed different models of disability, mainly the medical and social, and how these models has potential to shape ECE practices. The medical model characterises a child with a disability by physical and psychological differences and does not recognise how barriers in society and educational context disable children. The social model of disability has shifted the focus from the individual child to identifying and removing social, structural and attitudinal barriers in society and the education context.

However, the social model of disability has been critiqued for not considering the experiences of disabled children and their different needs (Connors & Stalker, 2007). Underwood et al. (2012) argue that to achieve full inclusion, the impairment experiences need to be considered alongside societal barriers to ensure children's learning needs are met. In this regard, the relational model plays an essential role in defining disability as an interaction between people with impairment and disabling barriers in society. The relational understanding of disability is adopted in this study and is central to the work of disability studies and international policy and legislation on disability (Goodley, 2016; Thomas, 2007).

Furthermore, the approaches of Disability Studies and Critical Disability Studies (CDS) are discussed to understand the theoretical concepts of disablism and ableism. An exposition of what ableism is and how it is used as a key analytical tool for this study is discussed. Finally, Disability Studies in Education (DSE) as a theoretical framework for this study is discussed.

Embedded within CDS perspectives, DSE is regarded as a valuable framework to explore and dismantle the practices of ableism and support changes in the education context and teaching curriculum to include all children. The following chapter discusses the literature review conducted as a part of this research investigation.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

Chapter Overview

This study explores whether and how ableism operates in key ECE policies and practices, and its impact on the inclusion of autistic children. I also examine how disability awareness and critical reflection on their practices can help teachers to resist ableism and promote inclusion for all. In order to locate this research investigation in the context of existing research, this literature review critically engages with the research on ECE and ableism. This literature review has two key strands. Firstly, the chapter critiques the individualistic approaches underlying the discourses of developmental psychology, special education, and the medical discourse of disability in relation to how they frame the notion of the 'normal' child. The perception of the 'normal' child is central to the concept of ableism, which expects autistic children to comply with the expectations related to 'normal' children, therefore stigmatising and devaluing children's different ways of being. In addition to reviewing these pervasive narratives of normality, I review the critical theoretical paradigms within childhood and disability studies that have critiqued the idea of the 'normal' child and suggest alternative perspectives for understanding childhood, disability and inclusive education.

Search Methodology

To identify research at the intersection of ableism and ECE, I undertook a literature search from June 2018 to January 2019. Subsequently, I undertook a further literature search in the period from November 2020 to December 2021. The following databases were used to search literature: ERIC, PubMed, J Stor, Taylor & Francis (e-journal), Sage Journal, NZCER, ProQuest Central, PsycInfo and Google Scholar. The key terms used in full and truncations were: ableism, normalcy, disability studies, ableism in ECE or preschool or early years and school, autism and/or children with ASD, autism and ableism, inclusive education, early childhood education, experiences of families with autistic children/children with ASD and disabilities, critiques of developmental psychology, special education, neoliberalism and ableism. The criteria for selecting the literature included: a) theoretical and empirically-based peer-reviewed journal articles and published books and book chapters, PhD theses and government policy documents, b) publications that used one or more key terms, and c) publications between 1999 and 2021. This timeframe was selected because Disability Studies in Education as a mode of inquiry to critique special education practices was introduced in 1999, critiques of developmental psychology were emerging (Burman, 2008; Rose, 1999), and discussion on ableism in disability studies (Campbell, 2001; 2003 & 2009) and critiques of ableism (Baker, 2002; Hehir, 2002, 2007) in education were more evident.

The initial literature search yielded 60 peer-reviewed articles, 10 Masters and PhD theses, and 25 book chapters. The abstract of each publication was reviewed to decide if it fitted the selection criteria. When an abstract did not contain sufficient information to make a decision about selection, the entire article was reviewed. However, a survey of the first selection of literature resulted in very few publications discussing ableism in ECE in New Zealand and internationally (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013; Lyons, 2013). Consequently, I broadened my selection criteria to include material with themes including terms: critiques of developmental psychology, special education, normalcy, and neoliberalism in inclusive education research in ECE and school (a search conducted between November 2020 and December 2021). The follow-up literature search resulted in 27 peer-reviewed articles, six book chapters, one book and one PhD thesis. The literature from the follow-up search was also refined to select material that closely aligned with the selection criteria and was pertinent to the research topic. After refinement, the initial and follow-up literature search resulted in 50 peer-reviewed articles, eight book chapters, three books, two PhD theses and five government documents which are all included in this literature review.

This review of literature is organised according to the themes that emerged from my reading which are related to: 1) critiques of development psychology and special education discourses and the construction of the ‘normal’ child, 2) critical paradigms in disability and childhood studies, 3) inclusive education and ECE for young autistic children, 4) understanding family experiences of inclusive education for their disabled children, and 5) ableism in ECE.

The Construction of the ‘Normal’ Child in ECE

The previous chapter (Chapter Two) discussed the theoretical understanding of ableism underpinning this study. This section reviews literature in ECE and disability studies that engages with and critiques the discourse of developmental psychology for its description of the ‘normal’ child, and explores how this discourse has shaped practices of inequality for disabled children. Furthermore, I review literature that examines how the construction of the 'normal' child is extended through the special education discourse.

The Discourse of Developmental Psychology

The literature that critiques the discourse of developmental psychology highlights the pervasive influence of the concept of normalcy in this discipline. The notion of normalcy conceptualises an 'abnormal' person as deficient if they are perceived to be functioning outside the boundaries of the 'normal' person (Campbell, 2009). To understand the ways in which the notion of normalcy operates and informs ableist beliefs in ECE, this section analyses literature that critiques how developmental psychology constructs the hegemonic notion of the 'normal' child and marginalises disabled children. Disability scholars argue that the idea of a 'normal' child is at the root of exclusionary practices in education (Baker, 2002; Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Baglieri et al., 2011a; Cologon, 2014; Goodley et al., 2016; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010; Watson, 2017).

There are a number of key works that have critiqued discourses of childhood that have their roots in developmental psychology. A seminal work in understanding the history of the discourse of the 'normal' child is by Rose (1999). Rose (1999) employs several illustrations, charts, photographs and scales to demonstrate how the child became the central focus of psychiatry's normalising gaze in the twentieth century. Drawing from Foucault's work, Rose (1999) notes that developmental psychology is taken as truth, a natural and given phenomenon that provides an empirical account of 'normal' developmental milestones, representing how children's bodies should be at a given age and stage (Rose, 1999). Rose (1999) argues that the emergence of developmental psychology as a category of inquiry represents positivistic accounts of 'normal' and 'abnormal' child development. He wrote that:

> A developmental norm is a standard based upon average abilities or performances of children of a certain age on a particular task or a specified activity. It thus, not only represents a picture of what [is] normal for children of such an age but also enables the normality of any child to be assessed by comparison with this norm (Rose, 1999, p. 145).

Likewise, also influenced by Foucault's work, other scholars have been critical of the homogeneous view of childhood within the discourse of developmental psychology and its impact on children's lives (Antonsen, 2019; Cohen, 2008; Gunn, 2019; MacNaughton, 2005). In Australia, MacNaughton (2005) argues that developmental psychology, established as truth in ECE, informs teachers' pedagogies and perpetuates practices of inequality. MacNaughton (2005) contends that the truth about developmental psychology is established in official ECE government regulations and curriculum documents internationally, and that these provide guidelines about what are considered to be "desirable ways to think, act and feel in, for instance, early childhood institutions" (p. 32). MacNaughton (2005) suggests that using the poststructuralist perspectives of Foucault can provide ECE teachers with opportunities to critically reflect on developmental psychology and how it perpetuates injustice and inequality in their everyday teaching. Similarly, highlighting the importance of Foucault's discourse analysis in ECE to resist social injustice, Gunn (2019) reflects on her journey as an ECE teacher in New Zealand and how the discourse of developmental psychology informed her practices. Gunn (2019) notes that as a teacher, she used to draw on the discourse of developmental psychology to compare children against norms of development and make pedagogical decisions to help children meet the so-called 'normal' developmental milestones. Moreover, she notes that the discourses of developmental psychology and medicine informed her understanding of heterosexuality as 'normal', and her beliefs and thoughts about children's sexual development in the early years. However, she argues that the critique of developmental psychology and the development of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996, 2017) shifted attention from an individualist model of development psychology toward the social and cultural nature of human development and a holistic view of children in ECE in New Zealand.

Other critiques of developmental psychology focus on the links it makes to productive adulthood. This is a focus of Leonard (2016) in her review paper on psychological and sociological approaches to child development. She argues that one of the important aims of developmental psychology is to understand the processes of developmental changes with age, which involves documenting children's age-based competencies to provide a passage toward capable and productive adulthood. Thus, adulthood is seen as an end period of childhood and adolescence, and if the child has not yet reached adulthood, they are considered as "not a fully developed, incomplete, not fully human being, who is required to go through the processes of intervention to learn and internalise how to become a productive and competent adult" (p. 15). Leonard's (2016) work suggests that the developmental psychology description of progression toward adulthood needs to be questioned, as it sees child development as essentially biological in nature, disregarding the role of the social and cultural context in which child development takes place. Furthermore, in the developmental psychology discourse, children's cognitive abilities are linked to a set of stages that provide a benchmark to determine whether the child is developing normally. Children who do not meet developmental milestones are considered incompetent and as requiring intervention to progress toward productive adult citizenship (Leonard, 2016).

In a similar vein to Leonard, a link between the discourse of developmental psychology and productive adult citizenship is critiqued by Burman (2008, 2017). Within critical psychology, Burman's (2008, 2017) work has been influential in critiquing the field of developmental psychology. One of the central themes of her recent work focuses on how the normative understanding of developmental psychology, that describes individual development in terms of child development, informs international and national social development policies (Burman, 2017). She called this theme "new developmental psychologies that connect economic and political models of development with psychological ones" (p. vii), forging an "explicit connection between the individual, national and international economic development policies" (p. viii). Echoing Leonard (2016), Burman (2017) argues that the discourse of developmental psychology in social policies fantasises the neoliberal agenda of productive workers and future citizens that contribute to the country's economic success. This adult-normative model establishes the norms, and when measured against this model, the non-normative child is pathologised. Burman (2017) contends that the notion of linear development in developmental psychology reflects the developmental trajectory that does not reflect lived experiences of children, assumes children as homogenous objects, and negates the interactions of children's lives and their different identities. Thus, Burman (2008) urges us to move from the myth of the normal child and its individualist approaches to radical constructionism that studies "not only the child but also the context that produces her" (p. 9)

Disability theorists have also critiqued the understanding of the 'normal' child that underpins the developmental discourse and argued that it produces oppressive practices related to disability in ECE (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010; Watson, 2017). In Australia, informed by Foucault's theory and using ethnography as a method, Watson's (2017) research explored how the construction of the 'normal' child disrupted the process and practices of inclusion in three ECE classrooms. Watson's (2017) study provided various examples of how developmental psychology, among other discourses (medical, special education, discipline, play), shapes the subjectivities of disabled children in ECE. In her observations, she found examples of non-disabled children adopting the developmental discourse when they positioned themselves as bigger, more mature, and knowledgeable about the classroom rules and positioned their disabled peers as younger children, who do not follow the classroom rules, and are in need of special education support. Watson (2017) argued that the positioning of disabled children as 'other' and in need of special education can constrain their inclusion as their participation depends on conforming to the idea of the 'normal' child. In this way, the participation of the 'normal' children remains unquestioned, and the diagnostic labelling of disabled children continues to limit relationships and participation within ECE settings.

Another critical perspective on the notion of normal development relates to the role of play. Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2010) critically reflected on the link between children's play and their 'normal' development. They argued that this connection assumes that only 'normal' children play for intrinsic value while disabled children play as a means of therapeutic intervention and meeting developmental growth. However, the authors recognised that childhood studies play an important role in critiquing the view of play as a means of intervention in developmental psychology and supporting the idea of play as having 'intrinsic value' for all children (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010). Moreover, Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2010) highlighted the importance of work by Burman (2008) and other critical psychologists in deconstructing the discourse of developmental psychology. They noted that Walkerdine (1993) and Burman (2008) critique the discourse of developmental psychology for the myth of the 'normal ' child which produces an atypical developing child as deficient and problematic. Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2010) argued that the work of these critical psychologists "requires us to think critically about the constitution of bodies, activities, institutions and communities" (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010, p. 509). In this regard, deconstructing developmental psychology provides an essential critique of the link between play, normal child development, and normalisation, providing an opportunity to understand disabled children's play experiences in ECE research and practice (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010). Supported by this literature, I am critical of the narrowly defined understanding of 'normal' within the developmental discourse and how that understanding does not consider physical and cognitive differences in children. This discourse also does not consider the context in which learning takes place. In a sociocultural view, learning is described as developing through “responsive and reciprocal relationships with people places and things” over time (MoE, 2017, p. 21). To sum up, the literature in this section discussed how the discourse of developmental psychology has been used to narrowly frame and assess ‘normalcy’ and the resultant practice that has stemmed from this has used a deficit approach. Similarly, views about normalcy and deficit framing are found in the discourse of special education, critiqued in the next section.

The Discourse of Special Education

Campbell (2009) notes that “a chief feature of an ableist viewpoint is a belief that impairment (irrespective of ‘type’) is inherently negative which should, if the opportunity presents itself, be ameliorated, cured or indeed eliminated” (pp. 153-154). Echoing this view, disability scholars note that ableism in education can be maintained through special education practices of identifying and remediating the differences of disabled children (Baker, 2002; Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Ferri & Bacon, 2011; Hehir, 2007). In their theoretical paper on understanding the implications of Disability Studies in Education for ECE, Ferri and Bacon (2011) argue that ideas of the ‘normal’ and ‘normalcy’ are embedded in the special education discourse. They note that ableism is linked to the special education discourse when children who do not conform to the norm of developmental psychology are seen as ‘at-risk’ and having special educational needs.

An example of how the discourse of special education reinforces the othering of disabled children can be seen in Macartney’s research. In New Zealand, Macartney's (2011) qualitative study explored the inclusion and exclusion experiences in ECE of two families of disabled children. Drawing from Disability Studies in Education and employing Foucauldian discourse analysis, Macartney’s study provided an example of how developmental psychology, special education and medical discourses interacted with the experiences of two families who had disabled children. Macartney (2011) noted that the special education discourse placed teachers’ attention on the deficits of Maggie-Rose (disabled child) whom they suggested required intervention and support from special education professionals to remediate her (Maggie-Rose’s) differences to fit into the normal ways of being and learning in the education context. Macartney (2011) argued that focusing on Maggie Rose’s deficits represents a view of Maggie Rose as a passive learner who can be shaped to fit into the normal expectations of development and behaviour. Furthermore, such a view disregards Maggie Rose’s experiences, abilities and identity as a disabled learner and active participant in her ECE setting. The dehumanising effect of the special education discourse on disabled children is also found in Watson’s (2017) research. This qualitative study explored the construction of ‘normal’ in ECE classrooms in Australia. The study findings suggested that the discourse of the ‘normal’ child is upheld by the special education discourse, which produces disabled children as ‘other’ who require support from special education professionals. In her observations of interactions between teachers, non-disabled and disabled children, Watson (2017) observed that the special education discourse informs language used by teachers to describe disabled children in terms of the severity of their impairments and their need for specialist equipment and constant supervision (Watson, 2017).

To sum up, the discourses of developmental psychology and special education will be considered throughout this literature review as they can help to understand the construction of ‘ableism’ in ECE and how it impacts the inclusion of autistic children. The following section discusses critical perspectives within childhood and disability studies that suggest alternative views for understanding children’s development and disability in ECE.

Alternative Perspectives and Critical Paradigms

This section presents the critical paradigms that were evident in the literature reviewed and relevant to this study. These paradigms are central to the work of childhood and disability studies researchers and are important for challenging the exclusionary impacts of ableism and suggesting inclusive practices. I first outline the important literature in childhood studies that critiques the discourse of developmental psychology and its description of the normal child, thereby recognising the diversity of childhood. After that, I review literature in disability studies that suggests the importance of disability studies’ perspectives in ECE in valuing disabled children’s childhood experiences, understanding and reflecting on the constructs of ‘normalcy’ and ‘ableism’, and removing barriers to inclusive education.

Sociology of Childhood or Childhood Studies

Childhood studies emerged from a critique of developmental psychology and its universalised and homogenous notion of childhood (James & Prout, 1997). In childhood studies, children

are represented as social actors and viewed as ‘being’, which differs from developmental psychology’s view of children as ‘becoming’ (James & Prout, 1997). The child who is viewed as ‘being’ has the ability to actively construct their childhood and has rights and views and experiences about being a child (James & Prout, 1997; James et al., 1998). Whereas, the child which is perceived as ‘becoming’ is seen as having the skills and features of an adult citizen whom they will become. The view of the child as ‘becoming’ is problematic as it is future-oriented and focusses on what the child will be as a future adult rather than a young human being (James & Prout, 1997; James et al., 1998).
The view of a child as becoming might also inform ableist beliefs and practices in the ECE context.

A foundational work in the sociology of childhood is James and Prout’s (1997) “*Constructing and reconstructing childhood. Contemporary issues in the sociology of childhood*”, which was first published in 1990. They have highlighted six key components of childhood studies:

> 1. The socially constructed childhood is different from a construction of the child as biologically immature. It is a contextualized interpretation of human’s early life based on societal beliefs and cultures. 2. Childhood is intertwined with other social variables in societies such as gender, class, ethnicity etc. 3. Children’s own independent perspectives must be considered while studying children and childhood. 4. Children must be viewed as active participants, not only in the construction of knowledge about them but also in construction of society as a whole. 5. Due to direct involvement of children in construction of knowledge about them, ethnography is a useful methodology for studying childhood. 6. The new paradigm of childhood sociology is to respond to the process of reconstructing childhood (pp. 8-9).

In their later work, James et al. (1998) note that in childhood studies, children are seen as social actors and active agents who have rights and expertise in articulating their experiences, rather than adults imposing their interpretation of children’s everyday experiences and lives on them. Furthermore, in childhood studies, childhood can be seen to be played out differently in different contexts, spaces and across time periods. This means that while children’s development can be shaped by historical, cultural, and social contexts, these factors can be different according to family structure, culture, education and the work environment in which children's development takes place (James et al., 1998).

Building on the earlier seminal work of James et al. (1998), Leonard (2016) critically evaluates the psychological and sociological approaches to childhood. Leonard (2016) notes that the sociology of childhood is an approach that recognises the social and cultural production of knowledge and allows the implications of interdisciplinary approaches of social sciences to capture the diversity of children's childhood which varies across time and space. Similarly, James and James (2008) argue that the study of childhood is no longer confined to the traditional knowledge of developmental psychology, which conceptualised children as a developmentally determined group of homogenous people. They note that childhood studies are engaged with the multidisciplinary fields and theoretical perspectives of social sciences, including social work, history, law, anthropology and many more. These theoretical perspectives explore the relationship between childhood and various sociocultural discourses, children's experiences, and the impact these have on children's everyday lives. Thus, the social construction of childhood critiques the developmental psychological notion of a 'normal' child, because it does not envisage children as having rights and agency, and neglects the role of social and cultural contexts on child development. By contrast, in childhood studies children are viewed holistically as competent individuals whose rights, experiences, and perspectives matter in everyday life and research. This view is consistent with the view of children in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017).

However, disability scholars argue that although the childhood studies has provided a critique of the developmental psychology discourse and its description of normal children that constructs some children as deficient and lacking, the voices and experiences of disabled children in childhood studies and research are neglected, but not absent (Curran & Runswick-Cole, 2014; Franck, 2014; Tisdall, 2012; Underwood et al., 2020). Franck (2014) questioned the notion of children as competent individuals in childhood studies. She argued that childhood studies see children as competent individuals with agency which contradicts the view of children as passive, incompetent and vulnerable. However, she argues that the idea of the child as a competent individual with agency may become limited when the voices and experiences of disabled children are not included in ECE policy, practice and research. Consequently, she suggested that a discussion on competence in ECE should be presumed as relational, not something located within an individual child but depending on the situation and context (Franck, 2014). Franck (2014) contended that childhood studies make a valuable contribution as it values the perspectives and experiences of children in research and ECE practices. Moreover, the ideas in childhood studies can benefit from the theoretical perspectives of disability studies which can help teachers, researchers and policy makers to be aware of and reflect on notions of competencies, normality, ability and disability in ECE (Franck, 2014).

Several scholars suggest the need to include disabled children's voices in childhood studies (Curran & Runswick-Cole, 2014; Tisdall, 2012). Curran and Runswick-Cole (2014) argue that the childhood of disabled children and their experiences are largely invisible within childhood studies, but not absent. When disabled children are visible, they are generally identified using deficit language, and the focus is on seeking special education and welfare support for children (Curran & Runswick- Cole, 2014). Disability theorists note that the gap in childhood studies in defining disabled children's experiences and recognising disability as a positive identity can be addressed by introducing disability studies perspectives in childhood studies (Conners & Stalker, 2007; Curran & Runswick-Cole, 2014; Eilers 2020; Franck, 2014). In line with this aim, the following section critically reviews the literature that suggests the importance of integrating disability studies' perspectives in childhood studies and ECE.

Integrating Disability Studies Perspectives in ECE

This section discusses the literature that uses critical studies in disability (see Chapter Two) as a theoretical framework to critique the dominant hegemonic framing of disability as 'not normal', and suggests alternative perspectives to reorient inclusive ECE. Drawing from the sociology of childhood and Critical Disability Studies (CDS) perspectives, Curran and Runswick-Cole (2014) developed the framework of Disabled Children's Childhood Studies' (DCCS). This framework provides an approach to supporting disabled children's childhood through understanding their experiences and critiquing the discourse of 'normal' development. Moreover, DCCS advances research provision and expects an ethical research design that considers the experiences of disabled children with those of significant others in their lives at the centre of research inquiry. Similar to Curran and Runswick-Cole, Watson (2012) brought together childhood and disability studies and developed "a new approach to the study of disability in childhood" (p. 200). The approach centred on the contributions of disabled children and considering the heterogeneity of their experiences and learning needs. The approach also encourages consideration of changes that occur in the nature of childhood over time. Thus, the approach suggests the importance of challenging ableist assumptions that produce and sustain a homogenous view of childhood. Finally, this approach emphasises the importance of disabled children's contribution and active participation in the research agenda. In my study, the focus was on exploring the beliefs, interactions and practices of teachers for understanding how ableism might impact these. In exploring this, the autistic children were active participants in the video observations. However, I have suggested that future research could extend the research methods to include disabled children as active participants in exploring their experiences of ableism (see Chapter Ten).

Other scholars have examined the implications of Critical Disability Studies (CDS) for critiquing the idea of the 'normal' child and supporting inclusion for disabled children in ECE (Eilers 2020; Goodley et al., 2016; Runswick-Cole et al., 2016). In her review paper on the distinction between CDS and inclusive ECE, Eilers (2020) pointed out the implications of CDS for ECE inclusion. Eilers (2020) noted that understanding the theoretical perspectives of CDS contributes to the field of ECE in highlighting the role of the history of child development in constructing the 'normal' child. She also suggested the need for an alliance between educators, researchers, caregivers and ECE service providers to discuss the contribution and practical implications of CDS to the promotion of inclusion in ECE. Drawing on CDS perspectives, Runswick-Cole et al. (2016) discussed the framework of critical autism studies. They noted that critical autism studies critique the assumption of normal and typical individuals that positions autistic persons as not normal and provides a view of autism as materially and discursively produced within a specific sociocultural context (Runswick-Cole et al., 2016).

Goodley et al. (2016) also draw from CDS perspectives and have developed the 'dis/human lens' to analyse and critique the dehumanising impact of the idea of the 'normal' child on disabled children. Goodley et al. (2016) argued that '[a] dis/human position means that we recognise the norm, the pragmatic and political value of claiming the norm, but we always seek to trouble the norm" (p. 5). Goodley et al. (2016) noted that to trouble the norm, we need to celebrate disability as an identity and recognise disabled children's lived experiences and that of their families. Like the dis/human lens, their article writes about other binaries like dis/development and dis/play that interrogate the idea of the ‘normal ‘child development and ‘normal’ play. Their article also advocates recognising disabled children’s development and play experiences.

Scholars have also noted the importance of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) perspectives in ECE for challenging ableism, removing barriers and supporting inclusion. DSE as a subfield of disability studies provides a framework to examine and critique the practices of ableism and provide a social justice view of inclusion where all children have equitable access to education (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Morton, 2014; Slee et al., 2019). DSE in the current study has been used as a theoretical framework to examine and critique the discourses of ableism and provide an alternative way of understanding inclusive ECE (see Chapter One). Ferri and Bacon (2011) suggested that DSE perspectives can help ECE teachers to understand and question the categories of ‘ableism’ and ‘normalcy’ and the related special education practices of categorising and remediating disability. DSE provides an alternative view of inclusion that recognises and embraces the diversity and differences of disabled children rather than their homogeneity and advocates for change in curriculum and teaching practices (Ferri & Bacon, 2011). In her theoretical paper, Ferri (2015) argued that implementing DSE perspectives is more valuable and practical than changing the bodies and minds of children, as classroom and teaching instruction can be easily modified and made more valuable for a wide range of children with diverse learning needs. A framework for implementing DSE perspectives in practice is the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Ferri, 2015). For the current study, UDL is seen as a useful framework for implementing DSE perspectives in practice as its shifts the focus from individual child impairment and special education practices towards making education contexts and teaching curriculum accessible for all learners (Rose & Meyer, 2006) (see Chapter One).

Drawing from DSE perspectives, Lalvani and Bacon’s (2018) theoretical paper further provided pedagogical suggestions for ECE teachers to critique the silence about disability and ableism in the ECE curriculum in the United States. They noted that although disability is considered a part of human diversity in ECE, there has been little acknowledgement of disability and ableism in social justice and multicultural ECE. They suggested that DSE perspectives can help teachers to dismantle ableism by recognising disability as a form of human diversity, providing the space for reflection on the construction of normalcy and teaching young children to value human differences (Lalvani & Bacon, 2018).

Similarly, Baglieri and Lalvani (2020) have synthesised DSE perspectives and critical pedagogy as a means to counter ableism. Giroux (2020) notes that critical pedagogy is informed by critical theory, which requires teachers and other education practitioners to scrutinise and interrogate the role of their own beliefs and practices in the systematic exclusion of specific individuals or groups. Baglieri and Lalvani (2020) suggest that teachers undertaking a critical inquiry about ableism need to engage in three essential components of social justice-oriented critical pedagogy: critical analysis, critical reflection, and social change. Critical analysis requires teachers to understand the taken for granted understandings and dominant discourses that perpetuate inequality for disabled children. Critical reflection extends the teachers' knowledge of how these dominant disability discourses reflect their thinking and teaching (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020). Finally, critical reflection involves teachers questioning and challenging their deficit assumptions about disability, which encourages insights and shifts in their thinking and can change their practices (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020).

Thus, DSE as a subfield of disability studies shares a similar aim to the social model of disability to remove barriers in the learning environment and the teaching curriculum to support inclusion. Moreover, building on the Nordic-relational (Tossebro, 2004) and intersectional models of disability (Shakespeare, 2006, 2013), DSE advocates for considering the impairment experiences and needs of disabled children as central in making modifications in teaching and learning contexts. Finally, DSE provides a framework for social justice and inclusive pedagogies in ECE by helping teachers to challenge ableism through understanding and critically reflecting on the dominant discourse related to normalcy and disability and how they become barriers to inclusion. In this regard, DSE perspectives not only provide a view of inclusion as 'education for all' through advocating for adaptations in teaching and education contexts but also provide knowledge to examine the constructs of ableism and normalcy in ECE that creates barriers to inclusion (Ferri & Bacon, 2011; Wilson, 2017).

To sum up, the literature in this section discussed the way disability studies contributes to childhood studies and ECE by recognising disabled children's experiences and drawing attention to structural, social and material barriers to participation, acknowledging the experiences of disabled children and inviting critical reflection to question the construct of ableism. The following section discusses the literature that critiques the deficit understanding of inclusion underlying the discourse of the 'normal' child and suggests a rights-based approach to inclusion from a disability studies perspective.

Inclusive Education in ECE

In the 21st-century, inclusion in ECE, as a model of social service, resulted from critiques of integration or special education approaches for disabled children and promoted greater recognition of the human rights of all children in legislation and policy internationally (Underwood & Parekh, 2020). Integration is not inclusion; integration is merely about placing the child in a separate or regular ECE setting without changing pedagogy, practice and classroom activities to include all children (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner [OHCHR], 2016). Internationally, a founding document that sets out the principles of inclusive education is the Salamanca Statement, which is considered universally good for all children and has reinforced government policies, teaching strategies and curricula (UNESCO, 1994). Furthermore, inclusion as a human right, that is important for positive educational outcomes and moral imperatives is given attention in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCROC] and United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD] (United Nations General Assembly, 1989, 2006). Both documents state that every child has a fundamental right to inclusive education and full and effective participation at every level of education (Cologon, 2020). Drawing from a rights-based approach, I describe an inclusive ECE setting as a place where disabled children have equal rights to participate, receive a quality education, feel empowered and belong, as well as rights of being and embracing their identity as disabled individuals.

As a signatory to conventions like the Salamanca Statement, UNCROC, and UNCRPD (UNESCO, 1994; United Nations General Assembly, 1989, 2006), New Zealand has an obligation to ensure that the rights of disabled children are being met. Moreover, the New Zealand Disability Strategy (NZDS) has been developed as a framework that outlines expectations from government, education and other agencies that New Zealand will be transformed from a disabling to an inclusive education society (Office for Disability Issues, 2001, 2016). New Zealand's binding obligation to national and international legislation to provide inclusive education is supported by *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood education curriculum (MoE, 1996, 2017). The *Te Whāriki* view of inclusive ECE encompasses inclusion for all children regardless of "gender and ethnicity, diversity of ability and learning needs, family structure and values, socio-economic status and religion" (MoE, 2017, p. 13). The authors of the curriculum expect teachers to plan an inclusive curriculum that considers the strengths, abilities, interests and needs of each child and removes barriers to children's participation and learning (MoE, 2017). Broadly, the context of ECE services for autistic and other disabled children in New Zealand is informed by *Te Whāriki* and the Ministry of Education's early intervention services.

Early Intervention and Critical Perspectives

In the current context, early intervention services are derived from various theoretical perspectives. The theoretical perspectives of developmental and behavioural psychology have a major influence on most early interventions through functional assessment and intervention services like incidental teaching, positive behaviour support, individualisation assessment and learning plans (Odom & Volery, 2003). Moreover, Odom and Volery (2003) argue that the ecological approach, Bronfenbrenner's model, has an influence on early intervention practices, which serve as the foundation for eco-behavioural assessment, where children's needs are assessed considering the influence of the classroom and home context and the broader cultural and political values. In her theoretical paper, Liberty (2014) notes that the philosophy of early intervention in New Zealand is based on a bicultural model, which involves the Western model of early intervention combined with Māori cultural understandings of well-being (Liberty, 2014; MoE, 2011). The Western model involves philosophical understandings of developmental psychology, and special education (Liberty, 2014). The influence of such philosophies can be seen in some aspects of early intervention like assessment and identification of disability and a focus on remediating the effects of disability (Liberty, 2014). Underlining these philosophies, early intervention in New Zealand is defined as "a set of services and supports delivered as early as possible to ameliorate or prevent long-term problems" (Liberty, 2014, p. 115). Māori understandings of wellbeing focus on strengthening family relationships, involving the family in the process of early intervention, recognising their cultural values, and concentrating on improving the child's wellbeing (Liberty, 2014).

Early intervention services in New Zealand are provided by the Ministry of Education and through non-for-profit organisations contracted by the Ministry. The success of early intervention services is based on the child’s assessment and subsequent referrals. The child’s assessment can be conducted through universal screening, like the B4 school check (a free health and development check) that is conducted when the child is four years of age by health care providers (Aspden et al., 2022; Liberty, 2014). The referral for early intervention services is made by teachers, parents and or health care providers. However, the referral to early intervention services cannot proceed without the parents’ approval (Liberty, 2014). Aspden et al. (2022) argue that in New Zealand, ECE teachers are the first professionals who engage with young children and observe and support their learning and development. This provides teachers with the opportunity to identify developmental delays in children and make necessary referrals for early intervention services. Therefore, teachers as professionals, who have an understanding of a child’s development, are in an ideal position to assess children’s additional needs (Aspden et al., 2022).

However, critical scholarship in ECE argues that developmental and psychological approaches to assessing children’s needs and focusing on intervention for meeting normal developmental outcomes can also reinforce deficit views of disability and be detrimental to inclusive practices (Cologon, 2014; Dalikilic & Vadeboncoeur, 2016; Underwood and Parekh, 2020; Underwood et al., 2012). Dalikilic and Vadeboncoeur (2016) examined the perspectives of six ECE teachers on inclusive education in Canada. They found that teachers' perspectives reflect the conventional view of inclusion where the discourse of ‘normal’ child development intersects with the discourse of disability. They discussed two ways in which a discourse of the ‘normal’ developing child reinforces the notion of inclusion among ECE teachers. The first is emphasising the diagnosis and label of disability. The second is decontextualising the child’s disability from the social context to something that lies within the individual child, and expecting to normalise children’s differences with interventions. Similarly, in understanding ableism and disablism in the early years, Cologon (2014) noted that one of the fundamental barriers to inclusive education is the myth of the ‘normal’ child and its emphasis on normalising disabled student differences, so they are ‘same enough’ to fit with the existing education system. Cologon (2014) argued that such ableist beliefs about inclusion persist when inclusion is synonymous with assimilation. The emphasis is not on the education setting and teaching practices but on planning interventions to normalise student differences to implement inclusion.

Recently, Underwood and Parekh (2020) pointed out the tension between theoretical approaches underpinning inclusion and early intervention discourses. The discourse of inclusion sees children as active citizens who have rights to care, education and engagement in community relationships. However, the discourse of early intervention marks the need for early identification and intervention in cases of disability so children can achieve normal development outcomes. Underwood and Parekh (2020) suggest that these discourses are critical for understanding the concepts of inclusion and social justice, and how they shape inclusive educators' understandings of childhood and differences and practices toward disabled children. In line with this, Underwood et al. (2012) argued that the real challenge in implementing inclusive education is deconstructing the "artifice" created between inclusion and early intervention discourses that derive from different perspectives, i.e., sociological approaches and medical approaches to understanding disability and inclusion. The authors suggest a reason for the tension between inclusion and early intervention discourses is that most early interventions are grounded around medical model practices and deficit-based views of the disabled learner. That the mix of different perspectives from discourses of inclusion and early intervention has resulted in vagueness about the concept of inclusive ECE in most parts of the world (Underwood et al., 2012). As an alternative, Underwood et al. (2012) pointed out the need for a critical view of inclusion derived from the implementation of Universal Design for Early Childhood Education (UDECE).

UDECE adopted the framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the field of ECE. Conn-Powers et al. (2006) in their theoretical article first applied the principles of UDL to ECE with the goal of "designing early education settings so all children, as equal and valued members of the program, may access and engage in all learning opportunities, learn from a common curriculum according to their individual strengths and abilities, and demonstrate their learning in multiple ways" (p. 4). Extending Conn-Powers et al. (2006) work Darrgah (2007) argues that UDECE underpins the theoretical framework of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). Underpinned by ecological theory, UDECE focuses on the 'inclusion of all children' by recognising the diverse needs, strengths, weaknesses and abilities of each ECE professional, family and child, and the influence of the society and culture that manifests from economic, political and educational expectations (Darrgah, 2007). Considering the contemporary approaches to inclusion in K-12, Fovet (2022) notes ecological theories help us understand the lack of fit between the individual child and the learning environment that is not fully inclusive, and how the lack of fit can impact a child's engagement, attendance and sense of belonging (Fovet, 2022). In this way, ecological theories are important in developing approaches of inclusion that shift the attention away from the individual deficits or perceived deficits of the child to the design of the learning environment and teaching pedagogies (Fovet, 2022). The Ecological Systems Theory of Uri Bronfenbrenner is also a core theoretical perspective underlying *Te Whāriki* and the curriculum view of "inclusion for all" (MoE, 2017). Accordingly, UDECE seems to fit well with the strengths-based approach of teaching and learning underlying *Te Whāriki*, the New Zealand ECE curriculum (MoE, 2017) and with concepts of inclusion that have a systemic focus.

UDECE also draws from the UDL principle of universal access, where the focus is on supporting equity for all children and families through the design of ECE programs that meet all children's needs (Darrgah, 2007). Supporting the principle of universal access, UDECE requires examination of "every aspect of early childhood practice, including curriculum, physical space, social interactions, staffing etc. with the view each should be designed from the outset with the stakeholders in mind" (Underwood et al., 2012, p. 295). The UDL principle of universal access applies the "concepts of accessibility and inclusion beyond physical environments, to design teaching and learning opportunities in ways that are varied, accessible and engaging for *all* students, including those with differing needs and/or disabilities" (Dalton et al. 2019, p. 519). In this way, UDL draws on the social model of disability that sees disability as a construct and focuses on the design of environments, products and experiences, rather than the inherent characteristics of the individual (Bunbury, 2019). UDL also underpinned the rights-based perspectives of disability. Article 2 of UNCRPD refers to the importance of universal design to support accessibility for disabled people and reduce the need for specialized accommodations. Article 2 of UNCRPD states that "Universal design means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design" (United Nations, 2006). However, "universal design shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this needed" (United Nations, 2006). UDL also supports the use of assistive technologies for children who need them to express themselves freely (see the instructional principle of multiple means of expression).

At the core of UDL, there are three instructional principles that ensure access to high-quality ECE and a flexible approach to learning design is supported. The three instructional principles of UDL are: (a) provide multiple means of engagement, (b) provide multiple means of representation, and (c) provide multiple means of action and expression (National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2014). The key concept of neuro-variability underpins these three instructional principles. The concept of neuro-variability "reminds us that learners do not have an isolated learning "style", but instead rely on many parts of the brain working together to function within a given context" (CAST, 2018, p.1). Acknowledging variability among children when designing the learning environment leads teachers to recognise and respect the strengths and diversity of children. Furthermore, considering variability among children challenges teachers to understand how the individual child's background, knowledge and experiences may impact their learning. Underpinning the neuro-variability concept, UDL instructional principles also empower children to maximise their strengths, focus on their challenges and drive the learning processes (CAST, 2018). The following discusses the three principles of UDL and how they relate to *Te Whāriki.*

The first principle of multiple means of engagement encourages teachers to look for different ways to engage and motivate children in learning to support their development of autonomy, empowerment and accomplishment (CAST, 2021). The principle of engagement encourages teachers to provide different levels of challenges, repetition and scaffolding to maintain the motivation needed for optimal learning (CAST, 2021). There are various factors that can impact the way children engage with learning including diversity of culture, subjectivity, background knowledge, language, abilities and disabilities (CAST, 2021). For example, engagement with children of different cultures requires teachers to look at how children's cultural beliefs impact the ways children interact and engage with their environment. The ECE environment that reflects the cultural beliefs and traditions familiar to each child builds children's sense of belonging and positive cultural identity (Brillante & Nemeth, 2017). The principle of multiple means of engagement aligns with the *Te Whāriki* view of an inclusive curriculum for all learners. The curriculum states that children's strong sense of belonging is supported when their interests, cultures, languages, age, gender and abilities are valued and respected.

UDL also encourages teachers to understand how children's abilities and disabilities impact their engagement with their peers, learning materials and classroom environment. For disabled children, teachers should reflect on what changes to the learning spaces, materials and instructions can be made to enable the child to attend and engage in learning and social activities. There are different ways ECE teachers can motivate children and their interest in activities using this principle. For example, allowing children to participate in the design of classroom activities, involving children in setting their learning goals, and providing a safe space for children by identifying and reducing potential threats, barriers and distractions in their ECE settings. Following the principle of multiple means of engagement, teachers would provide children with flexible resources and play materials that children require to complete tasks and optimise challenges (CAST, 2021).

The second principle of multiple means of representation argues that learners differ in the ways they perceive and comprehend information that is presented to them (CAST, 2021). This principle means the ECE programme should plan its teaching materials, and play spaces in a flexible way to engage and connect the child to the information presented (Darragh, 2007). For example, children with sensory, physical and language disabilities may require different methods of comprehending the learning content (Darragh, 2007). Teachers should display information to children using varied perceptual features such as visual, auditory and tactile formats. For example, providing non-visual alternatives like providing spoken descriptions for written content, and other modes that children with visual impairments can access (CAST, 2021).

The principle of multiple means of representation also implies that differences in children's ways of processing information can be informed by their prior knowledge and experiences. It ensures that the learning opportunities and teaching instructions should reflect a variety of formats and levels of complexity addressing the variety of needs and abilities of children (CAST, 2021). *Te Whāriki* also expects teachers to adapt their teaching and learning environment considering individual child interests, needs and strengths that enable the individual child to experience meaningful and inclusive learning with and alongside their peers (MoE, 2017). Through building a meaningful and reciprocal relationship with parents and families of children, teachers can have insights into children's interests, prior knowledge and experiences (MoE, 2017), which are important to present the information in multiple ways. In essence, the UDL principle of multiple means of representation can strengthen the inclusive practice in relation to *Te Whāriki* by providing teachers with practical examples, strategies, materials and equipment required to present information to learners in multiple modes.

The third principle of multiple means of action and expression refers to different ways and formats in which children can express themselves and navigate their learning environment (CAST, 2021). For example, children who have communication disabilities may be able to express themselves well in written text. The principle of expression consists of two key aspects- providing children with multiple ways to express themselves including gestures, verbal language, dance, songs so on and understanding different ways children respond (CAST, 2021). *Te Whāriki also* highlights the importance of providing opportunities for children to express their ideas and experiences using a range of materials and modes. The communication strand of *Te Whāriki* states that opportunities should be provided to children to communicate and represent their experiences through "languages of signs, mathematics, visual imagery, art, dance, drama, rhythm, music and movement" (MoE, 2017, p. 41). To facilitate multimodal pedagogy, teachers need to observe and understand children preferred semiotic modes so that teachers can support and expand them (Simonsen et al., 2009).

The second aspect of the principle of multiple means of actions and expression requires teachers to acknowledge and respect the complex ways in which disabled children express themselves. For example, children may differ in the rate, timing, speed and range of motor actions required to interact with learning materials and the physical environment. Children with non-verbal communication using assistive technologies may require some more time to express themselves. Teachers should think about what kind of scaffolding and learning support such as assistive technologies children need to express themselves (CAST, 2021). For example, *Te Whāriki* encourages ECE settings to use New Zealand sign language for children who are deaf or hard of hearing (MoE, 2017). In this way, UDL recognises and respects the diversity of all learners by providing instructional strategies for designing teaching pedagogies that consider the needs of all children, thereby eliminating the necessity for specialized interventions.

In essence, this section discusses how UDECE and UDL frameworks are aligned with *Te Whāriki* as the curriculum supports the strengths-based teaching pedagogies and rights-based approaches that are framed around the concept of universal access for all children.

The following section provides insights into the literature on autism and ECE that critiques the discourses of the ‘normal’ child and special education and suggests the implications of disability studies for the inclusion of autistic children.

Inclusion and ECE for Autistic Children

This study which focusses on exploring whether and how ableism impacts the inclusion of autistic children is informed by my professional experiences as a special education teacher. Reflecting on my professional experiences as a special educator in India, I can now realise how the discourse of developmental psychology may shape ECE teachers' understanding of autistic children. In my conversations with teachers, I often came across teachers’ concerns regarding children’s delays in motor and language development, listening to instructions and short attention span, which teachers associated with stereotypical symptoms of autism. Moreover, teachers believed that it is the responsibility of a special education teacher to work one to one with these children to ensure they are catching up with the curriculum.

These concerns usually came up with early year teachers where the curriculum was designed to focus on supporting children’s development and building literacy skills. As discussed earlier in this review, the individualistic focus of developmental psychology discourse can provide a deficit view of autistic children as not ‘normal’ and, therefore, may reinforce ableist assumptions in ECE. New Zealand scholars note that deficit theorising of ASD can limit the teachers’ ability to frame autistic children as capable learners and provide equal learning opportunities (Bevan-Brown, 2010; Goodall, 2014). Douglas et al. (2019) also argue that when the medical understanding of autism has influenced educators, they are expected to conform to the deficit demand of remediating children’s differences. Hence, teachers view education as a means to produce normal, productive “autism-free bodies” (p. 618). Drawing from Disability Studies in Education perspectives, Douglas et al., (2019) critique the special education approaches that frame autistic children as ‘not normal’ through pathologizing language and practices of diagnosis and interventions. They suggest an alternative understanding of autism as relational which signifies the role of interaction between autistic children and various objects, spaces, contexts and time in their education setting in facilitating inclusion.

In New Zealand, ASD guidelines provide information on early identification of and intervention for autism. The guidelines recommend that the "earlier the diagnosis of ASD is made, the greater the impact the early intervention has, resulting in fewer challenging behaviours and better outcomes for families and whānau" (Ministries of Health and Education, 2016, p. 12). The diagnosis of ASD in New Zealand involves a multidisciplinary team of education and healthcare professionals. Therefore, the ASD guidelines recommend that "all health care and education professionals need to be responsive to alerting signals of possible ASD and be receptive to parental concerns about their children" (Ministries of Health & Education, 2016, p. 14). At the national level, the *Before Schoo*l check plays an important role in the early identification of ASD. However, drawing from critical autism studies, the work of Runswick-Cole et al. (2016) provides a critical account of the diagnostic framing of autism and its related early intervention services. They argue that the medical framing of autism suggests that children with autism will be better off with intervention and emphasises the importance of early intervention in normalising an autistic child to conform to the notion of enforced 'normalcy' (Runswick-Cole et al., 2016).

However, Goodall (2019) recognises that while diagnosis can benefit autistic children and their families, it can also result in discriminatory practices. She argues that in the current policy environment that promotes an inclusive education system, diagnosis is the pathway to access services and support for autistic children. Parents are required to battle for their child's diagnosis to access support services to deal with the challenges of mainstream education. For Goodall (2019), "labels are umbrella terms that denote common characteristics, challenges or differences amongst children but which can undermine the strengths a person may have by being over-simplistic or by using terminology tendentiously" (p. 21). Moreover, she agrees with Runswick-Cole et al. (2016) that diagnostic labels can have real implications for the inclusion of autistic children as they are not value-free. Goodall (2019) argues that diagnostic labels can lead to ableist assumptions and discriminatory behaviours toward autistic children. Teachers' attitudes and assumptions about diagnostic labels can negatively affect how inclusion is understood and practised for autistic children. Therefore, Goodall (2019) suggests that shifting from the medical conceptualisation of autism toward a social model of disability would enable recognition of educational and attitudinal barriers to including autistic children. Moreover, in realising full inclusion, by recognising the experiences of autistic children, teachers will gain a greater understanding of the impacts their impairment can have on their learning needs.

Echoing Goodall (2019), other disability researchers have discussed the implications of disability studies' perspectives for achieving the inclusion of autistic children (Douglas et al, 2019; Mackenzie et al., 2016; Majoko, 2017; McAnelly & Gaffney, 2020). Research by Mackenzie et al. (2016) provided examples of inclusive practices for autistic children in ECE from the perspectives of the social-relational model of disability. Their qualitative study used interviews, observations and document analysis to explore the attitudes of four ECE teachers toward the facilitation of inclusion for autistic children in one ECE setting in Australia. Using the social-relational model (discussed in Chapter Two: Theoretical Perspectives) as an analytical lens, this study's findings demonstrated that the full inclusion of autistic children in ECE was realised when teachers understood barriers to autistic children's 'doing' and 'being' (Mackenzie et al., 2016). The barriers to doing were brought forth by teachers when they altered their teaching and learning environment according to the needs, interests and abilities of autistic children. The barriers to being were realised when teachers reflected on their attitudes and misconceptions about autistic children and how their attitudes can impact the self-esteem of autistic children. Mackenzie et al.'s (2016) research suggested that barriers of being and doing can be recognised and dismantled when inclusion is not seen as a burden or extra responsibility but as an ordinary element of the ECE programme.

Similarly, in New Zealand, McAnelly and Gaffney (2020) point out the importance of a relational understanding of disability, drawing on the theory of new-materialism. McAnelly and Gaffney's (2020) work is based on McAnelly's PhD project that used new materialism as a theoretical perspective and sensory ethnographic case studies of two autistic children in different ECE settings. New materialism is an interdisciplinary contemporary perspective in the arts, humanities and social sciences that provides a philosophical and empirical approach to inquiry (Fox & Alldred, 2022). New materialism sees the world produced through a range of social, cultural, political, economic, human and non-human things (technology, time, a tool and a building) (Braidotti, 2013). Reddington and Price (2018) note that new materialism focuses on a relational understanding of disability that observes the 'intraaction' between a child with impairment and their educational, social, political and cultural contexts. In this regard, new materialism-informed pedagogy critiques the special education discourse of remediating disability and produces alternative ways of understanding disability as a relational material-discursive, becoming, and processual concept in education settings (Reddington & Price, 2018). McAnelly and Gaffney's (2020) work suggests the importance of new materialism and sensory ethnography methods in building the idea of "intra-active pedagogy" in early childhood education (Lenz Taguchi, 2010). They note that engaging in intra-active pedagogy can help shift teachers' thinking from seeing problems within autistic children to understanding how the environment, objects, and practices in ECE settings produce the active participation and learning of autistic children. In this regard, intra-activity pedagogy can be relevant in understanding the practices of 'disablism'; that is how barriers to inclusive education emerge through interaction and mismatch between the learning needs of autistic children and the learning environment, teaching pedagogies, objects and physical context of ECE settings.

From a disability studies lens, Majoko 's (2017) study provides further examples of practices to include autistic children. Majoko's (2017) qualitative study used interviews, observations and document analysis as methods to explore practices that support the inclusion of autistic children in an ECE setting in Zimbabwe. The study found that teachers facilitated the inclusion of autistic children through making modifications in teaching pedagogies and the education setting. The modifications in pedagogy that teachers made focused on the strengths of children, positive reinforcement, the use of different modes of instruction like visual schedules for children with and without autism, and different modes of communication where teachers supported communication of autistic learners through using gestures and sign language with speech. Teachers also made adaptations in their ECE environment, like reducing noise level strategies and modifying seating arrangements. Moreover, teachers facilitated the interactions between autistic children and their non-autistic peers through peer modelling and disability awareness sessions. Majoko's (2017) study provides valuable examples of inclusive pedagogy approaches underpinned by disability studies perspectives, that demand a change in the teaching and learning context to enable inclusive education.

To sum up, the literature in this section suggests an inclusive pedagogy approach informed by disability studies perspectives can challenge the view of the 'normal' developing child as they support change in teaching and learning processes rather than the child. A collective change in the teaching processes can provide equitable opportunities for autistic children to participate, have control of their learning and the varied experiences of their impairment to be recognised and valued. The following section discusses the literature that explored the lived experiences of families of disabled children in ECE and school settings, including understanding their perspectives of disability, inclusion and recognising barriers that families encounter

Understanding Family Experiences of Inclusive Education

Framed within disability studies and narrative research methodology, Lalvani (2015a) explored the perspectives of parents and teachers in the United States of America about the meaning of disability and raising a disabled child. Lalvani (2015a) found that teachers' perspectives about family include narratives of otherness, grief, distress, and courage of parents who deserve admiration for raising disabled children. She noted that teachers who situated parents' experiences within the institutional discourse of denial and grief reinforced ableist ideology, which casts subjective experiences of parents about their child's disability as deviant from the 'normal' child. Thus, the role of social, cultural and structural barriers in informing parents' experiences is left unexamined. Many parents in Lalvani's (2015a) study viewed disability labels as problematic, as these reinforced 'otherness' and lowered expectations of their children in the education settings. Consistent with this analysis, parents in Cologon's (2014) study also resisted the disabling discourses about their children and families. Cologon's (2014) longitudinal study explored inclusive education experiences of families having children with various disabilities, including ASD, in Australia, Iceland, the UK and the USA. One of the dominant themes from Cologon's (2014) study was that ableist views were a barrier to inclusion for families in ECE. Cologon (2014) noted that the ableist views were evident as parents in her study reported the negative and exclusionary attitudes of teachers and others toward their child's disability. Parents also reported a lack of knowledge among ECE professionals in order to make necessary adaptations to the curriculum and the education setting.

In New Zealand, research by Lyons (2021) also provided accounts of how parents resisted the dominant discourse of disability that provided a pathological view of their child. Instead, parents situated their experiences within a sociocultural context, recognising social, attitudinal and structural barriers in society. Most of the parents in Lyons' (2021) study believed that one of the barriers to the inclusion of their children was community attitudes and less exposure to disabled people. Therefore, Lyons (2021) argued that people draw from pathological views to describe disability. Lyons noted that parents are aware of the structural challenges for ECE professionals, and parents were willing, although nervous, to advocate for their children’s inclusion. This finding was echoed in Macartney’s (2011) study. Being a researcher and a participant, Macartney discussed how she and Fran (another mother participant) “stayed in the closet” to hide their children’s differences from others for fear of being judged and the related consequences of these judgements for their children. In concluding her study, Macartney (2011) described her family’s experience of “coming out of the closet” to advocate for their child’s inclusion. As a parent advocate and an ECE teacher, she resisted normalising discourses and special education practices that classified and identified her child as ‘other’ in relation to her child’s rights and participation in ECE.

However, in her analytical essay, Lalvani (2014) noted that teachers and other professionals might interpret parents’ resistance to their children’s disability label and special education services as ‘denial’ of their children’s differences. Drawing from disability studies, Lalvani (2014) argued that parents’ disagreement with professionals and teachers about diagnosis and referral to special education services might not be a denial of their child’s differences. Instead, the dispute may be over the labelling of disability and its associated stigma, otherness and lower expectations in education settings. A similar point was made by Thomas (2020), who explored 22 parents' experiences (education and healthcare) of children with Down’s syndrome through the lens of “neoliberal ableism”. Thomas (2020) argued that parents in his study rejected the view of disability as a stigma and did not locate challenges experienced within their children’s bodies and minds but within structural barriers that did not recognise their children's differences. Thomas (2020) described parents’ experiences as an outcome of the “neoliberal ableism” era, which values productive, self-sufficient individuals and devalues disabled children and their families. Thomas (2020) contended that situating families' experiences within social, political and structural perspectives will help teachers understand how stigmatising experiences of families are informed by the current neoliberal system that values ‘normalcy’.

Thus, critical reflection on this literature suggests how understanding family experiences through the socially constructed notion of disability can provide reasonable grounds for parents and others to advocate for systemic change in favour of inclusion. My literature review found only a small number of research studies that have used ‘ableism’ as a conceptual framework to examine the ECE experiences of families with autistic children. Thus, the current study aims to contribute to the existing literature by exploring whether and how the ableism impacts parents' experiences of inclusive ECE for their autistic children.

The following section discusses the literature that has used ableism as a concept to analyse inclusive education practices.

Ableism in ECE

This study explores how ableism operates in ECE policies and practices in New Zealand. Drawing from Disability Studies in Education (DSE) perspectives, I am studying the impact that ableism has on the inclusion of autistic children, and how inclusion might be enhanced by reflection on ableist assumptions. Ableism is a lens through which deficit perspectives of disability and about disabled children in ECE can be explored. DSE as a theoretical framework is useful to understand and question the categories of ableism and normalcy and the related special education practices of categorising and remediating disability (Ferri & Bacon, 2011; Lalvani & Bacon, 2018). Drawing from the DSE view of inclusion, this study provides insights for teachers to question the construct of ableism to bring positive changes in their thinking and practices that support inclusion.

In England, Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2013) use ableism as a lens to explore the leisure experiences of eleven disabled children (aged 4-16) and 23 parents/careers of disabled children. This study shows how ableism marginalises disabled children and their families in play spaces. The researchers found that practices of ableism in leisure opportunities are observed when children who do not conform to the 'ableist norm' are subjected to diagnostic labelling, categorised into different groups based on the type and severity of their impairment, and then forced to attend segregated leisure opportunities. Hodge and RunswickCole's (2013) study highlights that, despite the exclusionary effect of ableism on leisure and play activities of disabled children, the notion of ableism remains implicit; therefore, they conclude that it is possible to challenge these ableist assumptions by naming them and making them visible.

Love and Beneke's (2021) theoretical paper adopted a Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) lens to discuss literature showing the intersection of racism and ableism in ECE research and practice. These authors suggest how a DisCrit lens provides a new possibility for justice-driven inclusive education research. Love and Beneke (2021) argue that the construction of children in ECE is based on the racist and ableist notion of ‘ability’ and its related notion of ‘normalcy; which dictates how children should develop, behave and learn. To reflect upon such practices, Love and Beneke (2021) gave an example of narrowly defined behaviours and roles ... “such as requiring children to sit quietly as a part of a large group and only speaking after raising their hand and being called on, despite their need and ability to participate in different ways and cultural differences in verbal turn-taking, movement, and expression” (p. 32). They argue that such practices designed to support children’s participation through dominant behaviour expectations may reinforce ableist and racist practices. The authors argue that practices like these are intended to assimilate all children without considering children’s different ways of being, learning and contributing in the ECE classroom. Echoing Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2013), Love and Beneke (2021) suggest that research that aims to counter exclusion and promote inclusive practices must contribute to understanding and dismantling the notion of ableism that upholds deficit practices in ECE.

Neoliberal Ableism

Disability scholars have used the concept of neoliberal-ableism as a lens to study inclusive education in the neoliberal context (Campbell, 2019; Goodley, 2014, 2017; Runswick-Cole, 2011). In her theoretical paper, Campbell (2019) pointed out the connection of ableism with the neoliberalism agenda. She argues that ableism relies on the preferences of ‘ability’ and a ‘homogenous’ world, which are usually unacknowledged or invisible to able-bodied and abled minded people, but it is central to asserting the political rights of citizenship, the idea of productivity, including contributing to the nation's economic success. Drawing from Campbell’s perspectives of ableism, Goodley (2014) presented the theoretical idea of ‘neoliberal ableism’. Goodley (2014) pointed out that in educational institutions, ableism ideals feed neoliberalism which values ability, flexibility, productivity, achievement, and success, creating a space fit for normative citizens who are economically active. This idea enforces homogeneity and sameness and rejects those who do not conform to these ableist ideals in education.

Neoliberalism is defined as a political and societal shift in the relationship between public good, market and individualism (Brown, 2015). According to Roberts (2007), neoliberalism ideology is based on a view of “human beings as rational, self-interested, choosers and consumers” who can take care of their economic matters (p. 350). Neoliberalism promotes the decentralisation of education and sets up common assessments, standards, outcomes, and accountability of schools and teachers to increase children’s competencies (Brown, 2015; Goodley, 2017). Increasing children’s competencies in education is closely related to the process of surveillance, testing and assessment, which are usually prescribed by a powerful group of people (Goodley, 2017; Romstein, 2015). Therefore, a key concern with neoliberal ideology is its focus on market values such as competition and competencies in education and its related government policies that value autonomous and productive individuals and simultaneously marginalise disabled people. The ideology of neoliberalism in ECE has connections with the discourse of developmental psychology. As discussed earlier in the review, Burman (2017) notes that the discourse of developmental psychology in social development and ECE policies serves the neoliberal agenda as it fantasises about the notion of productive, autonomous and competent individuals. Simultaneously, children who do not meet developmental norms experience disabling and other oppressive practices. In this regard, neoliberalism provides the context for ableist assumptions.

In this study, the concept of neoliberal-ableism was useful to explore and critique the neoliberalism ideologies in policies and practices that see childhood as preparation for children to become productive, autonomous, and economically independent adults. These ideologies narrow the purpose of education and devalue the differences and experiences that autistic children and other disabled children bring to ECE settings. Therefore, to understand how ableism impacts the inclusion of autistic children, it is essential to understand how the current neoliberal context works in ECE policies and practices to shape understandings of able-bodied individuals and how it might pose a risk to the inclusion of autistic and disabled children.

Goodley (2017) analysed how the neoliberal education system creates problems in the inclusive education agenda and suggests how critical pedagogy can provide ways to challenge the neoliberal ableist education system. Goodley (2017) argued that neoliberalism in education holds the idea of developmental norms associated with achievement, competency and citizenship. Children who conform to the ‘developmental norm’ are represented as ‘neoliberal ideals’ that promote personhood as an autonomous quality and ability expected from global citizens (Goodley, 2014). Therefore, a learner can only remain in the neoliberal education system when they meet the developmental norms or the standard of ‘normalcy’ (Goodley, 2017). In this way, the idea of neoliberal ableism makes it easier to identify those children who fail to meet the neoliberal ideals. Likewise, Runswick-Cole’s (2011) theoretical paper draws from critical disability studies and uses ableism as a concept to critique the neoliberal education system and how it poses barriers to inclusive education. She argued that under the marketisation of the education system, children who do not meet ableism ideals are at risk of exclusion and being perceived as a threat to the nation’s economic success. As a result, children who do not fit into the mainstream education system are subjected to ‘surveillance’ and ‘normalisation’, shaping children to fit into the existing education system and be productive citizens (Runswick-Cole, 2011).

In New Zealand, Lyons’ (2021) doctoral research examined how neoliberalism affects the inclusion of disabled children and their families. She notes that despite rights-based legislation and policies on inclusion (UNCROC; UNCRPD (United Nations General Assembly, 1989, 2006), teachers and managers in her study drew from the deficit discourse of disability, which views disabled children as “problematic” and “costly”. Lyons (2021) argued that the contradiction between policy and practices results from the increasing privatisation of the ECE sector in New Zealand. With the privatisation focus on increasing profit, limiting costs, and providing quality services within an accountability framework, disabled children are seen as a burden on resources and time. Lyons (2021) named this gap between inclusion policy and practice as ‘enlightened ableism’. She writes, the “rhetoric of enlightened ableism presents a rational, modern, well-informed and humanitarian world view of inclusion yet allows the continuation of practices that position disabled children as other” (p. 116).

In their theoretical article, Arndt et al (2015) also provides an example of how a neoliberal agenda is served through the special education discourse in the government’s inclusive education programme. The authors draw from the philosophies of Julia Kristeva and Michel Foucault to question the normalisation practices in New Zealand’s government professional development programme,-Incredible Years for Teachers (IYT), for children aged 3-8 years, designed for teachers to support children with behavioural disabilities. This programme adopted the Incredible Years programme series developed by Webster Stratton in America (Arndt et al., 2015). The authors noted that IYT is based on government policy of early identification and intervention and reinforces ECE teachers' subject position as behaviour managers who identify children with challenging behaviour and use normalising practices to turn their disruptive behaviours into positive ones. They argued that the IYT serves a ‘neoliberal agenda’ where children with behaviour difficulties are ‘normalised’ to become self-sufficient citizens who are not a burden on the country’s economy. Arndt et al. (2015) suggested that teachers critically question the idea of the ‘normal’ child underlying the IYT programme and how it locates a problem in an individual child’s behaviour without considering other critical factors within the ECE environment and teaching practices, and beyond.

To conclude, my critical review of literature reflects key ECE research in New Zealand and internationally that has explored how ableism and its related exclusionary practices underpinning the discourses of special education, developmentalism, and neoliberalism can negatively impact the intention and spirit of inclusive education for disabled children and their families (Ferri & Bacon, 2011; Goodley et al., 2015; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013; Love & Beneke, 2021; Lyons, 2021). This literature has been influential in identifying discriminatory practices that can be understood as indicators of how ‘ableism’ operates within ECE settings. However, more research is needed to understand how and why ableism as a bias disrupts the inclusion of autistic children and remains unacknowledged in ECE policies and teachers’ practices. I hope my research will add to the growing body of inclusive ECE research in New Zealand, providing insights for teachers to address how ableism disrupts the processes and practices of inclusive education for autistic children and their families. It is also hoped that these insights can lead to a review of thinking about inclusion for autistic children in ECE and corresponding changes in practices.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed literature that critiques developmental psychology and its scientific knowledge about how children should behave, learn, and develop in ECE contexts. I argued that the construction of the ‘normal’ child within developmental psychology discourses provides an individualistic approach to understanding children’s development and does not consider physical and cognitive differences in children, or the child’s social and cultural contexts. Furthermore, I explored literature that provided a critique of special education discourses that reinforce the idea of the ‘normal’ child by expecting disabled children to work toward reaching certain developmental and behavioural milestones. These discourses are problematic as they may inform the process and practices of ableism and become barriers to including autistic and other disabled children. I also considered literature that explored families’ experiences of inclusive education for their disabled children. The literature unpacked how understanding families' experiences through the socially constructed notions of disability, normalcy and ableism can be helpful to understand how society stigmatises the experiences of disabled children and their families.

I also discussed the literature in childhood and disability studies that critiques the notion of a ‘normal’ child and supports the sociocultural constructed view of childhood, disability, and autism. Finally, the chapter discusses the literature that has used ableism as a lens to explore ECE practices and suggests how my research inquiry could provide insights to ECE teachers about how ableism might disrupt their aspirations and practices of inclusion and assist them to review their own thinking and practices. The next chapter presents the methodology utilised for this research.

Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods of Data Collection

Chapter Overview

This chapter explicates the research design for this study. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the choice of a qualitative case study as a methodology. A qualitative case study approach is based on a social constructionist paradigm and aims to examine the context, interactions, and practices within a bounded case (Yin, 1994). Additionally, the analytical tools for my study, thematic and Critical Discourse Analysis are discussed. Thematic analysis, guided by social constructionism, is broadly used to identify and explore themes that emerge from the case study related to disability, inclusion and ableism. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is utilised to examine the language used in the policy texts and themes that emerge from the case study. CDA facilitates evaluation of what the language conveys about the dominant discourses related to disability and ableism when interpreted through the lens of particular theoretical perspectives.

The second section outlines the two data sets (policy documents and a case study of an ECE setting) which are used in this research study. The first data set consists of pertinent policy documents, and this chapter describes these documents, the rationale for their selection and the analysis process. The second data set includes interview and observational data and pedagogical documentation from the case study of an ECE setting. This chapter explains the process of recruiting ‘the case’, ethical procedures, data collection methods, and analysis processes for the case study. Finally, I discuss how I ensured self-reflexivity and trustworthiness during the data collection and analysis process. An overview of the research design and methodology is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Research Design

Research Focus	Whether and how ableism influences the educational policies and the everyday practices of teachers participating in an ECE setting in New Zealand.
Theoretical Perspectives	Paradigm: Social constructionism Theoretical framework: Disability Studies in Education Main conceptual tool: Ableism
Methodology and Method of Analysis	Qualitative case study methodology Thematic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)
Data Sets and Methods of Data Collection	The first set of data: Policy documents- *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017); *Success for All* (MoE, 2014). The second set of data: A case study of 'Shemrock'- the ECE setting Case study participants: N= 10 (two autistic children and one parent, and a curriculum leader, three qualified permanent teachers, two qualified relieving teachers, an Education Support Worker). Methods of case study data collection: ▪ Introductory meeting for teachers that involved a workshop on disability awareness. ▪ A semi-structured interview conducted with teachers, an Education Support Worker, the curriculum leader and a parent of an autistic child. ▪ Observations including video observation, photographs and field notes ▪ Analysis of the documents (policy statements and assesment documents of children) developed and used by Shemrock ▪ A focus group discussion with teachers and the curriculum leader.
Time Frame for Data Collection	Data collection (case study): August 2019 to November 2019 Data transcription (case study): November 2019 to January 2020 Analysis of case study data was conducted to develop themes and select video clips for focus group discussion (January to March 2020). Data collection: Focus group discussion conducted on 17 June 2020.
Data Analysis	CDA of policy documents involved three steps: Description/textual analysis (modality, evaluations, and social actor representation), interpretation and explanation. Case study data were analysed using thematic analysis and CDA.

Qualitative Case Study Methodology

Case study methodology consists of a detailed investigation of a case in its real-life setting in order to analyse the context, processes, interactions and relationships involved in a bounded environment (Yin, 1994). The choice of a qualitative case study is based on a social constructionist paradigm and aims to provide a deep understanding of the social phenomenon under investigation. The methodology recognises the importance of participants' subjective experiences and meaning attached to a social issue as part of the process (Creswell, 2013). Stake (1995) pointed out that an instrumental case study provides insight into an issue where the case is selected to advance the understanding of the object or phenomenon of interest.

In this study, Shemrock, an early childhood education (ECE) setting is an instrumental case chosen to provide insights into the principles which underpin teaching practices with autistic children in ECE in New Zealand. Stake (1995) notes that a case study in empirical research involves a "palette of methods" that draw together "naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological, and biographic research methods" (pp. xi-xii) to provide converging evidence, which is known as triangulation for studying a phenomenon. Situated within the social constructionist paradigm, my case study of Shemrock involved applying a series of interpretative methods to understand and describe the environment and interactions that took place at Shemrock in relation to autistic children. The processes of data collection involved recording teacher responses in an initial workshop on disability awareness, interviewing teachers and parents, accessing and analysing documentation that framed practices at Shemrock, and observing interactions between autistic children, teachers, children and the researcher within the physical space of Shemrock.

Introduction to Analytical Tools: Investigating Ableism in ECE Policies and Practice

This section summarises the analytical tools used in this study. In the interpretation and analysis process, I have adapted what Thomas (2019) termed "analytical eclecticism" (p. 512) to combine multiple analysis methods (thematic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis) and interpretative frameworks (social constructionism, Disability Studies in

Education) to understand the case through examining the data (Stake, 1995). The interdisciplinary approach to analysis allowed me to understand better the complex concepts of ableism, disability and inclusion, which can be constructed in many ways.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is broadly used in this study to analyse empirical data derived from the case study of Shemrock. Thematic analysis is a method for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns of (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis is an inductive analytical method characterised by a qualitative paradigm where themes emerge from the data and are not imposed by the researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Braun and Clarke (2012) pointed out that thematic analysis “can also be used within a ‘critical’ framework, to interrogate patterns within personal or social meaning around a topic, and to ask questions about the implications of these” (p. 297). Similarly, Lawless and Chen (2019) suggest that thematic analysis is a valuable method for integration with CDA and critical perspectives for qualitative research that works towards social justice goals. These authors note that thematic analysis enables examination of everyday communication and interactions to reveal recurrent themes in the data. Furthermore, these themes can be analysed to explore how they are connected to broader social ideologies and dominant discourses (Lawless & Chen, 2019).

The study used Braun and Clarke’s (2006) method to guide the thematic analysis process. Braun and Clarke (2006) articulated a six-step framework for thematic analysis: (a) familiarise yourself with the data; (b) generate initial codes; (c) search for themes; (d) review themes; (e) define and name themes; and (f) produce the report (p. 87). After identifying themes, I used CDA as an additional method of analysis. CDA helped me explore in-depth how the language used in the relational interactions is associated with wider social ideologies and dominant discourses of disability and ableism, taking account of the social and cultural context (ECE context in New Zealand) in which these discourses are situated, produced and practised. The following section summarises CDA as an analytical tool for this study.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis as an analytical approach in qualitative research is common among social constructionists (Fulcher, 2010). Discourse analysis can be seen as a tool for understanding language through social interactions (Fulcher, 2010). Understanding the association between language, discourse and power was necessary in this study to determine if ableism was underpinning what teachers were saying and then doing in their practice. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perceives language as a dialectical relationship between discourse and society, text and context, and language and power (Fairclough, 2009; Van Dijik, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The term 'critical' in CDA refers to the interrogation of ideologies that underlie language usage. CDA is an approach to explore the everyday function of ideology, which plays out through language and discourse to express and maintain power (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). By understanding the ideology process, researchers reveal the way discourses give meaning to social practices. In doing so, their attention is directed not only to critiquing and addressing the inequalities but also to looking for ways to solve them (Fairclough et al., 2011)**.** According to Van Dijk (2008), CDA is concerned with issues of power and justice and motivated by an endeavour to understand critical social issues. In this regard, CDA aligns with critical theory perspectives as it deals with the expectations and norms of particular discourse communities, raises social, cultural, economic, and political concerns and provides ways to solve these issues.

The CDA approach used in this study is primarily based on the work of British sociolinguist Norman Fairclough (1995, 2003). In this study, I draw on Fairclough's views on the social construction of reality. Fairclough (1989) emphasises the importance of language in constructing and reconstructing our understanding of the world. He defines language both as a discourse and social practice, thereby showing a dialectical relationship between language, discourse, and its social and political context. Language constructs and represents reality in powerful ways, and the social and cultural context has a key influence on discourses (Fairclough, 1998). Fairclough's (1995, 2003) CDA approach assists in understanding how discursive practices produce and reproduce unequal power relations in society through the ways they position people and represent things.

In this study, I consider language-in use as a means to examine whether and how discursive practices in the form of language produce and reproduce the dominant discourse of ableism which may not be overtly visible. CDA is used to explore how ableist discourses function through what is made present in the language (text) of educational policies, and beliefs and interactions of teachers involved in the case study, and to uncover truths that are absent and silent. Fairclough (2009) suggests that CDA researchers should be “open to a wide range of theories” and allow CDA to mediate interdisciplinary dialogue between social theories and methods (p. 163). Considering this, I have adopted DSE as a theoretical framework for interpreting discourses and guiding me to examine the reasons underlying the discourses that emerge in this study, and what they reveal about how ableism operates in ECE policies and practices. Using DSE, I take a critical stance toward special education, developmental psychology and other deficit discourses that construct disability as other or inferior to ‘ablebodied’ and in need of remediation. I have also used DSE perspectives to provide an alternative view of inclusion that advocates for change in the education context, teaching practices, and recognising disability as a different and positive identity. Fairclough’s (1995, 2003) approach to CDA is based on three components: description (textual analysis), interpretation (discursive practices) and explanation (social practices).

1) **Description**

The first step of CDA is identifying and describing the language or linguistic features of the text (Fairclough, 2003). Description of the text involves studying the linguistic features produced in a text, and demonstrating how textual features signify power relations at the level of language (Fairclough, 1995). Additionally, this stage involves exploring how these linguistic features relate to the surrounding discourses and context of the situation in which they are being produced (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough (1995) presented various tools for understanding the function of the text. However, the process of textual analysis is not ‘rigid’; instead, it is a guide to help researchers plan the textual analysis according to the aim of their research (Fairclough, 2003).

In this study, the grammatical function of the text was analysed through modality and evaluation and social actor representations concerning discourses of disability, ableism and inclusion. Modality and evaluation were chosen to understand the authors’ beliefs and assumptions about the knowledge related to disability and inclusion in the national policies’ text. Modality also helps to understand the explicit assumptions, which may indicate the modality markers in the text. Evaluation of the text includes statements that make explicit assumptions about disability and implicit assumptions that reinforce the discourses of disability, inclusion, and ableism in the policies’ text. The implicit assumptions were chosen to evaluate texts that are not explicitly referred to in policies that are taken for granted. For example, the implicit assumptions about disability rooted in special education, developmental and medical discourses that see disability as a deviation from 'norm' and in need of 'fixing', may not be explicitly mentioned in the policy's statements. Furthermore, social actor representation is used to examine the power relations in discourses by focusing on how disabled children are represented and positioned in policy documents. Social actor representation in the policy documents may uncover unequal power relations between disabled and non-disabled children through the multiple ways that disabled children are represented and positioned.

Modality

Analysis of modality refers to an author's degree of affinity with their statements. According to Fairclough (2001), modality is an important concept in CDA as it can highlight both the "relational and expressive values in grammar" (p. 105). Halliday (1994) defined modality as a "speaker's judgement of the probabilities or the obligations involved in what he is saying" (p. 75). Modality is related to the "many ways in which attitudes can be expressed towards the pure reference and predication content of an utterance, signalling factuality, degrees of certainty or doubt, vagueness, possibility, necessity, and even permission and obligation" (Verschueren, 1999, as cited in Fairclough 2003, p. 165). Modality has usually been described as two types, epistemic modality and deontic modality, as explained below.

Epistemic Modality

Epistemic modality indicates the author's commitment to the truth and facts. In other words, an epistemic modality observes how writers commit themselves to knowledge claims (Fairclough, 2003). Epistemic modality concerns the author's estimation and confidence in the knowledge claimed in three forms-certainty, probability and possibility (Halliday, 1994). These three forms in English can be realised through modals, adjectives and auxiliary verbs. The modals highlight the author's judgement about the certainty of knowledge (high degree modals such as must and will); predictability of knowledge (should, ought, and would); possibility of knowledge (low degree modals- may, might, could) (Halliday, 1994). Epistemic modality may also be expressed through modal adjuncts (definitely, probably, certainly, always, possibly, usually, obviously etc.); lexical verbs (believe, guarantee, guess, promise, suggest, think, suppose etc.); lexico-modal auxiliaries (be certain to, be due to, be going to, be sure to, be likely to, would rather) (Kress & Hodge, 1988).

Deontic Modality

Deontic modality is expressed through the author's expectations that another person will undertake an action. Deontic modality concerns the degree of obligation and necessity incumbent on the other person to carry out the expectation (Fairclough, 2003). Deontic modality in the text can be realised through the use of finite modals (must, should and need to); passive verbs (are advised to, are allowed to, are obliged to etc.) and adjectives (are obliged, are advisable, are permissible etc.) (Kress & Hodge, 1998). The following section discusses the second tool of textual analysis used for policy analysis, implicit assumptions.

Implicit Assumptions

Identifying implicit assumptions in the text is vital for gaining understanding of the ideology which shapes the capacity to exercise social power, domination and hegemony, and to a certain extent, shared or common knowledge in society (Fairclough, 2003). Fairclough (2003) distinguishes three main types of assumptions which are "existential assumptions, they are assumptions about what exists, propositional assumptions, they are about what can be or will be the case, value assumptions: assumptions about what is good or desirable" (p. 55). The linguistic features of the text mark all three assumptions. Existential assumptions are identifiable by the markers of definitive articles and demonstratives such as (the, this, these, those, there). Propositional assumptions are marked by factive verbs, such as accept, acknowledge, confirm, demonstrate, establish, explain, know, recognise, observe, note, understand, show and reveal. Value assumptions are indicated by certain verbs that show desirability and ability, such as could, be able to, can, may, might and so on.

The following section discusses the final tool for textual analysis used in this study, social actor representation.

Social Actor Representation

Social actor representation through CDA provides a focal point where the sociological and linguistic categories of text meet (Van Leeuwen, 1996). Social actor representation analysis helps to examine how social actors are represented in the text, and who they are. As observed by Flick and Foster (2007) "social actor representations, once developed and elaborated, come to constitute our reality" (p. 5). The reality as constructed in the text is built on beliefs and assumptions that exhibit 'common knowledge' to form the representations that can be ascribed to certain identities (Flick & Foster, 2007). Moreover, such representations form the social understanding of social groups, which continue to persist and become ingrained into social norms. My analysis of social actor representation explored how disabled children as social actors are presented in the text of policy documents and whether they are included or excluded, and depicted as active or passive social agents (Van Leeuwen, 1996).

2) Interpretation

The next phase of CDA, interpretation, involves the researcher's interpretation of the text, recognising the situational and social context in which discourses are produced and consumed or practised. This stage of CDA involves interpreting text with a focus on two main features: the production of text and the context in which text is produced and consumed. The production of the text focuses on the text producer, the author and speaker in the text and their claim to knowledge, obligation and necessity in the text. The context includes the sociohistorical and cultural context in which the text is produced and consumed. The researcher's interpretation is about the meaning-making of the text, which can also be derived from others' interpretations using different theories (Fairclough, 1995, 2003). Thus, interpretation is partly a matter of understanding the meaning of words, sentences and paragraphs in the text and the intention of writers/speakers and participants. Interpretation is also concerned with the researcher's judgement about the text (Fairclough, 2003).

3) Explanation

The explanation stage in CDA involves the researcher's interpretation of discourses to examine the ideological effect of discourses and how they might become social practice, and how changes in these discourses can lead to social change (Fairclough, 1995). Analysis of text needs to go beyond explanation of how ideologies are produced and also explore the discursive practices (how the texts are interpreted and received) and their social effects (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Fairclough, 2003). The explanation step of CDA consists of the researcher's interpretation of why the speaker/ writer is speaking and writing in the ways they do and identification of the social cause and ideological effects of their claims (Fairclough, 2003). The researcher's interpretation/judgement about the ideological impact of discourses can be achieved by looking at the effect particular discourses might have on social practices, and asking whether these discourses contribute to changing or sustaining power relations

(Fairclough, 2003). The interpretation and explanation are open and can be explained through theories and literature using an inductive process of analysis (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

Data used in this Study

There were two sets of data used in this study that have different types of texts. The first data set consisted of two policy documents, *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) and *Success for All* (MoE, 2014), which are formal public texts. The second data set was performed text created through a case study of an ECE setting. The data in the case study is seen as performed text because it is formed by multiple interpretative methods to understand the co-construction of social interactions and practices and identify documents that inform practices at Shemrock.

First Data Set: Policy Documents

Legislated policy, *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood education curriculum (MoE, 2017) and *Success for All* policy (MoE, 2010), were selected because of their significance and relevance in guiding and regulating inclusive education for disabled children in the ECE sector in New Zealand. The policy analysis aimed to examine discourses of disability and ableism and how these discourses might shape teachers' practices. *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) communicates the ethical and legal obligations for ECE teachers and ECE settings for providing quality inclusive education to disabled children. Adherence to the expectations of inclusive education articulated in *Te Whāriki* in ECE settings is assessed by the Education Review Office.

The *Success for All* policy document (MoE, 2010) actively promotes inclusion for disabled children in ECE settings and schools. The *Success for All* policy aims to support inclusive practices in ECE and other education settings through providing early intervention services and other resources to support inclusion. Also, targeted courses, like the Incredible Years Programme for Teachers (IYPT), focus on increasing ECE teachers' capabilities to identify children with behavioural needs and providing positive behavioural strategies (MoE, 2010). Thus, both policy documents play a vital role in guiding inclusive teaching and learning in ECE settings. The following section sets out the process that will be followed for the analysis of these policy documents.

Process of Analysis of Policy Documents

The goal of the policy analysis was to examine how disability and ableism are produced, encoded and exhibited in the policies’ text. I downloaded the policy documents in a separate folder on my computer in digital form to prepare the text. I also printed hard copy documents so I could write references and notes on them as I was undertaking the CDA. I started the analysis by reading the policies’ text several times. I marked all the statements that talked about children with disabilities/ children with additional learning needs/children with special needs. I also marked the statements that were not explicitly discussing disability and the statements that indicated silence about disability and disabled children's experiences. I chose these statements because they were related to the aim of the policy analysis. Then I conducted Fairclough’s (1995, 2003) approach of CDA in three steps as follows:

Description of the text

The first step of CDA is identifying and describing the language or linguistic features of the text (Fairclough, 2003). I began the textual analysis by simultaneously marking the epistemic modality and deontic modality of the selected statements. I drew a table with two columns. One column comprised the statements where I marked modality, and the other indicated potential meaning. I then conducted an evaluation (assumptions) analysis of those statements which had not explicitly marked any modality. The purpose of modality analysis was to explore the author’s commitment to knowledge and obligation/necessity in the policies’ text. The implicit assumptions were useful for understanding the author’s assumptions of what is desirable or undesirable, good or bad and the facts.

Furthermore, I conducted social actor representation analysis to identify how children with disabilities were represented in the text. For this step of the analysis, I returned to the selected statements. I started reading to determine whether children with disabilities were included or excluded and presented as active or passive actors (see social actor representation in the description of CDA above) in the policies’ text. I followed the same approach of using a table that I employed in the modality analysis.

In the next section, I discuss the second step of Fairclough’s method of CDA.

Interpretation (Discursive Practices)

The next stage of CDA involves interpreting text considering two things, the production of the text and the context in which text is produced and consumed. I started the interpretation or discursive practices by looking at the words, phrases and statements in the policy documents broadly related to disability and ableism. I reviewed the selected statements to see what discourses I could identify in them. At this time, I also looked at discourses that I identified in the first step of CDA, description/textual phase. I then coded each statement to its respective discourse strand. The coding of discourses was done based on the discourses found in the literature related to disability and ableism (discourses on development, special education, neoliberalism and inclusion. I also noted any other discourses about disability and ableism that were found in the two policies.

I employed the theoretical framework of Disability Studies in Education to inform my discussion and writing in the interpretation stage.

Explanation (Social Practices)

The final stage of CDA involves the explanation, also known as social analysis. This stage explains the social effects of texts on practices and how identifying these social effects can bring about social change (Fairclough, 1995).
The following questions guided the analysis at the social level:

- How are dominant discourses represented in the policy documents? What/who do they privilege, and what/who do they exclude or marginalise?
- How might these dominant discourses become social practices that teachers in ECE settings could engage with?

At this stage, I examined the discourses that I identified to see what ideological effects they might serve and how they could be reflected in ECE teachers' practices. I also asked the question of how resistance to these discourses could bring about social change for the inclusion of disabled children and their families. I describe the explanation (social analysis) of the text using the theoretical framework of DSE. Finally, the analysis of all three stages of CDA (description, interpretation and explanation) was brought together in my writing of my CDA of the policy documents. The following section discusses the second data set.

Second Data Set: Case Study

I conducted a qualitative case study of an ECE setting. Purposive sampling was used to recruit the ECE setting (the case). The criteria for selecting the ECE setting were a) the ECE setting was located in the Waikato region of New Zealand, b) children with autism spectrum disorder were enrolled, and c) the management and teachers were interested in participating. In the recruitment procedure, the focus on children's diagnoses was described as not labelling the children differently, but understanding what the interactions between autistic children with their peers, and teachers participating in an ECE setting can tell us about ableist processes and practices. Patton (2002) notes that purposive sampling in qualitative research has less emphasis on generalising findings to a broader population. Rather, greater attention is given to selecting samples that can yield in-depth insight into concepts, phenomena, and hypotheses being studied. I used purposive sampling with the hope that investigating ableism in an ECE setting might result in findings that could illuminate whether and how ableism operates in ECE practices and how it can be resisted.

Selection of the Case (ECE setting)

The study adopted purposive sampling to recruit an ECE setting for a case study that had autistic children enrolled. The process of finding such a setting was by no means straightforward. I faced challenges in recruiting participants and used my personal contacts with ECE teachers to find an ECE setting and willing participants for my study. Freya (Pseudonym) was one of the teachers who helped me search for a potential ECE setting. She is a New Zealand qualified ECE teacher who has been teaching for ten years. Freya helped me to find the contact details of settings that had disabled children on their rolls. With her help, I managed to get the details of 12 settings. Initially, I approached all 12 ECE settings by email, introducing myself and the purpose of my study. I attached the research information sheet and requested a meeting to discuss further details. Eight out of 12 centres wrote back to me saying that they did not have autistic children in their setting. Four centres did not reply, so I continued with the search. This time Freya again contacted me saying that she had been working with an ECE setting for a month which had autistic children. She said that she had approached the centre manager and talked about the possibility of my doing the research there. Providentially, the manager showed an interest in the research and asked Freya to tell me to send details.

My first contact with Shemrock was a phone call to the centre manager, Richard (pseudonym). During this conversation, I introduced myself and the research. It was a conversation I would repeat many times with many people early in the project. I introduced myself as a PhD student from The University of Waikato. I told him that my research focused on empowering teachers through disability awareness and understanding of how ableism might impact their inclusive practices. Freya had recommended Shemrock as a model of a centre aiming to be inclusive for disabled children. I then explained that I hoped to spend some time (two to three weeks) in the centre as a volunteer to learn about their policies and gain consent from teachers, parents and other people involved in the ECE setting. This was a crucial moment in my research, not only because it resulted in approval to carry out my research at Shemrock, but also in many ways shaped the access and cooperation I would receive at Shemrock. Richard told me that he would be very interested, but before anything could proceed, I should come and talk to the curriculum leader at the centre. Richard arranged a meeting with Stevie (pseudonym) a week after our phone call.

I went to meet Stevie and explained the purpose and requirements of the research. I told her that the proposed research looks at inclusive and ableist practices for autistic children in an ECE setting. I explained that ableism is a discriminatory bias based on the belief that ablebodied/non-disabled people are superior to disabled people because of their specific abilities. I outlined that the research process would involve the collection of documentation, observations and interviews with teachers, Education Support Workers, and parents. Moreover, I explained that the main goal of this study was to ensure that ECE teachers are empowered to work inclusively with autistic and other disabled children in their settings. Stevie agreed to participate in the research and signed the consent form on behalf of the centre manager. I asked her if I could plan an introductory meeting about the research for the teachers at Shemrock. Stevie agreed to the introductory meeting. Stevie said that “it would be good to talk to teachers about your research and how you will proceed”. Stevie also agreed to my working as a volunteer to observe the culture at Shemrock. The introductory meeting introduced the prospective research participants to my study and included a presentation on disability awareness (for introductory meeting presentation, see Appendix E).

Familiarisation with Shemrock

During my volunteer work, I spent five hours every day over three weeks at Shemrock, learning about their routines and establishing rapport with the children and teachers. During this time, I made field notes about the classroom space, routine chores and relationships of autistic children with teachers and other children. I also began building a rapport with children by introducing myself during mat time. After three weeks of volunteer work, I conducted the introductory meeting for teachers at Shemrock. I describe this meeting in my research methods later in this chapter.

Recruitment of Teachers

During my volunteer work, I built a good rapport with teachers. Following the introductory meeting, I invited teachers to join me for light refreshments and handed out information sheets and consent forms. Teachers told me they needed time to go through them and would come back to me at some stage during the following week. After a week, I received consent from all the teachers. Some teachers had placed conditions on their participation, such as the amount of time they could spare for the interview, but no one had refused. There were some negotiations during the observation process as well. It reminded me that no one owed me cooperation, and their participation was voluntary. The most important aspect was that teachers were interested in participating in the research. The negotiation process did not end there. Later, it continued when I sought consent from Sherry (pseudonym), the Education Support Worker's (ESW), and the parent of an autistic child.

Recruitment of the Education Support Worker

Unfortunately, Sherry, the ESW, could not attend the introductory meeting. Later, I talked to Sherry about the research and invited her to participate. Sherry said that she was not comfortable with it and needed to ask her supervisor for permission to participate in my research study. However, after two weeks, Sherry agreed to participate in the research and said: "My supervisor has allowed me to participate provided that I don't share any personal information about the children I work with". I respected her professional boundaries and made sure that I did not ask her for personal information about children.

Recruitment of Parents

The final issue related to access was for parents' interviews. One of my study processes was to interview parents of autistic children to understand their experiences of ECE services for their children. Initially, two families signed the consent form for their participation in the research and were very cooperative and responsive in my first conversation with them about the study. However, one parent, Mary (pseudonym), indirectly withdrew before the interview. Mary had been responsive at our first meeting at the centre. She said she would be happy to be involved and asked me to come to her home for the interview. I went for a meeting at Mary's home three times as requested. I was turned away three times and told that Mary was not at home or busy. I tried to contact her but could not get hold of her. I found it very distressing and discussed the matter with the headteacher. She said that she had not received any message from Mary and that Mary had also not replied to the teachers to a request for an IEP meeting. The headteacher suggested that I stop trying to contact Mary and said, "You tried your best to approach her for the research. I think you should leave her now". I discussed the situation with my supervisors. We decided that I should give Mary some space to get back to me in her own time if she wanted. However, Mary did not get back to me throughout the data collection. Consequently, I consider that she indirectly withdrew from the research.

The Case Study- 'Shemrock'

The research was located in a private ECE setting, under an umbrella organisation run by a charitable trust that provides the centre with policy, strategic direction, and financial and business management. Throughout this thesis, the research setting is referred to as 'Shemrock' (Pseudonym) or 'an ECE setting'. Shemrock is an early childhood education and care centre licensed for 85 children from two years to school age. The centre is located on a busy road connected with other corporate offices. The entrance of the centre includes stairs and a ramp. The learning environment at Shemrock is set up across three spacious rooms. The first room includes young children aged between two to three years. The second room has older children aged between four to five years. The third room consists of a space for mat time and kai time (meal time). Children usually come into the third room for quiet reading time and group activities. Shemrock has two defined outdoor play areas. The first outdoor area is for young children, which is attached to their room. The play equipment in this area includes a sandpit, imagination station or family area and swings. The second outdoor area is attached to the preschool room. The second outdoor area is a large environment encompassing an open space and covered deck area for all weather. The open area consists of swings and a cycling track. The covered play area consists of a sandpit, an imagination station that consists of role play resources and an art and craft station. The covered deck is connected to an open play area through stairs and a ramp. Shemrock also provides a van service to transport children to and from the centre.

The centre philosophy aims to support children to feel safe, valued and empowered to be confident and capable learners. The centre philosophy includes a written commitment to providing inclusive services that reflect diversity by welcoming children from different cultures and abilities. Shemrock has a play-based curriculum guided by *Te Whāriki* that aims to respond to children's interests, family values and parents' aspirations (MoE, 2017). The centre's philosophy states their commitment to providing ongoing professional development and space for teachers to critically reflect on their teaching practices (reproduced from the photograph of the centre's philosophy and vision on 22/11/2019).

Research Participants

Besides teaching staff, participants in the case study included two children and one parent. The first child Jason (pseudonym) was three years old at the time of data collection. Jason did not have a formal diagnosis of ASD, but a referral for his diagnosis was sent to the Child Development Centre by the Ministry of Education during my fieldwork. The second child Kylee (pseudonym) was 3.5 years old at the time of data collection and had recently been diagnosed with ASD, and Kylee's mother, Kathrine (pseudonym). The other participants were a curriculum leader (a qualified and registered ECE teacher), three qualified and registered ECE teachers, an Education Support Worker, and two qualified and registered relieving teachers who filled in during the absences of permanent teaching staff. Table 2 provides demographic information about each staff member.

Table 2: Designation, Education Qualifications and Experience of Teachers (as of September 2019)

Name (pseudonyms)	**Designation**	**Teaching qualifications**	**Teaching experience in ECE**
Stevie	Curriculum leader and Registered teacher.	B.Ed (Primary)	5 years
Sofia	Registered teacher	Graduate Diploma in teaching ECE	7 years
Neah	Registered teacher	Graduate Diploma in teaching ECE	12 years
Cherie	Registered teacher	B.Ed (ECE)	24 years
Rachel	Registered relieving teacher	B. Ed (ECE)	4 years
Becca	Registered relieving teacher	Graduate Diploma in ECE	3 years
Sherry	Education Support Worker	B.A (Māori Visual Arts) and a certificate in ECE	10 years as an ECE reliever, teacher aide and nanny

Research Ethics

This research involved gathering data from human subjects. Therefore, questions of research ethics were an important consideration. The research required ethics approval to ensure that research participants were treated with respect, fully informed and not harmed by the research process. Hence, ethical approval was sought before this research was undertaken (FEDU003/19) and received from The University of Waikato, Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee on 29 January 2019.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is one of the most important principles of research ethics. It is based on the need for participants to voluntarily enter into research, while understanding the nature of the research and any disadvantages or obligations involved (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Informed consent from all the adult participants was sought for their participation in the research (see Appendices I, K, M, O). During the introductory meeting, information sheets and consent forms for teachers (Appendices G & J) were distributed. Teachers assumed the responsibility for sending information sheets (Appendix L) and consent forms (Appendix M) to parents to seek permission for their children's participation in the research. I talked to parents of autistic children about my research study.

Parents agreed to their children's participation and signed the consent form. After parents' consent, assent (Appendix O) was gained from all children in Shemrock with the help of teachers. Children's assent for participation was sought. The assent form for children included pictures along with written details (that could be read to them) to enable children to comprehend the given information easily. The headteacher individually invited the children to talk with me and her. The headteacher and I read the consent form to children and simultaneously showed them pictures. The children were asked to mark the images that they agreed for me to know about them. Extra help was solicited from parents for five children who were confused and unsure about their decisions. The assent forms of those children were sent to their parents to ask children about their decision in the comfort of their home and with parents facilitating this process. All children gave assent.

A notice about video recording of children was placed on the parents' noticeboard a week before video recording started. The consent forms from the two parents of autistic children (Appendix J) for the interview were collected in person. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and procedure and the potential risks and benefits of their participation. In this way, they could make an informed decision about their participation. I followed up with both parents to ensure that they understood the information given in the information sheets and consent forms.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Salkind (2011) asserts that "anonymity in research means that records cannot be linked with names" (p. 82). The anonymity of participants in this study was maintained using pseudonyms to protect participants' identities and maintain the value and integrity of their experiences. All the participants were offered the opportunity to choose a pseudonym for themselves. Most of the participants asked the researcher to choose a pseudonym for them. Therefore, the researcher assigned a pseudonym to each participant, including the ECE setting in this research.

Oliver (2003) suggests that confidentiality in research is maintained through the researcher's commitment to be explicit and truthful to participants about who will have access to the data, the researcher's plans for using and retaining the data, and how the data will be stored. In keeping with this requirement, all the participants were notified that information gathered during the data collection would be confidential to the supervisory panel and will be used for any publications and presentations resulting from this research. This was made clear in information sheets, which also stated that every effort would be made to report the research and findings anonymously. However, anonymity could not be completely guaranteed. I also did not put anything in the thesis that would compromise relationships between participants later on.

Potential Harm to Participants

The following ethical principles were followed for the research project: obtaining the permission of people involved in the research, ensuring their wellbeing by respecting and upholding participants' rights, not causing emotional harm and accurately representing findings.

As discussed, consent was gained from all the participants (assent from children) to participate in the research. This study itself is sensitive since it involves autistic children and their family members. Thus, the main principle was to have participants feel that this research was being undertaken with them, not about them. The Ethical Guidance for Research with People with Disabilities (National Disability Authority, 2009) states that "involving people with disabilities in an appropriate way in informing or shaping the research process respects them as active participants in the research and not as passive objects of research" (p. 7). This principle can extend to family members of children with disabilities and teachers working directly with children with disabilities. All participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without having to say why. Participants also had the opportunity to verify the accuracy of what had been transcribed from their individual interviews. Participants who participated in individual interviews were given a transcript of their interview. At no time did anyone correct or amend their transcripts. Hence, no data were deleted from the record. Due to the collectively generated nature of the focus group discussion, participants were informed that they could not review or withdraw any of the data they contributed to the discussion. These points were made clear in the participant consent forms and information sheets.

Methods of Data Collection

Introductory Meeting

The purpose of the presentation was to inform the participants about 1) the aims of the study, 2) the concept of ableism and how it can be seen in education practices, and 3) the methods to be used in the study so that they could make informed decisions about their participation. I had difficulty recruiting the ECE centres. I believe it was mainly because people do not understand the term ‘ableism’ and how participating in the study might benefit them. I believe conducting the introductory meeting at the beginning helped teachers to understand that my study was not about observing their “not-so-good practices” but supporting teachers to be reflective of their interactions and practices for autistic and other disabled children.

At the introductory meeting, the curriculum leader and three other teachers were present. The curriculum leader asked me to be quick as my presentation would follow a staff meeting. Stevie introduced me to the teachers as a post-graduate researcher from The University of Waikato, then left me to start the presentation. The presentation took 15 minutes to conduct, followed by time for teachers to ask questions. The presentation and discussion were recorded as data. See Appendix E for introductory meeting presentation.

Individual Interviews

Individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with the curriculum leader, three ECE teachers, the ESW and a parent. The interviews with the curriculum leader, teachers and Education Support Worker were conducted to understand their knowledge, beliefs and perspective about 1) the concept of disability and inclusion 2) its relation to autistic children, and how these beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge might influence their teaching practices. The purpose of the interview with the parent was to understand their experiences of ECE services for their autistic child. The guiding questions for all the interviews were prepared in advance (for interviews questions, please see appendices A, B, C & D).

As an interviewer, I ensured that interviews were conducted according to ethical interviewing protocols. The protocols involved asking participants for clarification where their responses were not clear, asking probing questions for an in-depth explanation, avoiding personal prejudice, and taking time to listen to participants' perspectives (Seidman, 1991). Participants were told that the interview was completely confidential at every stage and that only my supervisory team and I would have access to their recordings and transcripts. They were told that their participation in interviews was voluntary and that they had the option to end the interview at any time for any reason. The time taken to conduct each interview ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. Interviews were conducted in the staff room, except for the parent interview which was conducted in her home.

Semi-structured interviews are useful to elicit qualitative data based on participants' beliefs and perspectives on a topic (Burns, 2000). The researcher decides the focus of the interview, with predetermined broad questions based on that focus (Burns, 2000). Interviews were semistructured, meaning that each interview had a particular set of questions that I wanted to ask but I was open to following other tangents generated within the interview. This choice was made because it enabled me to focus on particular areas of interest while also following up on threads generated by the participants. Another advantage of semi-structured interviews is that there is flexibility for both the researcher and the participant. The researcher can probe for more detail and gain greater clarity about a participant's answers when needed, and the participant can provide information based on their beliefs and perspectives (Cohen et al., 2011). In semi-structured interviews, data credibility can be enhanced by providing opportunities for participants to check whether the meaning of their responses is correctly understood or not (O'Hara et al., 2011). Participants involved in individual interviews were given the transcripts of the interviews to verify their answers (see Appendices A to D for interview questions).

Observations, the second method of data collection are described in the following section.

Observations

Observation is a method of collecting data from existing phenomena through direct watching. This method draws on the first-hand evidence that one can see to provide data as things happen (Allen, 2017). Observation as a research method requires researchers to see, record, interpret and evaluate what people do as compared to what people think they do (Atwal & Caldwell, 2005). The observation method used in this study involved video recordings, photographs and field notes. I was keen to observe patterns of interaction (verbal and nonverbal) between autistic children with their peers and teachers in relation to the physical context of Shemrock. The observations involved a curriculum leader, permanent ECE teachers, an Education Support Worker, and relieving ECE teachers and children.

James (2007) argues that using the visual method in research involving young children allows children to have an active presence in research about their lives. A video recording can be a powerful tool in research to give visibility to children's interests, intentions, meaning-making and learning through different communication modes (verbal and non-verbal) and for observing children’s interaction and adult-child play dynamics in research (McLaughlin & Coleman-Fountain, 2018). One of the aims of using video recording in the study was to ensure all children, including autistic children, could actively participate in the study in their own time and pace by using different modes of communication and expression. Moreover, the use of video recording supported me to be aware of my subjectivity and potential biases during the observation process. Ciesieiska et al. (2018) note that one way the researcher can overcome the potential source of subjectivity is to use videos to record observations (Ciesieiska et al., 2018). Using video to record actions and interactions enabled me to view the data repeatedly as required and permitted me to be aware of my biases during data interpretation.

Process of Observation

The whole observation process took place over three months, from 5/8/2019 to 4/11/2019. The observations were conducted from 9:00 to 1:30 pm five days a week. This was the time when both Jason and Kylee (autistic children) attended the centre. Ethical considerations such as gaining consent from teachers and ongoing assent from children were completed before observations. All participants consented to video recording, except for the two relieving teachers. However, the teachers declined to wear microphones but agreed to video recordings that captured spoken words and sounds.

In video observation, close attention was paid to the time when autistic children interacted with their peers and teachers, and when teachers and their peers approached them. Moreover, field notes were recorded of verbal and non-verbal interactions to assist with understanding the video recording. These interactions were viewed as a catalyst, allowing for examining practices of ableism and inclusion. I also took photographs of the indoor and outdoor environment of Shemrock. In the pictures, I captured the physical environment and text and pictures on the wall, which were mainly related to the weekly teaching planning and classroom activities. I made video recordings for two to five minutes of episodes where autistic children interacted with peers and teachers. A total of 50 videos were made during the observation process, which was later refined to 10 videos that recorded ableism and inclusion from my perspective.

During my time at Shemrock, some children were inquisitive about my presence and usually asked me questions: Are you a teacher? Do you work here? In response, I was open with the children about my purpose for visiting. I told the children that I was there to learn more about their lives. I showed them my research tools: a notebook, pen, and the video camera that I would use to make observations. I was also sensitive to whether children were comfortable with my presence and video camera; if I felt they were not, I removed myself from those situations. This was also outlined in the assent form for children. Cocks (2008) notes that assent establishes a relationship of trust between the researcher and children and acceptance of the researcher's presence. Moreover, assent allows the researcher to shift the focus from seeing the child demonstrating adult-centric attributes such as compliance and maturity toward accepting the child's state of being and seeing children as subjects in the research rather than the objects (Cocks, 2008).

Hammersley and Paul (2019) note that during observation, there is a danger that the presence of an observer affects what is happening in the observation environment. The observer effect may influence participants' behaviour and cause them to act differently because they are aware that they are being observed. The observer effect can be overcome by the researcher spending prolonged time learning about the routines and culture of the organisations and building a trust relationship with the participants. Initially, while making some video recordings, I felt that my presence and video camera influenced the participants' behaviour and actions in the ways they were involved with autistic children. For example, some participants become self-conscious about being video recorded. Over time I built relationships with participants, making them comfortable with my presence as a researcher at Shemrock. After I finished the video recording, some teacher participants explained what they were doing and why. These interactions with teachers made me better understand their intentions, actions and interactions with autistic children. However, individual interactions with participants were not always possible because of their busy schedules.

Policy and Guidelines Documents Developed and Used at Shemrock

A range of documents was gathered and analysed, including Shemrock's philosophy and vision and annual goals. Documents from teachers were collected such as monthly plans for curriculum planning, and documentation for new and relieving teachers on children who need extra attention. Assessment documents in the form of Learning Stories (Carr, 2001; Carr & Lee, 2012) of Kylee and Jason (autistic children) written by teachers were also accessed. These documents were analysed to corroborate, contextualise and triangulate the data gained during individual interviews and observations.

Focus Group Discussion

The purpose of a focus group discussion is to identify and understand participants' different perspectives on a research topic. Therefore, focus group discussions should be focused on a limited number of issues and particular themes to give participants enough time to discuss them in detail (Hennink, 2014). As the discussion proceeds, the researcher should ask questions to participants to clarify their perspectives which may prompt them to raise additional themes and issues or share similar experiences, thus enhancing the clarity, extent, and detail of the discussion (Hennink, 2014). The final method of data collection was the focus group discussion. The focus group discussion was organised for teachers, the Education Support Worker (ESW) and the curriculum leader to provide a space for "collective conversation" on the research topic (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 887).

The focus group discussion in this study aimed to understand the participants' perspectives on the themes derived from the interviews with teachers and parents (please see appendix F for an outline of themes). Also, in the focus group some videos where inclusion and ableism were seen to be practised were shared in order to gain participants' views of video footage. The focus group discussion was conducted after all the video and interview data had been transcribed. My supervisors and I looked at all ten videos, and we decided on two videos as examples (one of ableism and the other of inclusion) for the discussion. These videos were chosen for the focus group discussion because I had already conducted follow-up interviews with teachers who were involved in the videos. The follow-up interviews allowed me to clarify the teachers' actions and interactions in videos and avoid any biased interpretation. The focus group discussion was delayed due to the global pandemic. It was conducted when the lockdown restrictions were lifted. The discussion was conducted face-toface, but due to health restrictions and other commitments, only three permanent teachers and the curriculum leader were present at the discussion time. The two relieving teachers and ESW did not participate in the discussion. This is a limitation that could not be avoided. The discussion lasted for approximately 80 minutes and was audio recorded.

Hennink (2014) suggests that the environment of a focus group discussion plays an important role. It is the moderator's responsibility to create an environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their views without the fear of judgment from others. Ground rules were discussed before the discussion started to ensure that participants felt comfortable. Participants were informed that all responses were valid, that there were no right or wrong answers, and they should respect others' opinions even if they disagreed. Also, they had the right to abstain from discussing specific topics if they were not comfortable. Due to data sensitivity in a shared video, participants were requested not to make any negative comments on other participants practices. The discussion started with interview themes, followed by a discussion to put the participants at ease. I then showed them the videos. The participants were asked to comment on a shared video where evidence of ableism could be seen, and how teachers could challenge such practices. The video observation of inclusive practice was also shared for participants' feedback to encourage the teachers in their inclusive practices. The following questions guided the group discussion on video observations:

- What is going on at the moment in the shared video?

- What leads up to that moment?
- Could you identify how ableism might inform interactions in the shared video??
- What strategies could you adopt to challenge these ableist beliefs?
- What do you understand by the concept of ableism?
- How does recognising ableism help to support the inclusion of disabled children?

I facilitated the discussion through these guided questions. I also picked up on other relevant themes that emerged to ensure participants also had the freedom to express their opinions freely rather than be constrained by questions (Cohen et al., 2011). I tried to ensure that all participants' views were heard, that comments were constructive, and that one person did not dominate the group interviews (Cohen et al., 2011). However, there were some moments where two participants dominated the discussion. I managed this situation by encouraging the other two participants to express their thoughts freely.

The following section discusses the process of analysis for the case study data.

Process of Analysis (Case Study)

Thematic Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Thematic analysis (TA) was used broadly in the case study. TA was used to analyse themes and subthemes that emerged from case study data relevant to this study. The data from the case study was in the form of visual, written and audio text. The video and audio data were derived from individual interviews, video recordings and the focus group discussion. Each recording was played several times to transcribe the visual and audio data in the written text. Each audiotaped and videotaped interaction was transcribed in its entirety. Non-verbal gestures, intonation and pauses were only indicated in transcripts when they were seen as relevant to the context of the interactions. The field notes made during observations were also considered during the transcription process to understand the interactions in video recordings.

In the first step. I started the analysis by familiarising myself with data through reading and re-reading transcripts several times to identify codes and how they cluster together in a grouping of interconnected ideas that "make sense" to the study and are meaningful to the participants. After this step, I organised codes (words, sentences and phrases) that cluster together into themes. For example, in the interview transcripts teachers repeatedly talked about the role of the environment and society in disabling individuals which led me to identify it as an emerging theme.

In the second step, the themes were then analysed using the interpretation and explanation steps of CDA (Fairclough, 1995, 2003). I began to analyse the link between themes and the dominant discourses related to disability, inclusion and ableism. The CDA was guided by the following questions:

- How are participants' everyday practices at Shemrock informed and constrained by dominant discourses related to disability and disabled children present in society and the ECE context of New Zealand?
- How might these dominant discourses of disability in policy and practices produce and reproduce the marginalisation of autistic and other disabled children?
- How might understanding and interrogation of these dominant discourses bring change in ECE that promotes the inclusion of autistic and other disabled children?

For example, taking the above theme on an understanding of disability as a social construct, I then paid close attention to why the participants talked in a particular way about disability and what dominant discourses might have informed their understanding. Pursuant to this question, I asked whether these discourses might play a role in including and excluding autistic and other disabled children? Moreover, in the interpretation and explanation steps of CDA, I became more confident about my interpretations of data as my confidence in analysis grew.

The Reflexivity of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, a researcher's role is crucial in data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Berger (2015) notes that to ensure reflexivity in qualitative research,

> researchers need to increasingly focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge; carefully self-monitor the impact of their

> biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research; and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal (p. 220).

Applying reflexivity means that I needed to be aware of who I am as an individual, a professional, and a researcher to ensure those lenses did not bias the research design and findings. I mentioned my professional history and academic interests in the introduction to this thesis as part of a commitment I made early in this project to make this research reflexive. I have positioned myself as an abled-bodied, Asian-middle-class female who has approached disability as a field of study and work.

My professional experiences as a special educator offered me a position of privilege to teach disabled children and plan interventions to normalise their differences to accommodate them in mainstream classrooms. Inspired by those normalising experiences, I asked myself "in what ways have I been unconsciously practising ableism as a teacher without being explicitly aware of it?". These professional experiences shaped my subject of inquiry in this research, created some dissonance and highlighted the need to address 'myself' as the primary research instrument for the study. To recognise and account for my personal biases, I repeatedly revised and expanded my interpretation of the data. I made reflexive notes to ensure my professional experiences and assumptions did not influence the research process, especially the data analysis process. Throughout the data analysis process, reflexive notes helped me question my subject position as a researcher and previously as a special education teacher in different cultural contexts (India and New Zealand). I critically examined my 'self' by reading and rereading the policies' text to expose ableism and offer different ways of viewing inclusive practices for disabled children and their families in the ECE context.

During my case study data analysis, I remained reflexive and mindful about what I created and my claims to the 'truth'. I did this by critically examining 'myself' in producing, sustaining and disrupting my position within discourses. I often questioned my role as a researcher and my representation of the participants' lives and experiences in this study. I did not want to position the participants as wrong or not good ECE practitioners in my interpretation of discourses. However, I wanted to tell my participants about the uncomfortable and silent truth about how ableism as an exclusionary system could disrupt their intentions of inclusive practices. For example, while doing the initial transcription and interpreting the video observation data, I felt the need to talk to the specific teachers involved in the video to know their reasoning for their practices and avoid any biased interpretation in the analysis. Hence, I conducted follow-up interviews with teachers to listen to their explanations of what was happening in the videos and what led to those moments. These efforts helped me purposefully engage with the research data more ethically and transparently. However, it is essential to note that there could be multiple readings and interpretations of the data analysed as a part of this study.

Rigour and Trustworthiness

Merriam (2009) notes various strategies that qualitative researchers can use to promote trustworthiness in their study. The strategies include 1) triangulation, including multiple sources of data. 2) peer review or member check or arranging with research participants to check the transcripts 3) Provision of detail about the study context 4) credibility of the data quality, analysis, and conclusion. In this study, I have established trustworthiness by clearly describing the rationale of study design and the compatibility between the theoretical perspectives, methodology, and data collection methods. I have used two different data sets, policy analysis and the case study, which included multiple descriptive methods of inquiry. The two different sets of data enabled me to get the big picture of my data analysis. It allowed me to understand whether dominant discourses identified in the policy documents are practised within an ECE setting and vice versa.

Furthermore, I ensure the credibility of data analysis through a clear description of the methods of analysis and theoretical framework used to analyse data. To ensure the credibility of my data, I followed what Miles and Huberman (1994) noted as “data reduction” (simplifying complex data by extracting recurring themes and finally drawing conclusions as a means of testing the credibility of findings). I used thematic analysis to understand recurring themes in my case study and then themes were further analysed to explore dominant discourses using CDA. I finally concluded my interpretation of the findings based on theoretical perspectives used in this study. I was mindful of my personal biases during the interpretation of data.

Moreover, I ensured data credibility through transparency to allow readers to test my claims. I did this by giving accurate and detailed transcription of data produced in the case study. The accuracy of individual interview transcripts was ensured by providing participants with opportunities to review the transcripts and request changes if necessary. The accuracy of video observation data where my supervisory team and I felt that we needed further explanation was supported through follow-up individual interviews with teachers. Also, I adopted peer debriefing using a devil's advocate approach. Marshall and Rossman (2006) argue that using a "devil's advocate" approach shows a willingness for others to "critically question the researcher's analyses" (p. 194). The supervisory team played the role of "devil's advocate" in the analysis of the text. Two doctoral cohort colleagues who specialised in ECE also provided feedback on the initial analysis of video data and my CDA of policy documents. Thus, trustworthiness in this study was ensured through the clear explanation and rationale of the research process, methods, and analysis process.

Transferability

Guba and Lincolin (2005) note that transferability refers to generalising research findings and theoretical perspectives to other contexts and research studies involving different participant groups, situations and contexts. In this study, the sample size (one case study) was small. The number of participants involved in the case study was relatively small (three teachers, two children, one parent, one ESW and one curriculum leader). The case study findings cannot be generalised and are specific to Shemrock, a private ECE setting. Rather than generalising, the findings and theoretical perspectives can be used to help interrogate processes and practices of 'ableism' in other ECE settings. Thus, the significance of case study findings might be specific to a particular ECE setting, but the CDA of policy documents and theoretical perspectives have relevance to other ECE settings in New Zealand.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the research design and process of undertaking the research. The qualitative case study approach enabled me to understand how interactions and practices within an ECE setting inform the processes and practices of ableism and inclusion. Policy documents were another data source to examine whether and how discourses of ableism and disability are exhibited in policy texts. The use of thematic analysis and CDA allowed me to understand the themes that emerged through data and what these themes tell about dominant discourses related to disability and ableism. Finally, I discussed how I understood and responded to ethical procedures, self-reflexivity and trustworthiness in the data collection and analysis process. The next chapter discusses the findings of the CDA of the policy documents.

Chapter Five: Critical Discourse Analysis of the Policy Documents

Chapter Overview

This chapter discusses the findings of my critical discourse analysis of the texts of two policy documents - *Te Whāriki,* the New Zealand early childhood curriculum (MoE, 2017), and *Success for All*, the New Zealand inclusive education policy (MoE, 2010) and the subsequent *Success for All: Special Education—Briefing to Incoming Minister* (MOE, 2014). My analysis was informed by the theoretical perspective of Disability Studies in Education (DSE). The aim of my analysis was to identify whether and, if so, how, discourses of ableism are encoded in the text of these two policy documents. *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) is the revised document of the original ECE curriculum document (MoE, 1996). *Success for All* (MoE, 2010) policy is the revision of the *Special Education Policy 2000 (*MoE, 1996). The original policy documents are also discussed to provide the historical and social context for the revised policy documents. The policy documents were analysed using Fairclough's (1995, 2003) approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA has been widely used for policy analysis to explore and address social issues through identifying dominant and marginal discourses within policy texts and to suggest alternative practices (Ball, 1994). In this respect, I have used CDA for examining ableism as a social inequity issue concerning autistic children and their families in ECE. Using CDA and informed by the DSE framework, I analysed the language used in the policy documents for disabled children to try and identify what the language reveals about the discourses related to ableism.

ECE Context for Disabled Learners in New Zealand

In New Zealand, as part of their licence, ECE settings are required to have a responsive and inclusive environment to support children's needs (MoE, 2008). As Macartney (2016) notes, "In Aotearoa New Zealand, both early intervention (EI) and ECCE services are responsible for supporting the care and education of disabled-labelled children" (p. 3). New Zealand has a diverse range of ECE services. The teaching and learning within these ECE services are closely linked to the national ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki,* which is mandatory for all licensed ECE services for children aged 0 to 5 years. *Te Whāriki* provides an overall curriculum framework for ECE services to guide their practices to be inclusive and responsive to 'all children'. The curriculum document defines outcomes for ECE settings related to knowledge, skills, attitudes, and offers pedagogical guidance for teachers on how these expectations can be implemented. These outcomes are linked to the ECE's service "quality" which is reviewed and monitored by the Education Review Office. The Education Review Office's report also measures and informs on the outcomes of inclusion for ECE settings.

Early intervention is a part of Learning Support Services, which is administered by the Ministry of Education. The Early Intervention Service is a component of New Zealand's inclusive education policy "*Success for All - Every School, Every Child*" which aims to achieve "a fully inclusive education system by 2014" (MoE, 2010, p. 1). These policy documents set out the 'discursive context' within which the inclusion of disabled children is perceived and implemented within ECE settings.

The Social and Historical Context for the Development of *Te Whāriki*

The context in which *Te Whāriki* was developed provides insight into its original goals and values. *Te Whāriki* was developed in the context of education reforms between the 1980s and 1990s. At that time, New Zealand was experiencing sweeping social and economic reforms within a shift to the ideological right. In 1980 the ideologies of the new right were introduced in New Zealand in response to the economic recession (Thrupp, 1999). The main aim of New Right ideologies was to promote competition for more efficient production and minimum state intervention in public services which included support for community services like health, education and other welfare services (Thrupp, 1999). The ideologically-motivated reforms in education focused initially on administrative frameworks and the development of curriculum and assessment measures (Te One, 2003, 2013).

The development of *Te Whāriki* began during the education reforms of the Labour government in the period from 1984 to 1992. In the late 1980s, the Department of Education ran several courses at Lopdell House in Auckland which provided "think-tank" forums for policy formulation in ECE. The Department of Education Lopdell House forums involved key people from ECE groups, including professionals such as teachers and academics (Lee et al., 2013). In 1988, central government reviews of ECE, schooling and tertiary education were conducted. The reviews led to the release of the government policy document *Before Five: Early Childhood Care and Education in New* Zealand (Lange, 1988). *Before Five* presented a shared framework for philosophies and principles of ECE, which encouraged ECE staff to discuss their programme's philosophy with parents/whānau and improve the quality of their services (Carr & May, 1993). Simultaneously, the recommendations received from ECE professionals involved in the Department of Education Lopdell Houses courses were developed as reports. The most important report for curriculum was the 1988 Lopdell Curriculum Statement which identified 15 basic principles of a developmentally appropriate ECE curriculum. The 15 basic principles were stated as follows:

> the curriculum will enable all children to experience an environment in which: they learn who they are, they learn in appropriate ways, decision-making is shared, they are safe, they respect the natural environment, conflict is resolved peacefully, they are healthy, there are goals for children, the importance of home and family is recognised, they relate positively to each other, learning is not limited by gender, adults are learners, they enjoy themselves, learning is not limited by race or colour, and people are accountable (Lee et al., 2013, p. 9).

These 15 principles underpinned the later development of *Te Whāriki.* In 1990, the Ministry of Education (1990) "called for tenders from potential contractors" (as cited in Te One, 2013, p. 12) to develop curriculum guidelines for the development of the ECE curriculum. The contract for the development of the curriculum was granted to a team of ECE specialists, Dr Helen May and Dr Margaret Carr based at The University of Waikato, and leading Māori specialists, Dr Tamati Muturangi Reedy and Dr Tilly Te Koingo Reedy from Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust (Mutch, 2004). The partnership with Dr Tamati Muturangi Reedy and Dr Tilly Te Koingo Reedy was important for weaving Māori and Pākehā cultural concepts into *Te Whāriki* (Te One, 2013).

From the beginning, the curriculum authors sought "to reflect the Treaty partnership of Māori and Pākehā as a bicultural document model grounded in the context of Aotearoa-New Zealand" (May, 2001, pp. 244-245), but there were also different pressures at work from government. At the time of the development of *Te Whāriki,* there was some push from the government to link the curriculum guidelines of ECE to the school curriculum. The government's goal was to link the ECE guidelines to the school curriculum to show the clear application of the ECE curriculum to school learning (Carr & May, 1993). Relatedly, there were also concerns about the government introducing prescriptive assessment in ECE to align with the school curriculum (Carr & May, 1993). However, the authors of *Te Whāriki* argued that the governmental pressures could be contained within the play-based philosophy of learning in ECE (Carr & May, 1993). In this contextual environment, the authors undertook a new process of curriculum development that "treated content, process, context and evaluation as interdependent features, an idea that could be traced back to the Basic Principles for an Early Childhood Curriculum developed at Lopdell House" (Te One, 2013, p. 13). These initiatives led to the development of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996).

Aspects of Te Whāriki

The resulting curriculum framework document had a number of distinctive features. *Te Whāriki* contains four principles: empowerment/whakamana, holistic development/kotahitanga, family and community/whānau tangata, and relationships/ngā hononga). There are also five strands: well-being/mana atua, belonging/mana whenua, contribution/mana tangata, communication/mana reo, and exploration/ mana aotūroa. Furthermore, each strand has goals for teachers that discuss the characteristics of facilitating environments and pedagogies, and learning outcomes that provide support to assess children's progress (MoE, 1996, 2017).

The name *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996, 2017) is of Māori origin and translates as a 'woven mat' for all to stand on (May, 2002). The metaphor of woven mat in the document represents the interweaving of the four curriculum principles with the five curriculum strands to reflect the vision of the curriculum that "children are competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and that they make a valued contribution to society" (MoE, 1996, p. 9; MoE, 2017, p. 6). *Te Whāriki's* translation of a woven floor mat also expects different ECE settings to interweave the principles, strands and goals of *Te Whāriki* with their ECE programmes' philosophies, structures and environments to develop a curriculum (MoE, 2017, p. 10). Thus, the metaphor of 'woven mat' represents the non-prescriptive nature of the curriculum, which allows each ECE service to interpret the principles and strands within the cultural values, practices and needs of their local community (May, 2002).

Children with Special Needs

The original published curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996), had a separate section, "including children with special needs". This section states that:

> Te Whāriki is designed to be inclusive and appropriate for all children and anticipates that special needs will be met as children learn together in all kinds of early childhood education settings. The programmes of each centre will incorporate strategies to fully include children with special needs….. [As part of this commitment] “an Individual Development Plan or Individual Education Plan (IDP or IEP) will be developed for any children who require resources alternative or additional to those usually provided within an early childhood education setting (MoE, 1996, p. 11).

Macartney (2011) argues that the above statement established a binary view of children with and without special needs. She contends that the emphasis on separate assessment and additional resources in the document can be seen to reinforce the view of disabled children as ‘others’. Her argument is that this view is implicitly based on an ableist assumption of disability as lacking, and deviating from a ‘normal’ person. She contends that such a view may encourage teachers to assume that the ethical responsibility for teaching disabled children belongs to special education professionals. Recognising the potentially negative impacts of the language of ‘children with special needs’ in marginalising disabled children, during the revision process of *Te Whāriki*, consideration was given to the implications of the curriculum document for disabled children. In the report of the Advisory Group on Early Learning (MoE, 2015), there was a suggestion to carefully consider the implementation of *Te Whāriki* for children with special educational needs, including updating the language used to identify children with ‘special educational needs’ in the document. This suggestion was important for critiquing the special education knowledge underlying the representation of disabled children in the original curriculum document.

Revision of *Te Whāriki*

The process of updating *Te Whāriki* started in mid-2016. The Ministry of Education appointed early learning experts and practitioners to develop the draft of an updated *Te Whāriki.* These experts and practitioners worked under the guidance of the original authors of the curriculum. The updated curriculum has the same vision, principles, goals and strands. The revisions in the updated *Te Whāriki* are broadly related to changes in context, theory and practices (MoE, 2017b).

The significant changes in the updated document that are relevant for this study were the addition of the concepts of inclusion and critical theory. In the document, the term "inclusion encompasses gender and ethnicity, diversity of ability and learning needs, family structure and values, socioeconomic status and religion" (p. 13). Thus, the focus of inclusion in the document is not limited to disabled children but encompasses all children with differences. Defining inclusion, the document promises to empower children to engage in learning which caters to their individual needs and interests. Another significant change was the addition of new theories and approaches underpinning the principles of *Te Whāriki.* The document includes a brief paragraph on critical theories, questioning the stereotyped assumptions related to children's culture, gender, and ability (MoE, 2017). These changes will be further explored in my CDA of *Te Whāriki* in the following section.

The Silenced Discourse of Disability

With the historical evolution of the document in mind, this section discusses whether and how the discourse of inclusion in *Te Whāriki* supports inclusive practices for disabled children and their families, and examines the way in which disabled children are represented in the document. "*Te Whāriki* is an inclusive curriculum – a curriculum for all children. Inclusion encompasses "gender and ethnicity, diversity of ability and learning needs, family structure and values, socioeconomic status and religion" (p. 13). This statement of "inclusion for all" highlights a social and educational understanding of inclusion that is not specific to disabled children, but refers to every child. *Te Whāriki* is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) (United Nations General Assesmbly, 1989). The curriculum document espouses the Convention's articles and intention in its four foundational principles: Empowerment (Whakamana), Holistic Development (Kotahitanga), Family and Community (Whānau Tangata) and Relationships (Ngā Hononga). Broadly, the UNCROC promotes inclusion as a basic human right. Convention Articles 28 and 29 state that all children have an equitable right to an education that develops their ability, to strive, thrive and reach their full potential, and respects their family, culture, languages and identities (United Nations, 1989).

Moreover, the understanding of empowering and inclusive ECE is reflected in Te Ao Māori world views underpinning the curriculum document. The curriculum principles and goals are central to the Whanaungatanga approach, which values the contribution each child brings to the process of teaching and learning. *Te Whāriki* highlights the importance of recognising and upholding the mana of all children with the promise of providing an empowering curriculum. Mana expresses an image of a child as a powerful, competent and capable learner. The role of ECE teachers is to respect and value an individual child’s competencies, language and culture to support the mana of each child and their family (MoE, 2017). The epistemic modality in the following statements shows the authors’ certainty about and commitment to facilitating an inclusive and empowering curriculum for all children (the underlined words are my emphasis in the following statements). The curriculum document states that “every child will experience an empowering curriculum that recognises and enhances their mana and supports them to enhance the mana of others” (p. 18). *Te Whāriki* holds the promise that “all children will be empowered to learn with and alongside others by engaging in experiences that have meaning for them” (p. 13). A fundamental expectation, aligning with the concept of mana, is that “each service will offer a curriculum that recognises these rights and enables the active participation of all children, including those who may need additional learning support” (p. 12). Enriched by UNCROC articles and Māori world views, *Te Whāriki* promises disabled children as ‘children first’ rights to equitable participation, attainment of their full potential, and recognition of their identity (mana). However, to uphold the mana of disabled children, it is crucial that their identity as a disabled child is recognised, and the value of their individual and family experiences are clearly articulated in the document.

My CDA found that the document fails to actively constitute disability as an identity marker in the wider context of diversity. My analysis of social actor representation aimed to identify how disabled children are represented in the text of *Te Whāriki*. The analysis noticed that there is no explicit reference to the term ‘disability’ or ‘children with disabilities’ or ‘disabled children’ in the document. Timberlake (2020) argues that the ubiquity of ableism requires increasing attention to how disabled children are portrayed (including absences) in educational policy. In *Te Whāriki* disabled children may be included under “children who need additional learning support” (MoE, 2017, p. 12). However, the curriculum document fails to explicitly consider disability in the wider context of diversity. The term inclusion in the curriculum encompasses “gender and ethnicity, diversity of ability and learning needs, family structure and values, socioeconomic status and religion” (p. 13). The term disability is missing in the statement. To ensure that ECE teachers respect and value an individual child’s identity, language and culture to support the mana of children and their families (MoE, 2017), it is important that disability is explicitly recognised, valued and integrated into the curriculum alongside other perspectives on diversity.

Furthermore, the discussion on disability discrimination is missing in the section on theoretical perspectives and approaches underpinning *Te Whāriki*. Since *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) is underpinned by critical theories, some statements in the curriculum broadly talk about equity and discrimination. *Te Whāriki's* references to critical theories in the theoretical perspectives section show the authors' intentions for teachers to use them "to challenge disparities, injustices, inequalities and perceived norms" (MoE, 2017, p. 62). However, there is not any explicit and specific guidance for teachers on how they can use critical theory perspectives to identify and challenge the implications of norms for disabled children. The curriculum document also encourages teachers to provide opportunities for children to discuss bias and challenge discriminatory attitudes. However, without any explicit reference to disability discrimination like ableism in the curriculum, teachers might find it challenging to use these perspectives to reflect on and challenge their ableist assumptions and provide opportunities for children to discuss discrimination and the bias of ableism. If we are to prepare children to counter social biases and bring about change in society, we need to pay attention to the omission of disability and disability oppression like ableism in curricula (Connor & Gabel, 2010). Furthermore, it is important that teachers should be critical of their beliefs about disability and disabled children to understand the implications these beliefs can have for the inclusion of disabled children (Ware, 2013). New Zealand ECE research shows that teachers' deficit beliefs about disabled children can become barriers to providing an inclusive curriculum (Lyons, 2021; Macartney, 2011; Purdue, 2009). To provide equitable learning opportunities to disabled children, teachers should "be aware of the history of people with disabilities, their subjection to ableism, and their struggle for rights as citizens" (Connor, 2016, p. 228).

DSE provides a framework that can help teachers question taken for granted views about disability, rethink their interactions with disabled children, and empower teachers to see disability as a difference of 'being'. Furthermore, explicit reference to the term 'disability' and 'disabled children' in the curriculum will help children develop the positive learner identity of a disabled person. Using the term 'disabled' children or 'children with disabilities' is a source of pride, identity and recognition that there are disabling barriers that exist within society and not within an individual child. This recognition is imperative as it makes us realise and accept disability as a difference, where disability is not a fixed but a fluid and relational concept. Moreover, embracing disability as an identity critiques the perceived 'norm' as it subjugates the homogenous view of childhood and recognises disabled children's ways of being and learning.

The Discourse of Developmental Psychology

The second discourse found in *Te Whāriki* is the discourse of developmental psychology, representing the dominant understanding of the 'normal' child. This discourse is a site where ableism resides in the expectations and prioritisation of 'normal' child development and the discounting of experiences of disabled children (Ervelles, 2011). The discourse of developmental psychology can be identified in the following statement in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017). "While all children are different and their learning trajectories are influenced by the social and cultural context, there are nevertheless typical characteristics and patterns that can be observed in the years from birth to school entry" (p. 13). My CDA of the above statement identified an existential assumption. An existential assumption is a type of implicit assumption which is important for understanding the hidden ideology in the text that shapes the capacity to exercise power and, to a certain extent, produce taken for granted knowledge in society (Fairclough, 2003). The existential assumption in the above statement tells us about the authors' certainty of taken for granted truths about typical characteristics of learning and development. Thus, this statement seems to set an "ableist regulatory norm" (Campbell, 2009, p. 1) of typical development in children observed from birth until the school years. This statement may send a message that 'normal' is prioritised or that a particular way of being could be dominant, excluding other ways of being. It is noticeable that this statement acknowledges variations in children's learning trajectories in different social and cultural contexts. However, the ways in which impairment experiences of autistic and other disabled children may inform their development trajectories are not reflected in the curriculum. Rietveld (2008) argues that ignoring the impact of children's impairment-related differences on their development and learning experiences can negatively impact children's belonging and opportunities for learning. Without guidance about how impairment experiences of disabled children impact their development, participation and quality of life, ECE teachers may find it difficult to engage all children in their learning and make children feel that they belong. Recognition of how children's lived experiences are affected by social, educational and learning barriers is also important to understand and critique disablism practices in ECE, and to promote ‘inclusion for all’.

Discourse is powerful in constructing identity and revealing assumptions (Fairclough, 2003). *Te Whāriki* is a guiding document in ECE, the language used in the curriculum that highlights the discourse of developmental psychology shape the ways teachers understand, interact and engage with children. When teachers using the discourse of developmental psychology interact with autistic children, the discourse of developmental psychology plays a powerful role in pathologizing children’s unique ways of being and constructing children as deficient in relation to ‘normal’ children. In this way, the binary of normal/abnormal children is constructed.

The statement about ‘typical patterns and characteristics’ that flows from a developmental discourse can be contradicted by another underlying discourse of the child as a social construct in *Te Whāriki.* The discourse of the child as a social construct is evident in the social-cultural theories of teaching and learning underpinning *Te Whāriki*. The social-cultural perspective embedded in the strand of Mana Tangata (contribution) values the uniqueness that each child brings to the table as affirmed in the curriculum's statement that “each child learns in their own way, which means there can be wide variation in the rate and timing of learning and in developing the capacity to apply new knowledge and skills in different contexts” (MoE, 2017, p. 13). This statement provides a different viewpoint to the statement on typical characteristics of development. Further, the statement here reminds teachers to consider the difference in the time and rate of learning and development of each individual child. The deontic modality in the following statement identifies how authors of the document resist developmental comparison of children by advising “kaiako to avoid making unnecessary developmental comparisons between children, recognising that developmental progress varies” (p. 38). Although these statements recognise differences in children’s development and contradict the developmental psychology discourse, it is important for teachers to be conscious of the language of “typical learning and development” and the effect of developmental psychology discourse when engaging with autistic and other disabled children.

A Tension between Rights-based and Special Education Discourses

ECE scholars argue that prescribed truths about ‘normal’ child development have real implications for regulating children’s bodies and confining and dictating the possibilities of what children’s bodies can and cannot do (Antonsen, 2019; MacNaughton, 2005). The expectations of normal child development may position ECE teachers as power and authority figures, responsible for producing bodies in a society that promotes sameness and homogeneity (MacNaughton, 2005). These assumptions underlying developmental psychology and special education seem to be evident in the following statement from *Te Whāriki*: “Although learning and development generally follow a predictable sequence, for some children progress in some areas may require further assessment, planning, intervention and support” (p. 13). The contradiction between rights-based and special education discourses is evident in a way these statements may indicate the expectations for normal patterns of learning and development and the imperative for the child with a disability to go through the process of “further assessment, planning, intervention and support” to catch up with the typical developmental trajectory. An alternative reading of these statements also seems to reflect the commitment of *Te Whāriki* to support the rights of disabled children to receive extra support to ensure they have equitable learning opportunities in their ECE setting.

A possibility for additional support and intervention is also expressed in the following statement: “From time to time, external expertise may be called on to support children’s learning. This is important for all children, but particularly so for those who need additional learning support” (p. 64). The explicit modality in the above statements suggests the curriculum authors’ conceptions of the need to involve external expertise to support children’s participation as outlined in key international law and conventions like UNCRPD and UNCROC (United Nations General Assembly, 1989, 2006). In addition to these statements, there is another telling comment in the assessment planning and evaluation section, which shows an implicit assumption about what is desirable and necessary (the underlined words are my emphasis in the following statements). This statement says: “Identifying the learning, progress to date, possible next steps, and whether additional support is required are the core elements in a formative assessment process” (p. 64). The above statement implies that teachers can use formative assessments to identify children who would benefit from additional support, and disabled children are likely to be labelled as requiring extra support.

The reference to ‘additional support’ is not problematic in itself, but may be problematic if it is discussed in isolation from system-level approaches to modifying the teaching, learning and social environment. The absence of system-level approaches, alongside additional support statements, may shape ECE teachers’ thinking that the problem lies with an individual child. The focus of teachers’ practice may remain on identifying ‘additional needs’ of children, diverting their attention from consideration of the teaching pedagogies, learning and social environment that disable children.

Thus, it would be incorrect to say that providing extra support and intervention is wrong. However, there is a need for vigilance about the fine line between improving the experiences of disabled children in ECE and promoting ableist preferences of perfect health and wholeness (Goodley, 2014) by requiring children to fit perceived standards of normality. Therefore, I argue that extra support and intervention programmes for disabled children and any other child are not wrong, provided that the programmes also support changes in teaching curriculum, social and learning environment.

To advance such changes, DSE delivers a framework for reimagining special education support through the lens of Universal Design for Learning. UDL in ECE calls for teachers to plan the learning environment and activities considering the diverse needs of children to ensure all children can participate (Conn-Powers et al., 2006; Underwood et al., 2012). UDL appeals for “designing early education settings so all children, as equal and valued members of the program, may access and engage in all learning opportunities, learn from a common curriculum according to their individual strengths and abilities, and demonstrate their learning in multiple ways” (Conn-Powers et al., 2006, p. 6). Therefore, in the UDL framework, disabled children are not considered a separate category who require additional support; rather, disability is seen as part of diversity in children's abilities who need to be accommodated in education settings.

Section Summary

My CDA has identified an important silenced discourse in *Te Whāriki* as well as a number of significant discourses in the text. The silent discourse is that of disability; this absence may marginalise the voices of disabled children and their families and make it difficult for teachers to challenge ableism. The influential discourses which have been identified in the text are those of the rights-based discourse of inclusion, developmental psychology, and special education.

Section Overview

The second section of the policy analysis chapter reports on the CDA of the *Success for All* policy, for which guidelines were first released in 2010. However, my CDA examined the latest published paper of *Success for All: Special Education—Briefing to Incoming Minister* (MoE, 2014), because it describes the policy components in detail.

The Social and Historical Context of Inclusive Education Policy in New Zealand

This section briefly discusses the historical and social context of inclusive education in New Zealand. The discussion outlines the development of *Special Education Policy (SPE) 2000* (MOE, 1996) and the development of the revised policy document *Success for All* (MoE, 2010). This discussion is essential to understand how inclusive education for disabled children evolved over time and shaped thinking about disabled children in recent times in the ECE context in New Zealand.

In the history of inclusive education in New Zealand, as in many other Western countries, disabled people were institutionalised in separate settings, often under hospital authorisation (Mitchell & Mitchell, 1985). The medical beliefs and practices of institutionalisation in which disabled people were considered less than fully human and separated in segregated education and care settings can be seen to have been rooted in ableism. These discriminatory practices continued until the late 1960s. During the early 1970s, the human rights movement started worldwide, where disadvantaged groups demanded equal rights with their non-disabled peers. The human rights movement targeted discriminatory practices, policies and attitudes that prevented disabled people from having equal access to all aspects of community life (Porter, 1988). As a result, the government in New Zealand and governments worldwide reflected on how people with disabilities were perceived and treated by the education and social systems (Brown, 1997; Greaves, 2003). New Zealand joined the mainstreaming movement in the early 1980s, which resulted in the disestablishment of segregated settings with satellite classes established in regular schools (Greaves, 2003). Later, this mainstreaming model led to the development of the first guidelines of the Special Education Policy in 1996.

Special Education Policy 2000

The *Special Education Policy 2000* “restructured the way in which resources and service provision” were allocated to “learners with special education needs” (Massey University & MoE, 1999, p. 5). Therefore, the *SPE 2000* was recognised as a “funding policy, not a “professional practice policy” (Coleman, 2011, p. 10). Nevertheless, *SPE 2000*, as a funding policy, inevitably had implications for professional education practice for disabled learners (Coleman, 2011). *SPE 2000* had a vision of providing a “world-class inclusive education system” in New Zealand by 2005 (MoE, 1996, p. 5). The policy guidelines consisted of three levels that focused on children with special needs in ECE settings, schools, and special education agencies. The first level focused on the services and support for children with very high needs. The second level included providing services and support for children with moderate needs. The third level consisted of an Early Intervention Service (EIS) for young children. EIS is provided by a group of professionals for children who have severe to moderate developmental and learning disabilities, behavioural or communication difficulties. These professionals work with family, education support workers, and ECE settings to plan Individual Education Plans (IEPS) to support children’s inclusion in ECE settings and at home. Underlying the three levels was a provision for professional development and training for teachers and schools to support the policy's implementation. (MoE, 1996).

Undoubtedly, *SPE 2000* provided a significant shift from the segregated education system to an inclusive and ecological (social) approach to disability (Kearney & Kane, 2006). However, scholars critiqued the special education knowledge base underlying the funding system of the policy. In particular, for ECE, the critiques were targeted at the Early Intervention Service (EIS). The EIS is an essential component of the policy, focussing on the early identification of and intervention for children with special needs. New Zealand ECE researchers have critiqued the special education philosophy underlying early identification and intervention (Macartney, 2011; Purdue, 2009; Rutherford, 2008). These scholars argued that the targeted funding system in *SPE 2000* was based on identifying and labelling young children with special education needs, which positions children as the responsibility of special education experts and may contribute to disabled children’s exclusion. These critiques demanded a shift from a resource-based funding system to the rights-based view of an inclusive education system that ensures changes in attitudes and effective teaching. Moreover, with the increasing demand for special education services and systemic weaknesses, a review of *SPE 2000* was conducted which led to the development of the *Success for All policy*.

Success for All-Every School, Every Child

Success for All-Every School, Every Child formalises the government's overall intention and direction for special education for 2010-2014. The overarching objective of the policy remains the provision of a world-class inclusive education system. In the statement of intent 2010-2015, the authors states that:

> Children with special needs have difficulty actively participating in regular ECE settings without appropriate support. Many of these children will start school at a disadvantage to their peers. We need to increase participation rates for these groups while maintaining high-quality provision for all (MoE, 2010, p. 11).

As a part of this commitment, the Ministry of Education states that it will:

> Work with ECE providers, families, whānau and communities [and health agencies]. to ensure that we identify and respond early to children with special educational needs. We will work with those communities to ensure that our early intervention services for children with special education needs are promoted and delivered appropriately (MoE, 2010, p. 14).

The *Success for All* policy has the same components as *SPE 2000*. A significant change is related to the development of the fourth tier, Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L): School-Wide. PB4L aims to create an inclusive environment that promotes positive behaviour and learning at home, and school or in ECE settings. PB4L provides programmes, initiatives and services for three types of interventions. At the first intervention, behaviour crisis response services are provided to the school and ECE settings in the case of serious misconduct to stabilise the situation, ensure safety and prevent further deterioration of the school and the ECE setting's reputation. The second intervention is targeted and preventive, including the Incredible Years Programme for Teachers and Parents and restorative practices. The Incredible Years programme is designed for teachers and parents of children (three to eight years) who have behavioural needs. The programme provides positive behaviour strategies to teachers and parents to help manage children's disruptive behaviour by creating a positive behaviour environment. The third intervention of PB4L is a school-wide preventative programme that focuses on increasing staff capability and confidence in schools and early learning centres to identify children with special education needs and provide the support and environment children need.

In summary, the *Success for All* policy supports the political rights of disabled children to learn and participate equitably in their ECE settings and offers suggestions around making learning settings accessible for disabled learners. However, the knowledge base of special education that focuses on early identification and remediation of disability remained unchanged in the policy (MoE, 2010). This argument will be further unpacked in my CDA of the latest publication of *Success for All: Special Education—Briefing to Incoming Minister* (MoE, 2014).

The Rhetorical Discourse of Inclusion: The Rights-Based or Special Education Discourses?

The first discourse found in *Success for All* policy relevant to this study is the rhetorical discourse of inclusion. My CDA found the discourse of the rights-based approach to inclusion in *Success for All* policy (MoE, 2014). Inclusion from a rights-based approach supports disabled children’s rights to equitable education and demands changes in the teaching curriculum and school environment to meet diverse needs (Kearney, 2016). By contrast, the special education approach to inclusion is constructed to identify the child’s needs, obtain the diagnosis, and remediate/normalise the child’s differences (Higgins et al., 2009; Rutherford, 2011).

The rights-based approach to inclusion can be seen in the following statement of the *Success for All* document. The policy defined inclusive schools as ones "where all students participate fully in the life of their school feel they belong and are learning" (MoE, 2014, p. 9). My analysis of social actor representation aimed to identify how disabled children are represented in the *Success for All* policy. My social actor representation analysis identified that students with special needs are presented as active members in the following statements (the underlined words are my emphasis). The document state that “<u>students with special education</u>

needs have the same rights to enrol and receive an education in a state school or early childhood education facility as students who do not have special education needs" (MoE, 2014, p. 8). It continues that "under the Education Act 1989, people who have special education needs (whether because of disability or otherwise) have the same rights to enrol and receive education at state schools as people who do not" (MoE, 2014, p. 9).

The above statements appear to recognise the rights of children with special needs to access, participate and receive a quality education without discrimination in their ECE settings like their non-disabled peers. However, the Ministry of Education does not collect any information regarding enrolment, suspension and achievements of disabled children in ECE settings. The lack of accountability may result in disabled children and their families' experiences of inclusion and exclusion remaining invisible in ECE.

The rights-based approach also seems to highlight the importance of a collaborative approach to inclusion in *Success for All*. The document states that "we also need to make sure that schools and early childhood services are becoming more inclusive in a collaborative way with principals, the education and disability sectors, parents, whānau and communities" (p. 3). The statement seems to recognise the need for a supportive and collaborative relationship with families/whānau and the wider community, building an alliance with teachers in ECE settings with limited understanding of disability. However, My CDA found that although there is an emphasis on the rights of disabled children within the *Success for All* policy, the special education discourse is also present in *Success for All* creating a view of inclusive education based on "two values" (Norwich, 2008, p. 138) for disabled learners in New Zealand.

Special education discourse is evident in the policy in the terminology of "students with special needs" or "special needs students". This language usage may justify exclusion, where the 'special education needs' label is imposed on certain children whose developmental and learning trajectories do not fit the notion of 'normalcy' in the education system. The label of special education locates the problem with an individual child's body and mind, thereby suggesting the ableist divide between children who have severe to mild extraordinary conditions and those who do not have them (Runswick-Cole & Hodge, 2009). Moreover, the special education system distracts the focus away from structural barriers in the education context and teaching to embodied differences that is devalued.

Furthermore, a contradictory view of inclusive and special education perspectives as belonging together is evident in the following statement. "Inclusive education is a goal that underpins all aspects of the special education continuum" (MoE, 2014, p. 14). The implicit assumption is important in order to understand the hidden ideology in the text that shapes the capacity to exercise power and, to a certain extent, taken for granted knowledge in society (Fairclough, 2003). This statement which presents inclusive and special education as one element of the education system provides a view of inclusion as underpinned by special education perspectives. Such an alliance between inclusion and the traditional special education discourse has been criticised as unfavourable for inclusion (Florian, 2015; Slee, 2001, 2011). Florian (2015) argues that seeing inclusive education as a form of special education is problematic as both underpin different approaches. While special education focuses on individual needs, inclusive education emphasises “individual needs in sociocultural context in which learning takes place” (p. 7).

The special education discourse in *Success for All* can be recognised in epistemic modality. The epistemic modality in the following statements suggests the authors’ beliefs in special education as an important tool to identify and fix a child’s deficits. The document states that

> about one in ten children and young people in early learning centres and schools receive special education support each year. Without this additional support, these children and young people will struggle to achieve their potential” (p. 4). “We have implemented initiatives in recent years so we can identify students with special education needs earlier and more effectively. This includes the universal new-born hearing and early intervention services, as well as B4 School checks. More children are being identified, which increases the expectation of support (p. 28).

The above statements inform ECE practices of early diagnosis and subsequent intervention to provide support to children as soon as possible. These statements may be reproduced in ECE teachers’ practices through identifying children’s developmental delays and initiating referrals to early intervention services to support children’s participation. Consequently, teacher practice may focus on identifying ‘additional needs’ of children, and the role of teaching pedagogies and the education system in disabling children may remain unquestioned.

Rutherford and MacArthur (2018) argue that despite *Success for All* policy's commitment to inclusive education, "a categorical and service-oriented approach remains whereby students whose bodies, minds, senses and/or behaviours are considered to fall beyond the boundaries of 'normal' must prove their needs for additional supports" (p. 369). Informed by the special education discourse, teachers may view inclusion merely as a practice of seeking special education interventions to support children's participation. However, inclusion is more than providing special education support, and attendance of disabled children in ECE settings. From DSE perspectives, inclusion as a practice explicitly recognises and embraces the differences of children through recognising their lived experiences and making changes in the teaching and learning environment.

The potentially contradictory views of inclusive and special education in *Success for All* can be seen in the deontic modality in the following statement. The policy states that "teaching must be responsive to the needs of all students". "We need to make sure that the ability to teach students with special education needs is a core part of teaching within every classroom" (p. 10). The first statement of teaching responsively to all students seems to reflect the inclusive teaching approach where teachers are charged with consideration of the individual differences of the learners. However, the second statement suggests the need to ensure teachers have "the ability to teach" children with special needs in classrooms. Citing the need for the ability to teach children with special needs may reflect the influence of special education discourse in the *Success for All* policy. New Zealand research showed that teachers hold the perception that specialist knowledge is important to facilitate inclusion (Black-Howkins & Florian, 2012; Morton & McMenamin, 2011). The statement may reinforce the ableist view that disabled learners are not equally capable of receiving the education that non-disabled children receive; therefore, teaching disabled children requires different skills and abilities. Here the emphasis seems to be on teachers' ability to teach disabled children rather than teachers focusing on modifying their current teaching styles to meet the learning needs of all children.

Thus, the special education discourse in *Success for All* could be problematic for the inclusive education intention of the policy that recognises every child being present, and participating in learning and belonging. Assuring equitable access to learning opportunities requires critical reflection about how the special education discourse and its associated ableist assumptions can hinder the inclusion of disabled children. This requires system-level support that commits to rejecting the ability-based segregation of children in education policy and recognises the learning needs and identities of disabled and other marginalised children.

The following is the second discourse found in my CDA of *Success for All* policy, neoliberal ableism.

The Discourse of Neoliberal-ableism

Another discourse uncovered in the text of *Success for All* policy is the discourse of neoliberal ableism. As discussed in the CDA of *Te Whāriki*, neoliberalism's focus on individualism and productivity is problematic for the social goal of inclusion in ECE. In neoliberal ideology, special education discourse plays an important role in the surveillance, categorisation, and normalisation of disabled children who are considered to be disrupting the normalcy of 'neoliberal ideals' (non-disabled) in the education system (Runswick-Cole, 2011). In this regard, the discourse of special education under the market-based model ensures that the education system runs as smoothly as possible by remediating differences of disabled children through special education services, which are often justified as meeting the needs of children (Barton, 2000). The discourse of neoliberalism is evident in my CDA of *Success for All* where special education practices provide a powerful and legitimising way of including disabled children. The neoliberal ideology in the text of *Success for All* is uncovered by analysing implicit assumptions in the following statements. The document states that "special education is important for the future success of New Zealand and New Zealanders. It helps all children and young people achieve their potential, leading to better outcomes for them, their communities and broader society" (p. 31). The document also notes that "special education is vital if we are to ensure all children achieve their potential. When we deliver the right services and support for children and young people to be present, participating and learning in education, they go on to have better lives and require less support as adults" (p. 8).

The above statements suggest implicit value assumptions about what is necessary and important. Fairclough (2009) pointed out that the value assumptions in a text identify the particular ideology of hegemony and universalisation. The above statements may legitimise the discourse of 'neoliberal ableism' by sending messages that special intervention and services are important in the lives of disabled children so that they can become self-sufficient and independent individuals who require less support as adults and achieve better outcomes for themselves and the country's future economic development. Peters (2013) notes that the view of the development of future citizens is a way to encourage an individual to take care of their financial matters and be economically independent without state intervention. Therefore, "within neoliberal discourse, disability and difference are constructed as private 'problems', deficits and lacks in and of individuals" (Lyons, 2021, p. 9) rather than questioning the system. Accordingly, the above statements in the *Success for All* policy may imply the discourse of neoliberalism that privileges able-bodied individuals who lessen state financial burdens as opposed to those who are economically dependent and require support. In this regard, the policy recognised special education services as an important way to manage the 'disability' so that disabled children become independent adults who require less or no support from the government.

Furthermore, the discourse of neoliberalism in *Success for All* indicates investment in teachers' professional development to increase their capabilities to identify children with behavioural difficulties and support them to manage their behaviour. The document states that:

> In the face of rising demand, we need to maximise the impact of current resources. In recent years, we've worked with schools and education providers to lift their capability to identify and better manage children and young people with special education needs. For example, signs of behavioural issues can be identified before a specialist, one-on-one support is needed. This allows support to be given to children much earlier, at a lower cost, and with a greater likelihood of resolving the difficulty (MoE, 2014, p. 29)

The above statement marks the deontic modality, where the authors seem to advise that school and ECE staff are accountable for identifying and managing children with special needs. This is done by increasing the capacity of education staff through a programme like Positive Behaviour For Learning (PB4L). PB4L is the fourth component of the *Success for All* policy with three intervention programmes. Fergusson et al. (2013) note that PB4L reflect "an increasing focus in New Zealand health, education and social policy on the identification, implementation and evaluation of programmes and interventions aimed at the prevention, treatment and management of conduct problems in young people" (p. 51). Within PB4L, one of the interventions is the Incredible Years for Teachers Programme (IYTP), aimed at providing teachers with behavioural strategies that help teachers change children's disruptive behaviour into a positive one. The Ministry of Education (2013) states that positive behaviour "is a prerequisite to improving the engagement and achievement of our children and young people" (p. 4). Positive behaviour outcomes in children are measured in relation to individual children's behaviour rather than a change in teaching curriculum, ECE settings routines and learning environment. In this regard, the neoliberal agenda in *Success for* All seems to guide teachers' practice to focus on managing children's behaviour so that they can become productive and responsible citizens, rather than nourishing human values, and recognising and respecting diversity and reciprocity in classrooms. Thus, countering ableism requires teachers to question the dominant neoliberal notion of education and adopt the ethical and moral principles in inclusive education to recognise and value the diverse needs of children.

Section Summary

My CDA of *Success for All* policy has revealed the tensions in the inclusive education approach, marked by the discourses of special education and neoliberalism. These dominant discourses may reinforce ableism as they are constructed on the perceived idea of normalcy and valuable citizenship and shape the selves of disabled children through special education practices of identification and remediation of disability. I also indicate how these dominant discourses could inform ECE teachers' practices and negatively impact the inclusive education vision of the policy. The following three chapters report findings from my CDA of the case study's data.

Chapter Six: Exploring the Framing of Disability, Inclusion and Autism at Shemrock

Chapter Overview

This chapter explores the construction of disability and inclusive education by the teachers at Shemrock (the chosen ECE setting), and examines the ways in which these may be informed by ableism. The data presented in this chapter are derived from my semi-structured individual interviews with teachers. Drawing from the social constructionist paradigm and using thematic analysis, I gave primacy to the participants' views by identifying the themes from the interview transcripts. I then interpreted themes using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), informed by the theoretical perspective of Disability Studies in Education (DSE), to analyse the language used by the participants. The guiding question for this analysis was: what does the language used by the participants tell us about the discourses that support the inclusion of autistic children at Shemrock or become barriers to their inclusion? There are various discourses that inform the ideas of inclusion and exclusion in ECE. These include discourses of developmentalism, special education, and the medical discourse of disability. These discourses can also be seen to reflect ableism and can shape the principles and practices of inclusive education. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explores the participants' understanding of disability. The second section discusses the participants' perceptions of inclusion and inclusive practices. The last section reflects on participants' experiences of working with autistic children.

Teachers' Understanding of Disability

Kang (2009) notes that teachers construct disability based on their own beliefs, attitudes, and experiences, which are influenced by the social values of people in the education context and society. The teacher participants in this research are all female. Those interviewed included three teachers, a curriculum leader, and an Education Support Worker who were closely involved in working with autistic children at Shemrock (see Chapter Four for the demographic profile of participants).

The following section presents five examples of how language was used by participants to describe their understanding of the term 'disability'.

The excerpts presented here were in response to the interview questions: “What do you understand by the term ‘disability’? And what are your experiences of working with disabled children?” (see Appendix A, B & C for interview schedules). Two key themes were identified from the interviews. The first theme shows an understanding of disability which is premised on an entanglement of two models of disability, the medical and the social models. The second theme demonstrates how the participants’ understandings of disability were shaped by their personal experiences. However, participants varied in the extent to which their responses reflected each of these models.

Entanglement between the Medical and Social Models of Disability

The first excerpt is drawn from a conversation with Sofia, a teacher at Shemrock that shows a complex mix of discourses:

Excerpt 6.1: Individual Teacher Interview

> Sofia (teacher): Disability is when people struggle in doing their daily stuff and need extra support to carry out their daily routine. The help disabled people require to carry out their tasks depends on the type and severity of their disability.
>
> Sofia: When you say disabled, you mean that people with physical disability only, isn’t it?
>
> Researcher: No, I am talking about physical, intellectual and developmental disabilities (e.g. children with autism, ADHD and learning disabilities).
>
> Sofia: Okay. If it’s physical, then it’s about making them comfortable, but if it is mental, we need to provide extra support. One should treat them as fair. We should not judge them and their abilities. In my view, disabled people could be different, but not like the disabled in their abilities.

Sofia’s understanding of disability appears tentative. First, she seems to describe disability from the medical model as an individual’s inability to perform their daily routine, which requires them to have help to carry out their activities. Sofia’s understanding of disability as a limitation may be primarily informed by her understanding of people who are physically disabled. Therefore, she sought the researcher’s confirmation of the meaning of disability. Sofia's understanding could be influenced by the dominant medical model that sees a person’s functional limitations as a cause of disadvantage that they experience and presumes that disabled people are helpless and unable to do things for themselves. Therefore, the expectation is that disabled people need extra help to feel comfortable in their environment and carry on with their lives. However, she also seems to acknowledge the role of society's judgement about disabled people's abilities as a barrier to a fair society. Sofia's words such as "fair" and "not judge" may reflect the rights-based discourse of disability. These values appear to exist in tandem with thinking influenced by the medical model of disability.

A mix of discourses in describing disability also appears in Sherry's (Education Support Worker) statement.

Excerpt 6. 2: Individual Interview

> **Sherry:** Hmmm…..I think the difficulty in language, understanding, social skills and physical limitation to do anything. I think people with a negative attitude toward disability can make them more disabled rather than help them overcome their disability.

Sherry's understanding of disability can be seen to closely align with both the medical and social models of disability. She described disability as a functional limitation that impacts a person's activity. She also considered the role of negative societal attitudes in disabling individuals. The contradictions between her views are evident when she focuses on disablement, locating the problem in society's negative attitude toward disability while granting the power to the same society to help disabled people overcome their disability. Sherry's understanding of disability seems to reflect the dominant medical model in ECE and society that sees disability as a disorder that needs to be treated and overcome while simultaneously allocating blame to society.

The idea of overcoming disability is also a core characteristic of ableism that privileges 'normal' children and expects disabled children to overcome their disability to be considered in the range of 'normal' development and behaviours in ECE settings. In this regard, the description of the 'normal' child within developmental psychology reinforces the discourse of special education that plays a role in remediating and overcoming disability.

By contrast, Stevie's understanding aligns well with the social model of disability.

Excerpt 6. 5: Individual Interview

> **Stevie (curriculum leader and a teacher)**: Disability covers a variety of things. It is not just the label that we give to a certain condition. It is a label as far as I am concerned to a

> group of people based on characteristics that they display whether they are just blind or deaf or have learning or social disabilities. Disability is a label that we use for a group of people. I believe the environment plays a huge role in enabling a disability to foster and grow. Environment influences the way people engage with people with disabilities.

Stevie's understanding of disability can be unpacked at two levels. First, she defined disability as a label that is assigned to a group of people based on impairment. Secondly, she talked about society's role in enabling disability through the way non-disabled people interact and engage with disabled people. Like Sofia and Sherry, but expressed more decisively, Stevie's views of disability seem to be informed by some tenets of the social model of disability, locating problems within attitudes of non-disabled people toward disability.

Understanding Disability from Lived Experiences

Different responses were evident in participants' beliefs about disability when two teachers talked about their personal experiences of disability. Here these teachers attribute the 'problem' of disability to society rather than within an individual child. Cherie's comments are presented here:

Excerpt 6. 3: Individual Interview

> **Cherie:** Disability is not losing an arm or leg. Though you do have impaired abilities, you are not disabled. It's the cognitive difference that you are not able to do things. The reason I say this [is] because I have a brother who was born with one and a half arms. I grew up with him. When you said to define disability, I thought even though my brother had body harnesses and had a limb missing, he was not disabled. He was able to do things everyone else did but slower. So, to me they are not disabled. You can make them disabled by the way you treat them.
>
> The attitude of our social environment really matters in the way they create disability. If teachers and parents have a negative view of disability, then they cannot help children to achieve their goals or may not provide them with equal opportunities that they provide to other children. Sometimes having a small physical area can hinder their ability to move from one place to another. Some disabilities are invisible until you talk to that person then later realise that he has autism or a learning disability. People with invisible disabilities

> don’t get much benefit from our physical environment as it is created keeping in mind the needs of a normal person.

Cherie's view of disability seems to be substantially informed by her brother’s experience of physical disability. Cherie’s comments suggest that she does not consider physical differences such as her brother’s missing arm a disability. She believes that her brother’s physical disability does not impact his ability to perform tasks that an able-bodied person can do. Cherie’s words “it’s the cognitive difference that you are not able to do things” (Line 2, Excerpt 6.3) acknowledge cognitive differences as a disability because they impact a person's cognitive ability to perform tasks.

Cherie’s comments align with the social model of disability in her explanation of disability not as an individual limitation but as a result of negative social responses toward disability. Cherie’s statements indicate she appreciates the role of physical and social norms in disabling individuals with impairment. She believes that the physical environment of society is designed to serve those who are normal and in the majority. She seems to believe that the disadvantages and restrictions of activity caused by the physical environment are not only limited to those with physical disabilities, but also to those who have cognitive disabilities that are sometimes invisible. Thus, Cherie’s understanding of disability appears to be informed by the social model of disability as she acknowledges that negative attitudes and the design of the physical world are barriers to equitable opportunities. The importance of removing physical, conceptual, and social barriers to children’s learning and participation is also articulated in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017). Cherie’s understanding of disability seems to align with the discourse of inclusion that focuses on children's rights and removing barriers to learning as evident in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) and other key international policy documents related to children’s rights and inclusion (UNESCO, 1994; UNCROC, 1989).

Neah, another teacher, also drew on her personal experiences when defining disability. She said:

Excerpt 6. 4: Individual Interview

> **Neah:** Disability is something that hinders and stops you from moving at the pace at which society expects you to move. Something that hinders your daily life activities and tasks. Disability is like a challenge that a person has. Like my disability is hearing. I am hard of hearing. But people won’t just label it as a disability. But it does slow my pace of

> moving forward because I cannot hear. And disability is not just about physical limitation and could be like hearing or intellectual disability.
>
> I grew up as a child who had a hearing difficulty. So, I feel connected with deaf children or any other children who have disabilities. My own experience has informed my beliefs about disability. I think disabled children should be given the opportunities to thrive in their life like other children. It depends on the perception of the people they are dealing with in everyday life. A person who holds a negative perception about disability can let the child down due to their disability. The attitudes of other people matter in terms of opportunities that children with disabilities get to achieve their life goals and our physical environment. I don't think people realise how important is our physical environment. I am speaking from a personal experience. We had a father with dwarfism who we never met until he came to our centre one day. We had a doorbell that he could not reach. Luckily, a teacher was near the door, and she heard that parent calling, "open the door please," and we were like ok. Those who have dwarfism cannot reach the door handle. But we have a sort of assumption that people can open the door, but they cannot. I think that disability as a concept needs to be more open in our society.

Neah's understanding of disability seems to be informed by the relational model of disability embedded in the DSE perspectives that see disability as an interactive experience between the individual with the environment and barriers in society. Sharing her personal experience, Neah understands her hearing difficulty as a limitation that stops her from moving at the same pace as non-disabled people in society. Neah's understanding of disability suggests disability as a lived experience resulting from her interaction with the society that is designed for 'normal' people of which hearing ability is expected. In this context, Neah's comments suggest that society creates barriers and limits opportunities for her to move and participate in society in ways that 'normal' people do.

Furthermore, Neah's example of a father with dwarfism points out the inaccessible design of the physical environment as a disabling factor at Shemrock, which is created based on the 'normal' adult height. Neah's comments suggest that the infrastructure at Shemrock is designed on the assumption that adults will use the doors and expects adults to be of normal height and ability. In this context, the design of the built environment of Shemrock is based on the presumed ability of the 'normal' adult and has not considered children and the broader community of users including disabled parents, teachers, and children. However, it is also possible that the decision to place the door handle within the reach of an adult at Shemrock is based on the consideration that children should not be able to reach the door handle to let themselves out of the centre.

Having discussed how disability is constructed through understanding, beliefs and experiences of teachers at Shemrock, the following section considers participants' beliefs about inclusive education.

Teachers' beliefs about Inclusive Education

Avramidis and Norwich (2002) point out that teachers' attitudes and beliefs are critical to the success of inclusive education. Teachers' commitment to implementing inclusive teaching may be informed by their understandings of the concept of inclusion. During individual interviews, participants were asked to describe their understanding of the term 'inclusion' and talk about how they facilitate inclusive education for autistic children in their practice [see Appendix A, B & C for interview questions]. The excerpts of transcripts that follow are examples of teachers' responses to the following questions; "What does an inclusive classroom look like to you? What are possible barriers to inclusive education?" (see Appendix A, B & C for interview schedules).

Inclusive Education: Rights and Special Education Support

Excerpt 6. 6: Individual Interview

> **Sofia (teacher):** An inclusive classroom for me is where all the children are included. It does not matter if a child has autism or ADHD. It's not good to exclude a child with disability from an activity if he has a disability. But if it is severe like ADHD or autism, then he may need someone to support [him] that child.

Sofia's understanding of an inclusive classroom reflects the philosophical understanding of inclusion that is informed by the rights-based discourse of disability and embedded in antidiscrimination legislation (UNESCO, 1994; UNCRPD, 2006; UNCROC, 1989). This legislation supports the right of children to receive special education support to ensure that they have equitable learning opportunities. Sofia's views seem to align with the rights-based discourse as she questions the exclusion of children from classroom activities because of their disability. Moreover, she points out the need for funded support for those with severe disabilities to be included.

Inclusion based on a Child's Interest in Participating

An additional perspective on inclusion is evident in the response of Sherry:

Excerpt 6. 7: Individual Interview

> **Sherry:** Inclusion is providing equal learning opportunities to all children. Well! in practice it depends if a child is approachable. When they show interest in activities then inclusion can be seen. If they are not interested in doing the activities, then it becomes difficult to achieve inclusion. For example: sometimes Jason [pseudonym] just loves doing an activity, but other times he just ignores it.

Similar to Sofia, Sherry's comment of "providing equal learning opportunities to all" suggests a universal approach to inclusion framed by a view of the human rights model. However, in practice, she relates inclusion to the child's interest in joining an activity. She believes that considering the child's interest in participating in the activity is important for allowing children to make their own choices and decisions about learning. However, Sherry does not seem to include thoughts about how teachers can change their practices and the environment to include everyone effectively. *Te Whāriki* notes that inclusion for all children requires teachers to respond to each child's ability, interests, strengths, and needs. Moreover, the curriculum points out that an inclusive curriculum requires adapting the environment and teaching practices as necessary (MoE, 2017). The framework of DSE also advocates for a strengths-based approach to learning that considers the needs and abilities of all children while planning teaching instruction. However, in her comments, Sherry appears to focus on the child's interest and discounts other important factors (adapting the environment and teaching practices) to provide an inclusive curriculum.

Benefits of Inclusion for Disabled Children

Excerpt 6. 8: Individual Interview

> **Stevie (curriculum leader and a teacher)**: Inclusion happens when all the children, regardless of their disabilities are included and engage in education. Inclusion helps children with disabilities in their socialisation, routines and structures of activities. It helps them push their boundaries and be a part of classroom learning.

Stevie's comments not only seem to align with the discourse of social inclusion about including all children, but also provide a holistic view of inclusion. In the holistic view of inclusion, Stevie's understanding seems to go beyond assessable developmental milestones. She recognises inclusion as beneficial for disabled children's socialisation and participation with their peers in classroom routines and activities rather than defining inclusion as helping disabled children meet a 'normal' developmental trajectory.

Role of Teachers in Facilitating Inclusion

The interviews with participants also revealed a range of views about the teacher's role in facilitating inclusion. One interpretation of this role was offered by Cherie:

Excerpt 6. 9: Individual Interview

> Cherie: I believe the inclusive classroom is when the teacher ensures that the children have the same resources and activities as everyone else, but they use their understanding and abilities. It allows the child to do the things they want to do in their own way. Make sure no one disturbs them doing the work they like to do. For instance, one day, Kylee was busy building the blocks. At the same time, other children were crossing her way, and I told the children to stop and be careful of Kylee as she was building blocks. Then they went from the other side of the table. It is also making other children aware that if Kylee is doing something, then they should not disturb her and let her explore the environment.

Cherie's view of inclusion involves encouraging children's diverse ways of learning. She describes inclusion not as the assimilation of disabled children to the 'norm' of classroom learning but as ensuring that they are given opportunities to use their unique understandings and abilities. Inclusion from this perspective means that teachers and children need to acknowledge that every child is different and has their way of learning and doing things. Cherie's perspective aligns well with the frame of inclusive education from DSE perspectives. Understanding inclusive education from DSE perspectives opens up opportunities for teachers to structure their teaching according to the needs, abilities and strengths of disabled children. Moreover, DSE suggests transformative possibilities for teachers to name and resist the idea of the 'normal' child, which is central to the exclusionary practices of disability (Bagleri & Lalvani, 2020; Baglieri et al., 2011b; Douglas & Martino, 2020).

The interview with Neah showed her recognition of the need to provide a range of play and learning opportunities:

Excerpt 6. 10: Individual Interview

> **Neah:** An inclusive classroom is where all the children are given equal opportunities to participate in the activities to explore the environment and feel belongingness. We encourage all children to join the activities. But we also let children take the initiative or interest to join us in play and mat time. On a bigger scale, we facilitate inclusion by providing all different types of play. We know children's interests, so we know if they will be going to be engaged.

Neah's statements discuss inclusion in a wider sense as providing equal learning opportunities. Furthermore, she talked about how teachers in their centre facilitate inclusion by planning different types of play considering children's interests. Neah's understanding of inclusive education is likely to be informed by *Te Whāriki* where there is an expectation that it is teachers' collective responsibility to make sure every part of the learning environment is inclusive for each child to have a sense of belonging and contribution. The view of inclusive education framed by DSE also seems to align with Neah's understanding of inclusion. Inclusion from a DSE perspective views teachers as agents of change who provide opportunities for belonging and learning to children through differentiated instruction and structuring teaching to accommodate children's learning needs (Ashby, 2012; Douglas & Martino, 2020). Moreover, within DSE perspectives, the differences of disabled children are recognised and celebrated, therefore providing possibilities for teachers to view disability as a diverse and positive identity (Connor et al., 2008).

The following section discusses teachers' experiences of working with autistic children.

Medical Discourse: Framing Autistic Children as 'Others' in their Minds, Bodies and Emotions

In this section, using CDA informed by the theoretical orientation of DSE, I critique the presence of the medical discourse of autism. The medical discourse of autism can inform ableist behaviours and practices that localise problems within individual children's minds and bodies and can have significant implications for the inclusion of autistic children. The following are excerpts from participants' individual interview transcripts. During the interviews, teachers were asked to respond to the questions related to the following broad themes: What are your experiences of working with children with ASD? What approaches/strategies do you use to facilitate inclusion?

Sofia’s response was:

Excerpt 6. 12: Individual Interview

> **Sofia:** Ohh! A long time ago, we used to have a boy with a different type of autism. I heard there are different types of autism. His case was quite harder. This child was a bit dangerous. He had a lot of complaints in our centre. It was a long time ago. He must be in primary or middle school now. He was quite dangerous and clever in his way. His language was not developed. He knocks over everybody who comes in his way. He struggled in interacting with other kids. The centre used to give complaints to his parents every day.
>
> Here in this centre, Jacob is diagnosed with autism, but I don’t know what type of autism it is. Jacob is quite social in his way. Like 4 to 5 months ago, Jacob was also like Jason. He used to hurt anybody who came in his way. He has grown out of it. He is not so good at listening to instructions, but he is better at socialising. Jacob did not have any physical or aggressive behaviour as such.
>
> It’s hard sometimes when children with autism switch off and on emotionally. A child with autism I have worked in another centre did not have any emotional feelings. When he knocked over other children, he just carried on with his activities as if nothing had happened. He did not have any sympathy toward other children. I think he did not have control over it. The struggle that I had with that boy is I could not predict what he would do next. The strategy I use is to try to know a child's routine to figure out hunger and tiredness. Sometimes physical comfort also soothes children with autism.

Sofia’s statements resonate with a stereotypical and deficit view of autistic children as noncommunicative, violent, unrelatable and different from ‘typical’ children. Sharing her teaching experience with Jacob (child with autism), she expressed astonishment about Jacob's socialising skills regarding how he likes to interact with others, a departure from the stereotypical norm for autistic children that they have difficulty forming social relationships. She also showed concern about her ability to deal with the emotional uncertainty of autistic children’s behaviour. Within this frame, Sofia’s statements can be seen to construct her view of an autistic child from the medical discourse of disability where the child is defined by their perceived deficits. Moreover, Sofia's understanding might inform the homogenous view of autism embedded in the dominant medical discourse of autism reflected in media, informational descriptions, and advocacy campaigns (MacCarthaigh; 2020; McGuire, 2011). MacCarthaigh (2020) argues that knowledge about autism in informative print media provides a negative description of autism that draws on the medical discourse and provides a homogenous view of autism as a pathology of sensory, communication, emotional and social functioning. The medical discourse of autism among teachers can negatively impact how inclusion is understood and practised in ECE settings (Douglas et al., 2019; Goodall, 2019).

There were a mix of discourses evident in the comments from Neah:

Excerpt 6.12: Individual Interview

> **Neah:** We had a child in our centre. He had autism with ADHD. His behaviour was just 'out of the gate'. It was not enjoyable being around him because he was so violent. Somehow, I knew how to settle him through my experience. I think his behaviour was very much environmental. His behaviour was due to what was happening at home. We had an Education Support Worker for him. We had very basic IEP goals for him, like toilet training. He was very much into solitary play. He could understand and has got very good language skills. He just used to walk around so angry, and he got so much energy. Now he is under the care of social services due to what's been happening at home.

Neah's comments suggest an overlap between the pathologising and social views of an autistic child. The pathologising view can be observed when she locates the fault in an individual child's behaviour. She also considers the role of the environment and family circumstances in informing that child's behaviour. Furthermore, she talked about that child being involved "very much into solitary play" (line 6, Excerpt 6.12). Playing with others or cooperative play is regarded as an essential milestone in a child's development and is observed as typical for children when they are older (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). Thus Neah's comments might reflect the developmental understanding of 'play with others' as appropriate for children's observing social and emotional competencies, which mark children who play differently as 'others', providing fewer opportunities to recognise children's differences in playing.

Furthermore, the taken for granted understanding of ‘appropriate ‘and ‘not so appropriate’ behaviour is evident in the following comments of Cherie (teacher):

Excerpt 6.12: Individual Interview

> Cherie: We had one little girl with autism who would just totally blank out. I used to run behind her yelling out. She had some behaviours of running in the middle of activity toward the outdoor area where she used to throw toys at others. She used to be in her world of imagination, and no one knew when she would just start running to hit other children.

Cherie’s comments reflect the ‘norm’ in terms of appropriate behaviour in ECE that it is not appropriate for a child to run in the middle of the activity, and hit and hurt other children. Cherie seems to recognise the girl‘s actions as inappropriate ways of behaving in an ECE setting. Cherie’s comments suggest that she was worried that the girl’s behaviour (throwing toys) might contravene other children’s rights to be safe in the ECE environment. Cherie’s statement suggests that she sees her role as an ECE teacher as keeping all children safe. However, sometimes, young autistic children use challenging behaviour to communicate their needs, including running away, hitting, biting, and screaming. According to Waddington (2019) there are two reasons for children’s challenging behaviours; (1) to get something that they want and like or need (2) to get away with something that they do not like or want. Considering Waddington’s (2019) argument, the autistic girl’s behaviour may be her way of coping with the stimulation in the environment of an ECE setting, rather than having an intention to hit other children.

Excerpt 6.13: Individual Interview

> **Sherry:** I have mostly worked with autistic children. I guess when you talk to children with autism, then that information processes in their mind a day later or sometimes hours later. It’s when you talk all the time, and they don’t get it. Children with autism get upset quite fast, even if you are talking to them. The challenge is when you don’t know what they need when they are non-verbal. Sometimes they cry or get angry. I find it difficult to understand the reason behind their behaviour.

Sherry’s views may imply the social behaviours of a child diagnosed or suspected of having autism includes taking time to understand others' perspectives. She also talked about the auditory processing challenges that most autistic people face. Her comments suggest that she understands the different needs and challenges that autistic children encounter in their lives. However, she seems to have difficulty supporting the behaviour and emotional needs of autistic children. The difficulty may be because of Sherry's limited understanding of using an alternative form of communication (non-verbal over verbal language) to support autistic children to express their needs.

Overall, the interview responses indicate that teachers' views of autism at Shemrock might be informed by the dominant medical view of autism, where they reflected on the challenges in the lives of autistic children deriving from their individual characteristics, discounting the role of the ECE environment and society in creating and exacerbating these challenges. Informed by DSE perspectives, scholars have critiqued the medical understanding of autism as 'not normal' and described autism as a social and relational impairment that is produced in the interaction of autistic children and the context, time and space (Douglas et al., 2019). Shifting understanding of autism from medical discourse to disability studies perspectives can allow teachers to recognise the role of educational and attitudinal barriers in disabling autistic children. Moreover, the DSE framework advocates for recognising experiences of autistic children that contest the homogenous view of autism and help teachers understand how autism impacts children in different ways and the diversity of needs among autistic children (Douglas et al., 2019; Goodall, 2019).

Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed some of the ways in which teachers at Shemrock understand disability, inclusive education and their experiences of enacting inclusive education for autistic children. My analysis of the teachers' interview transcripts suggests that participants are caught between the social and medical discourse of understanding disability. Moreover, in teachers' beliefs about inclusion, the rights-based discourse of inclusion that supports equitable educational rights for 'all children' was evident. Furthermore, teachers' experiences with autistic children display the medical discourse where they reflect on challenges faced by autistic children arising from their individual characteristics. Teachers also talked about their challenges in understanding the needs of autistic children. These findings suggest that to effectively implement the practice of full inclusion, a clear understanding of disability, inclusion and autism from DSE perspectives is imperative. Understanding and knowledge about DSE perspectives can help teachers recognise how dominant discourses of disability and ableism can propagate a deficit view of disability, inclusion and autism, and enable teachers to reflect on their role and barriers in their ECE settings in maintaining the exclusion of autistic and other disabled children.

Chapter Seven: Understanding how Ableism Works at Shemrock

Chapter Overview

In the last chapter, Shemrock teachers' understandings of and beliefs about disability and inclusion and the ways in which some views seemed to be informed by ableism were discussed. The discussion in this chapter examines how ableism can be seen to operate in interactions within this ECE setting and how these interactions can provide insight into disablist practices toward autistic children. The chapter discusses data from my video observations and follow-up interviews with teachers in which they shared their interpretation of the video observations, an individual interview with Kylee's (an autistic child) mother and the teachers' focus group discussion on interview themes. The data was analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), informed by the framework of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) and ableism. Using CDA, I explore the participants' language and its connection with various discourses (developmental psychology, special education and the medical discourse of disability) associated with ableism. Several discourses, located within these three broader discourses and taking cognisance of the ECE context for disabled children in New Zealand, were identified. These discourses will be examined in the following sections beginning with the discourse of discipline.

The Discourse of Discipline

Mat Time Rules

The mat time at Shemrock is usually conducted for 15 to 20 minutes before kai time (lunch time). The following observation features a mat time scenario for Kylee and Jason (autistic children) where teachers consider that Kylee is not following the rules of mat time. This mat time involved three teachers and around 20 children. The teachers' actions and comments appear to be informed by the discourse of discipline. The understanding of discipline employed in this analysis draws on the definition by Millei (2005) who defines discipline as a form of control that draws strongly on the discourses of developmental psychology and shapes teachers' understandings of appropriate behaviour, rules and practice in ECE settings.

Excerpt 6.14: Transcript of Video Observation

Stevie: Should we do one more song?. Are we ready? Give me your twinkle twinkle little stars. Twinkle twinkle little star.............in the sky.

Kylee (an autistic child): Ahuuuuuuuu (Screaming at the back of the mat and scratching her body and trying to pull off her pants).

Sofia (Another teacher) is trying to calm Kylee. Sofia is holding Kylee on her lap and rubbing her back. **(**Other children are singing along with Stevie).

Stevie to children on the mat: One more turn with our fingers. Are we ready? That's for our alphabets. Tahi rua toru wha. ABCDEFGHIJKLMN………… WXY and Z. Now I know my ABC, next time I want you to sing with me. Well done! Tamariki ma, I have something very… (pause for a second).

Stevie to Sofia (another teacher): You might have to take her (Kylee) away (Stevie looks stressed with a frowning facial expression). It's too loud (Sofia is refereeing to Kylee's screaming)

Sofia carried Kylee outside. Kylee kept screaming and scratching her body. Sofia tried to divert Kylee's attention by giving her toys. Sofia is trying to check Kylee's nappy, but Kylee won't allow her to touch it. Sofia then leaves Kylee under the supervision of another teacher near the family area in the preschool room. Sofia returns to the mat. Kylee cries for some time, and then she gets distracted with toys in the family area. However, she keeps pulling her pants down and scratching her body.

Jason (an autistic child) is sitting on the mat and flipping through books.

Stevie to children on the mat: Loves! Anne …No, it is all right Braxon (pseudonym) is there. Anne, later you can take your turn. (pause for a second). Michelle took out her glasses box. Where is my friend Ayeja (pseudonym)? Where is Ayeja? She is not here; she might be in another room. Okay.

Stevie: Loves! Look what Michelle's (pseudonym) got, One simple thing on her eyes. What are they?

Children on the mat: Glasses.

Stevie to another teacher: Can you please go and get Ayeja. I need to show them her eyeglasses, please.

Stevie to children on the mat: Ayeja wears these (glasses) to be able to see clearly. Stevie wears these (glasses) to be able to read. Stevie needs this all the time to be able to see you all clearly. If she does not wear this, then everything becomes blurry. Like you can make your eyes blurry if you go cross-eyed like this. Everything is blurry. Kylee: ahhhhhhhhhhh (Kylee starts screaming again and trying to enter the room, but Sofia carries her outside into the playground).

Jason (stands up and walks toward the door).

Jason (standing at the door and looking outside).

I conducted a follow-up interview with Stevie to ascertain her understanding and interpretation of the video. She had access to the video for a week before the interview to give her time to reflect on the mat time incident involving Kylee.

Excerpt 6.15: Follow-up Interview

Stevie: A lot was going on that day at mat time. We were trying to invite Kylee onto the mat. You can see here that I am doing mat time with children. At the back, Sofia is sitting with Kylee and trying to calm her. I do not want Kylee to sit on the mat and cry. She really needs to learn that mat time is [time] to sit properly on the mat. It is to show her that it’s not okay to sit on the mat and scream because you want to go and do something else. I think Kylee was resisting sitting on the mat and wanted to go outside, but later, when I saw her pulling her pants down and screaming, then I thought that it would be better if she had some time out with Sofia, and that’s why I asked Sofia to take her outside.

I then asked Stevie about teacher expectations of mat time behaviour for all children including Kylee and Jason specifically.

Excerpt 6.16: Follow-up Interview

Stevie: Mat time expectations are the same for all children. The goal was to help Kylee sit on the mat through the guided participation of kaiako. I told you before that we are pushing Kylee’s boundaries to involve her in group activities and mat time. Children are encouraged to be on the mat. If other children see Kylee playing outside during mat time, they just look outside and get distracted. Like with Jason, when you started your observations, he did not like to sit for the whole mat time routine. He used to sit on the mat just for 5 minutes, and that is [the same] for kai time because he knows that kai time comes after mat time. Gradually, we have encouraged him to stay on the mat, and now he sings karakia and enjoys story time. He waits for the mat time routine to finish then he goes and washes his hands and joins for kai. Similarly, we are encouraging Kylee to be on the mat.

Mat time is a common group activity in ECE to encourage children's learning and socialisation (Mortlock et al., 2014). Teachers usually see mat time as a routine for bringing children together and “helping children initiate and maintain relationships with peers” (MoE, 2017, p. 37). In the observation, Jason (an autistic child) seems to be doing what is expected of children at mat time. He is sitting quietly like other children. However, he is not interested in what is going on at mat time. He is flipping through books and looking at pictures. He is staring at the food on the table. He is also looking outside to the sandpit, where he likes to spend most of his time. For Kylee (an autistic child), it is her first experience of mat time. Before this observation, Kylee has usually played outside in a sandpit under the supervision of one teacher while mat time took place inside.

Stevie’s words seem to be informed by the discourse of developmental psychology, which determines the expectations of appropriate behaviours at mat time. This can be observed in the follow-up interview with Stevie, where she reflects on mat time expectations. Stevie’s words that “she really needs to learn that mat time is [a time] to sit properly on the mat” indicate a categorical adherence to expected norms. The choice of the word “properly” reveals an assumption about appropriate behaviours. According to Stevie, Kylee resists sitting on the mat because she wants to do something else. She breaks the rules and sets a poor example for other children. This view is problematic as it underlies the expectation that all children need to fit into existing arrangements about ‘normal’ and ‘desirable’ behaviour in the ECE setting. Informed by this view, teachers may ignore children’s differences and fail to consider adapting their own practices.

Stevie’s comments show that she conceptualises mat time as an important activity for children’s social and behavioural development and initiating relationships with peers. Stevie seems to insist on the need for Kylee’s participation at mat time. In the follow-up interview, Stevie compared Jason and Kylee's behaviour, saying Jason used to sit for a shorter period on the mat, but now he follows the mat time rules and routine. As they had done with Jason, the teachers are seen to be “pushing Kylee’s boundaries” (line 3, Excerpt 6.16) to get her to be involved in the mat time routine. Stevie’s comments here suggest that in this instance she does not nurture Kylee’s mana as she ignores Kylee’s different needs, capabilities and interests in her insistence on her participation in the mat time routine. This insistence is counter to the concept of mana. Mana is at the heart of all the strands in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017). Mana portrays a child as a powerful, competent and capable learner. The role of ECE teachers is to respect and value an individual child’s identities, interests, strengths, language and culture to support and enhance their mana (MoE, 2017).

CDA of the observation and the follow-up interview show that Stevie wanted to encourage Kylee's participation during mat time. However, Stevie found Kylee's screaming to be disruptive to the mat time activities, and inappropriate behaviour from children during mat time. Therefore, Stevie asked Sofia to take Kylee outside and spend some time with her. In planning mat time, Stevie seemed not to have considered the diversity of children's needs. For example, Stevie may not have considered that the structuring of the mat time (proximity among children, noise, lighting and so on) could be overwhelming for Kylee and might be a reason for Kyle screaming and being "too loud" (Line 12, Excerpt 6. 14). Thus, CDA of the observation offers some evidence of disablism, in that the physical spaces and learning activities in Shemrock were not designed with students' diverse abilities in mind. This structural disablism can create barriers to doing (Thomas, 1999), restrict the participation of autistic children and also impact their mana. In planning an inclusive and meaningful curriculum it is important that teachers enhance all children's mana, including that of autistic and other disabled children, through planning pedagogy that considers their needs, strengths and capabilities.

Playing with Blocks

The discourse of discipline is also evident in the following observation, which captured three children, Reho (pseudonym), Jason (an autistic child) and Harper (pseudonym), playing with blocks on the outside deck area. A teacher is supervising them, and another six children are playing in the sandpit.

Excerpt 6.17: Transcript of Video Observation

Jason, Reho and Harper are playing with blocks

Reho to **Harper**: Look here! I built a stormy tower

Jason observes Reho and **Harper** building with the blocks and trying to build something by joining the blocks together.

Harper is pulling apart some blocks. Harper comes close to Jason to collect some blocks.

Reho to the **researcher:** Look what Jason made.

Jason moves to the other side to pick up some blocks. Jason picks up the tower that Harper made.

> **Harper** comes close to Jason and snatches his tower from Jason. **Jason,** in return, gently pushes Harper's arm to get him aside (Jason seems not to like the close proximity with Harper). Jason shifts his position when he sees other children coming too close to him.
> **Harper** pushes **Jason** and **Jason** starts crying.
> **Teacher (Becca)** moves quickly to that area and says to Harper, "Heeey, stop it." **Becca** takes **Jason** away from the scene and directs him toward the sandpit, where she supervises Jason and other children playing on the deck.
> **Harper** and **Reho** continue to play with blocks. **Jason** cries in the sandpit for a while, then he picks up a spade and starts digging in the sand.

In this observation, both Jason and Harper disrupt the discipline rules of the ECE setting by gently pushing each other. Jason's action of gently pushing Harper may be his non-verbal expression of saying 'no' to Harper. I could see before and during the observation that Jason did not like being in close proximity with other children during the play. Sensory sensitivities could be the reason that Jason gently pushed Harper to maintain some distance from him. Becca's (teacher) action of telling Harper to "stop it" (line 10, Excerpt 6.17) might show the teacher's expectation that Harper as a 'normal' child should be able to discipline himself. Becca's action of separating Jason from the group of 'normal' children suggests a perception of him as a 'threat' and 'disruptive' to 'normal' children's play. However, Becca's action of separating children also suggests the legitimacy of discipline rules to support all children's rights to be safe in their ECE settings. She may assume that Jason, as an autistic child can only play in a particular way. The diagnostic labelling of Jason possibly informs Becca's actions, which reflect the medical discourse of autism that remains dominant in ECE and society. Within this discourse, autistic children are defined as those who like to play alone, do not like to socialise and play with other children, and require constant ongoing surveillance. Becca's response may also suggest a limited understanding of the different play needs and sensory sensitivities among autistic children, and inadequate knowledge about how to support positive interactions among autistic and non-disabled children during play. For example, with enhanced understanding, Becca may have resorted to an aspect of building inclusive play spaces which requires commitment from teachers to initiate conversations with children about being gentle, respecting each other's play space, and showing non-disabled children positive ways to interact with their disabled peers (Burke, 2009). Moreover, an inclusive play environment requires attention to accommodate the diverse play and communication needs of children.

The Developmental Discourse and Play

Traditionally in Western culture, play was related to the developmental psychology discourse that sees play as "generally thought to be progress towards the goal of normative, productive adulthood" (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010, p. 500). Within normative/typical play, disabled children who fail to play in normative ways are marked as atypical (Goodley et al., 2016). However, from a childhood studies perspective, play is defined as a freely chosen, personally directed, and spontaneous activity that occurs without the interference of adults (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). Consistent with the sociocultural theory that underpins *Te Whāriki*, the authors of *Te Whāriki* note that "children learn through play: by doing, asking questions, interacting with others, devising theories about how things work and then trying them out and by making purposeful use of resources" (MoE, 2017, p. 46).

The discourse of developmental psychology seems to inform the following transcript of the video observation of two children Kylee (an autistic child) and Bali and a teacher (Sofia). Bali had recently joined the centre. Stevie (curriculum leader) told me that Bali has a speech difficulty. He is non-verbal. She said that Bali's parents had his hearing tested, but it was "all normal." According to teachers' observations, he might have autism. Stevie also told me that Bali's parents requested some extra support for Bali. The centre uses its funding to support Bali, giving him one-to-one time with Sofia (teacher) for a few hours a day. In this observation, Sofia sits at the table with Bali encouraging him to engage in a 'chalk-board activity' alongside other children.

Excerpt 6.18: Transcript of Video Observation
The context of the observation scenario involved a creativity corner at Shemrock. Sofia brings Bali to the creativity corner**.** There are four other children who are drawing on board and paper with felts and chalk.

Sofia (teacher) to Bali: Come Bali, we will do some work.

Sofia bends down on the floor, picks up the toy and puts it into the basket.

Sofia to Bali: Come sit down (Sofia points toward the chalkboard, but Bali turns toward Sofia, and raises his arm to reach out to Sofia).

> **Sofia** Ahhh (holds Bali on her lap and shows him the coloured chalk). Sofia draws curved lines on the board. She gives the chalk to Bali and asks, “Do you want to draw something?” Bali throws the chalk on the floor.
>
> **Kylee (autistic child)** is also playing at the creative corner. She is sitting on the floor and looking for a lump of clay to put in her mouth. **Sofia** turns toward **Kylee** and sees Kylee busy finding some clay.
>
> **Sofia** rubs the chalkboard and holds Bali’s hand, helping him draw on the board. However, Bali does not seem interested in the activity. (Bali holds the chalk for a few seconds and then drops it. He is looking around. He stands up from the chair)
>
> **Bali** stands up from the chair and turns his head upward toward Sofia. He gestures to Sofia by raising his hands to reach Sofia and indicating to her to pick him up.
>
> **Sofia** gently pushes him back as she says “No” and moves toward the outdoor area.

I conducted a follow-up interview with Sofia to discuss her understanding and interpretation of the video. She had access to the video for a week before the interview to enable time for her to reflect on the video.

Excerpt 6. 19: Follow-up Interview

> Sofia: I was trying to engage Bali with other children in a group activity. You might have observed that he does not show interest in other children. He runs away from the crowd and when other children join. He is non-verbal. Also, he doesn’t make eye contact. He comes to the centre on and off [intermittently]. His parents said he has some hearing problems, which I don’t think so because he really enjoys listening to music. There is something else because he does not respond like a normal child. He might have autism. However, I am not educated to work with children with autism, so I don’t know much about it. The centre is soon going to send me to the Autism New Zealand workshop. Stevie asked me to be with him from 9 in the morning till 11. He is making great progress in just two weeks. He started showing interest in group activities. When he joined the centre, he used to play alone. This little progress is very important for me because I saw him running away from the group of children. Unfortunately, he left our centre last week as the family has moved to Tauranga.

Excerpt 6. 20: Follow-up Interview

> **Sofia:** Yes, she was exploring the clay down there. Kylee enjoys sensory stuff like clay and stones. She touches and feels them. I feel connected with Kylee. I feel very sad that she cannot speak. She is such a lovely child. However, she gives a lot of non-verbal indicators by pointing her fingers. She gets upset when we try to push her into group activities. It's very difficult for her to sit in one place and do the activity. She keeps on moving. Most of the time, I have seen her playing alone in a sandpit and the family area. However, I encourage her to play in a group if she shows interest.

The power of the word 'normal' is reflected in Sofia's actions when she attempts to encourage Bali to join other children in a group activity. Sofia demonstrates to Bali how to use chalk on the board again, but Bali does not seem interested in following her lead. Instead, Bali indicates his lack of interest in the activity by turning towards Sofia, dropping the chalk and standing up from the chair. However, Sofia focuses on the normative side of the play, trying hard to make Bali use the chalk to draw. First, she demonstrates how to use chalk on the board, then she holds his hand and helps him make marks. Unsurprisingly, Sofia may be pushing Bali to do the 'activity' to help him master fine motor skills and to initiate interaction with other children. Sofia's expectation that Bali should become involved in the chalkboard activity is in keeping with the role of ECE teachers to support the cognitive, social and emotional development of children. Sofia's comments in the follow-up interview suggest that she was seeing the chalkboard activity as a means to support Bali's social development. The goal of enabling children to learn to play with and alongside each other in an ECE setting is also reflected in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017). However, for some autistic children participating in reciprocal play with their peers might be overwhelming because of close proximity among children and other sensory sensitivities. Furthermore, play seen primarily as a means to serve developmental goals might impede the value of play as an intrinsic and spontaneous activity. Utilising play for developmental goals is also risky for disabled children as adults control the play, direct the goals and judge the level of achievement and ability that the child achieves (Papatheodoru, 2006). Sofia's intention of pushing Bali to get involved in the chalkboard activity is intentional teaching to help Bali to achieve his developmental goals. However, Sofia does not seem to adapt the activity according to Bali's interests and needs which is central to the strengths-based approach to teaching in the ECE context in New Zealand (MoE, 2017).

Furthermore, Sofia's comments in the follow-up interview seem to construct teachers as "judges of normality" (Foucault, 1995, p. 304) who have assessed Bali's development and categorised it as abnormal, based on stereotypical assumptions about autism. Based on her observations Sofia has assessed Bali's behaviour as a deficit – he plays alone, struggles to join a group and has difficulty making eye contact. Hence, Bali is identified and labelled as possibly having 'autism'. Furthermore, Sofia's comments appear to draw from the discourse of special education, suggesting that mainstream teachers require specialist knowledge and skills to work with autistic children. This assumption that mainstream teachers require 'special knowledge and teaching skills' to teach autistic children may express a belief that autistic children are incapable of receiving the same education that is provided to their nondisabled peers (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Manalili, 2021). This assumption can further lead to an ableist attitude toward autistic children as it perceives autistic children as deficient when compared with 'normal'; therefore, they require 'special teaching' to compensate for their developmental delays.

Talking about Kylee in the follow-up interview, Sofia's comments suggest that Kylee was probably doing what she likes to do—exploring clay and playing alone in the sandpit and the family area. From a childhood studies perspective, play in ECE involves self-initiated and spontaneous play where children have the freedom to follow their interests and do what they want in an unrestricted way (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). The ECE setting is presented as a place where children are given options to choose from and get to make decisions and where teachers follow the child's interests (Millei, 2011). From the perspective of the sociocultural theories that underpin *Te Whariki*, there is an expectation that teachers will support children's play interests and choices to help them explore, learn and make sense of the world (MoE, 2017). Drawing from *Te Whāriki*, Sofia seems to support Kylee in exploring and playing according to her choices and interests.]

Furthermore, Sofia's concern for Kylee not being able to speak resonates with the developmental discourse where language development in the form of spoken speech is regarded as crucial developmental progress for children (Cannella, 1997). Gomez-Victoria and Pava-Ripoll (2021) argue that the view of verbal language as a privileged form of communication, an important feature of being human, self-realisation and agency in children reflects an ableist assumption. Within this ableist assumption, verbal language is characterised as a legitimised and privileged way of using language, and the absence of verbal speech is considered a deficit in 'normal' child development, thus restricting disabled children's different ways of being, and interacting. The discourse of developmental psychology might have informed Sofia's view of Kylee's non-verbal speech as a source of grief and sadness since Kylee was not meeting the age-related milestones of language development.

The Combination of Special Education and Inclusion Discourses

Evidence of the special education discourse seems to be indicated in the excerpts of the teachers' interview transcripts. As part of their individual interviews, teachers were asked the following questions: "What challenges do you face in facilitating the inclusion of autistic children? What sort of help do you require the most to overcome these challenges? What resources did you feel you needed when you were facing these challenges? How does your centre support you for the resources you require when teaching a child with ASD?" (See Appendix A, B & C for interview schedules).

Excerpt 6. 21: Individual Interview

> **Neah:** We just got a support worker for Jason who took a while to get from the Ministry. Sherry comes for six hours a week. The Early Intervention teacher also visits him once a term. Jason has just started to join us on the mat, and he also sings karakia. However, we are still struggling with Kylee as she does not like to sit on the mat. We need more professional help with Kylee, where she has some small goals to achieve. A process like IEP [Individual Education Plan] to [would] guide us through to achieve the goals.

Neah's comments infer that having funded support person for Jason helped with his communication skills and participation in group activities like mat time. She seems to be worried about Kylee's progress toward meeting these same developmental goals and expects that "professional help" is needed to plan an IEP for Kylee. Neah appears to draw on the discourse of special education, where she focuses on improving Kylee's development and skills to join group activities like mat time through the IEP process. IEPs are based on developmentally oriented goals which are used to monitor a child's progress across developmental milestones (Dempsey, 2012). Drawing from special education discourse, Neah seems to be suggesting that she is not an expert and does not have knowledge about the learning needs of autistic children; therefore, she needs "professional help" to support her to progress Kylee’s inclusion at Shemrock. Teachers wish for extra support itself is itself problematic, but the belief that seeking professional help for Kylee will help her progress toward normal developmental milestones is problematic. Florian (2015) argues that “when an intervention is based solely on an individualized (or personalized) response to impairment, or a specific difficulty in learning, important contextual requirements may be overlooked” (p. 169). Other teachers, also, pointed out the need for funded support for Kylee to support her inclusion.

During the focus group discussion, I invited teachers to comment on the common themes that emerged from the individual interviews with teachers. After outlining the rules for focus group discussion, I informed the participants that I was going to share some themes that I had identified from their individual interviews and asked them to contribute their views on these themes. I discussed the first theme of funded support and resources. I said that teachers had mentioned in their interviews the need to get extra funding and specialist help to support Kylee and Jason (autistic children). I noted that most of the teachers also discussed the challenges they encountered in getting extra support for Kylee. I asked for their thoughts on this theme and received the following responses from the teachers. Stevie responded:

Excerpt 6. 22: Focus Group Discussion

> **Stevie:** From support, we mean some guidance to give us directions about dealing with Kylee and Jason’s meltdowns. Now we are getting some support for Kylee, Rayleen (Early Intervention Teacher) visited Kylee at home two times. She also visited Kylee at the centre and made observations. She asked some questions to the teachers about her developmental goals. I talked to her about all challenges we are facing with Kylee. I last talked to her in December. She told me that she would send Kylee’s file to her manager to arrange an Education Support Worker. I have not heard anything from her. We don’t have an IEP plan in place for Kylee. We have some individual plans that teachers have planned for her, but we need some specialist guidance to achieve Kylee’s language goals. Like, for Jason, we have Sherry (Education Support Worker). His language has developed so much. He was like Kylee before. Now he can say our karakia with the help of teachers. Stevie’s response was affirmed by Cherie.

Excerpt 6. 23: Focus Group Discussion

> **Cherie:** I agree with Stevie. We are already behind in getting support for Kylee. I think the early years are the best time to start speech therapy.

In the above excerpts, Stevie and Cherie employ the discourse of early intervention as they focus extensively on getting funded support for Kylee. Drawing on the special education discourse like Neah, Stevie also articulated the need for specialist advice for teachers to help Kylee achieve her developmental goals. Furthermore, Stevie and Cherie both stressed the importance of providing Kylee with specialist support and intervention (speech therapy) as early as possible. The discourse of early identification and intervention is a priority in the New Zealand government's policies to support young vulnerable children. The discourse is also marked in *Success for All* (MoE, 2010), which recognises the importance of diagnosing children's disabilities as early as possible to provide intervention. Thus, it seems that these teachers were considering funding for expert support in the context of a rights-based discourse to ensure that Kylee got the support to participate in activities at Shemrock. The discourse of inclusion is evident in the following excerpt, where Stevie talked about the professional development that Shemrock contracted for teachers to assist them to support autistic children.

Excerpt 6. 27: Individual Interview

> **Stevie:** Neah and I attended the Autism New Zealand workshop last month. In the workshop, we were given an insight into what autism is and how we can adapt our classroom and playground to support children with autism. We have learned that autism is like tilting a seesaw, and children with autism want to be down there all the time and how we can bring them into our world. So, we must challenge them every day and should push their boundaries. We also shared those strategies with other teachers to support children with autism. For instance, it's not okay to let our little Kylee play in a sandpit by herself. She might be happy. But this way, we are not challenging her autism. You would have seen a lot of change from where we have highly pushed Kylee in areas where she does not like to be involved. She is giving us a lot of resistance, but we are not taking it in [on board].
>
> On the other hand, when you look at Jason, he was the same as Kylee. Now, look at Jason, a lot of improvement comes from teachers pushing his boundaries. Teachers are dealing

> with Jason and Kylee screaming and being upset by letting Kylee know that it's not ok to sit on the mat time and scream because you want to go and do something else. We are pushing Kylee's boundaries as much as she is pushing our boundaries. Moreover, we have also enrolled in the Ministry of Education's Incredible Years, which helps deal with children with behavioural issues.

In Stevie's comments above, she shares her learning from the Autism New Zealand workshop. She describes how the workshop has been helpful for them in providing insights about making modifications in their classrooms and playground. These strategies are important as they will help teachers recognise and address the ways in which the barriers in their teaching, ECE settings and the wider community negatively impact the experiences of autistic children. Stevie's comments seem to show the discourse of inclusion where she and other teachers feel more informed and able to respond appropriately and make adaptations to the environment in their ECE setting for inclusion. Stevie's comments align with the rights-based discourse of inclusion in *Te Whāriki* and *Success for All* that expect teachers to make necessary modifications in their teaching and learning environment to ensure all children can actively participate.

A mix of discourses is evident in Sofia's comments

Excerpt 6. 25: Individual Interview

> **Sofia:** We have been trained a bit about teaching deaf and blind children. In ECE training, we are encouraged to do pictures, sign language and braille. However, it is not compulsory for teachers. We do have some professional development at our centre around inclusiveness, not particularly about children with special needs. However, these workshops have very little content on teaching children with special needs.

Sofia's comments suggest that she understands different teaching methods and communicates with children in multimodal ways, using pictures, sign language, and braille. Communicating and teaching in multimodal ways allow the teaching and learning process to go beyond linguistic modes, and recognises the importance of diversity in the teaching process so that it is accessible to many children. Moreover, Sofia signals the need for specific professional development to teach children with special needs. The language of 'children with special needs' used by Sofia signifies disabled children as separate from their typically developing peers. Sofia's views might have resulted from the pervasiveness of the special education discourse in ECE settings. Within this discourse, teachers think they need specialist knowledge and skills to teach disabled children. However, Sofia’s wish for professional development on inclusion for disabled children may also show her commitment to learning about the needs of disabled children and facilitating their inclusion.

Offering another perspective, Neah reflected on her learning about children with special needs during her teacher education qualification.

Excerpt 6. 26: Individual Interview

> **Neah:** I do not think there were enough training and studies when I did my teaching degree related to children with special needs. We just had a paper round inclusiveness. That was when I found I love working with children with special needs because I have struggled growing up with a disability because of my hearing loss.

Neah’s comments suggest that insufficient attention was paid to learning about teaching disabled children during her teaching qualification. Sharing her lived experience, she expressed how her struggle as a disabled person inspired her to work with disabled children, showing her willingness to develop professional knowledge to support them.

The Teachers’ Views of Parents’ Experiences

This study explores one parent’s experiences of ECE services for their autistic child (Kylee). Lalvani (2014) argues that master narratives in education about parents’ reactions to their child’s disability are grounded in the discourses of denial and special education. Within these discourses, teachers believe that parents who do not consent to their child receiving a diagnosis and being supported by special education services may be in denial about their child’s disability (Lalvani, 2014). However, she argues that situating parents’ experiences within the discourse of denial views parents’ reaction to their child's disability as pathological and fails to acknowledge the impact of social and structural factors in stigmatising parents' experiences. The discourse of parental denial is reflected in the following excerpts from the transcript of the teachers’ focus group discussion. During the focus group discussion, I asked teachers to respond to themes that I had identified from the teachers' comments and a parent interview (please see Appendix F for themes in the focus group discussion). The following are teachers’ responses to the theme of lack of communication between parents and teachers about parents’ expectations of their child’s learning. Cherie stated:

Excerpt 6. 28: Focus Group Discussion

> Cherie: Kylee's dad is in denial mode for her getting a diagnosis and extra support. Sometimes with parents, you need to be very careful in using words. You can push it back so much. If they are in denial, then we need to wait because sometimes they are never ready. One day I told her dad that it's just not about you and me. It's about Kylee being comfortable in her environment, being able to work with other children. Because at the end of the day, it is Kylee we have to consider and what's best for her. It is hard for parents.

Cherie's comments show concern about Kylee's father being in denial about Kylee getting a diagnosis. Sharing her experiences of having a brother with a physical disability, she talked about the difficulty parents could have in accepting their children's differences. Her own family experiences may inform Cherie's understanding of denial as a stage in the parents' life in accepting their child's disability. Furthermore, Cherie suggests that it is in Kylee's best interest that her father accepts her differences in order to get help to enable her to work with other children and feel comfortable in her environment. There is a direct connection between having an official diagnosis and getting easier access to extra support and funding (Macartney, 2011). However, in the ECE context in New Zealand, diagnosis is not the formal process to receive funded early intervention services. Parents' consent is important for processing the referral to the Ministry of Education Early Intervention Services (Liberty, 2014). Thus, Cherie's comments might infer that in order for Kylee to feel a sense of belonging in her ECE setting her parents should consent to access special education services. In her response, Stevie said:

Excerpt 6. 29: Focus Group Discussion

> **Stevie:** Yes, there was a time when they were in denial about Kylee's assessment. But later, they told us that they were going to the McKenzie centre for Kylee's speech therapy. They have not shared with us any report about Kylee's assessment. I believe that they had a fear of her getting labelled. And we really respect their personal choice. It took a while for us to know Kylee's whānau [extended family]. Kylee's father usually does drop off and pick up. I always tried to initiate the conversation about Kylee's routine at home. He would say that she is good at home. In our observation, we found that she is having a delay in her speech goals. She does not like to sit in a group usually plays alone. We took our time and observed her for two to three months. We then shared the concern about

> Kylee’s speech delay with her whānau [family]. But Kylee’s father was somewhere in denial for us to send her reports to the Ministry. So we waited for their agreement. Later, her mother came up and wanted us to progress Kylee’s file. I then sent teachers’ observations and assessments of Kylee to the Ministry in July.

Stevie’s comments can be unpacked at two different levels. First, drawing from the discourse of developmental psychology, Stevie’s comments may identify teachers as “judges of normality” who assessed Kylee against ‘normal’ developmental milestones. As a result of the teachers’ judgement, Kylee was identified as having a delay in language and ability to play cooperatively in the group; therefore, she was suspected of having autism. Second, Stevie described Kylee’s parents as being in denial when she informed them about her observation of Kylee not meeting age-appropriate language development milestones. Stevie also commented about parents not sharing Kylee’s clinical assessment with teachers as she thought they may have been afraid of getting Kylee labelled. Here Stevie seems to understand the impact of a disability ‘label’ in stigmatising the child and their family. Kylee’s parents' resistance to their daughter being labelled as autistic may resonate with the cultural interpretation and stigma attached to autism as a neurological condition. Goffman (1963) describes stigma as attributing societal meaning to certain bodies who are described unfavourably by society because their characteristics do not meet the societal expectation of a ‘normal’ body. Accordingly, children who are not measuring up to ‘normative’ expectations of learning and development are stereotyped. Correspondingly, negative attitudes and stereotypes attached to autism mean having a child with disability is seen by society as a disadvantage (McConnell et al., 2015). In Stevie’s view, Kylee’s parents may have chosen not to share her assessment with teachers because they feared getting Kylee, and their family stigmatised in her education space. However, in my interview with Kylee’s mother, the dominant discourse of the ‘normal’ child seemed to inform her experiences.

Excerpt 6. 30: Individual Interview

> **Kathrine (parent):** My husband said that Kylee just has speech difficulty and will start speaking. She is improving, like she started joining her sibling during play. Earlier, she did not make eye contact, but now she also makes some eye contact. I have three children. My older two started cooing and babbling when they were around three months. Like any other mother, I was expecting Kylee to start making sounds around that time, but it’s been

> bad luck with Kylee. I am hoping Kylee will start speaking when she goes to primary school. Otherwise, she might have to go to a different school other than a normal school.

Kathrine’s comments suggest that she has taken up the dominant discourse of the ‘normal’ child as she compares Kylee’s language development with her siblings. It is a natural instinct for the mother to compare their child’s development with the development of their siblings and other children. Kylee’s mother's reaction to Kylee being different from ‘normal’ children may not be her deficit perception of Kylee, but the result of ableist discourses which exist in a society that privileges ‘normal’ over the disabled. Interpreting Kathrine’s perspectives in the ECE context suggests the discourse of developmental psychology that informs parents' expectations about how their children should develop and experience childhood according to ages and stages of child development. In this way, the discourse of developmental psychology exercises power over children and their families, expecting them to achieve and comply with standards of ‘normal’ development in order to live and participate in society.

Furthermore, Kathrine shows concern about Kylee going to a “different from normal school”. Kathrine’s comments seem to be shaped by the perspective of verbal language as an important milestone for Kylee to be independent and able to catch up with ‘normal’ children in order to participate and succeed in a mainstream primary school. Kathrine’s views may be the result of ableist discourses in the education system that mark the preference for ablebodied children who can use verbal language to express themselves well so that they can be understood and adapt to the culture of the mainstream education system. In this regard, privileging normal ways of being, and communicating, the discourse of ableism provides a view of Kylee and children with other communication differences as inherently negative and undervalues children’s different ways of being and communicating.

In the following interview transcript, Kathrine shared her experience of accessing early intervention services for Kylee. Kathrine said:

Excerpt 6. 31: Individual Interview

> **Kathrine (parent):** We were going to the McKenzie centre for Kylee’s language therapy, but we are not going there anymore. I did not like their concept. Like we have been there three to four times. They have a playgroup on Tuesday, so we used to go there. They did not do any therapy and one-to-one interaction with Kylee. Children just play there, and the

> teachers randomly talk to parents about the strategies to work with children. They do have speech and occupational therapy, but they did not offer any sessions to Kylee. They have referred our case to the Ministry of Education. Last Monday, an Early Intervention Teacher (Rayleen) visited Kylee at home. Rayleen told us to encourage Kylee to speak by using words for the things that she wants. She also said to me that the Ministry might provide an Education Support Worker to work with Kylee. However, the ESW might not start till next year as it is a very busy time of the year. So Kylee might get some help sometime early next year.

Kathrine seems to be caught up in the special education discourse. The narrative of expert power within the special education discourse apparently shapes Kathrine's expectations that speech therapy will help Kylee to speak; therefore, Kathrine shows her disappointment at Kylee not being offered one-to-one speech therapy sessions. Kathrine's comment might reflect the 'parental care' to ensure Kylee receives the best support to thrive in her life. Kathrine's comments may not indicate deficit perspectives of Kylee, but the influence of the value that society places on 'verbal language'. As a result, parents of autistic children are expected to look for interventions to enable their children to achieve 'verbal language'.

Chapter Summary

The chapter contains examples of how dominant discourses of discipline, developmental psychology, special education, and the discourse of inclusion inform the practices of teachers at Shemrock. Kylee's mother's experiences of inclusive ECE services have also been situated within the special education discourse. Within this discourse, Kathrine (Kylee's mother) agrees with the expert knowledge of special education professionals to seek speech therapy and other early intervention services to support Kylee's inclusion in ECE. Using CDA, I looked beyond the beliefs and practices of participants toward the ECE context for disabled children in New Zealand to argue that participants' beliefs and practices may be the result of dominant discourses related to childhood and disability (developmental psychology, medical and special education discourses) which exist in ECE and society as a whole. These discourses are problematic as they reinforce ableist assumptions that privilege the 'normal' child, and see the differences of autistic children as 'inherently negative'. These ableist assumptions can further lead to disablist practices (negative attitudes, structural, and learning barriers) as evident in some examples in this chapter. These findings are useful to provide insights for teachers to understand how these discourses (developmental, medical and special education) can reinforce ableist assumptions and practices of disablism, thereby helping teachers to rethink the construction of these discourses.

The next chapter discusses how disability awareness and critical reflection on their practices helped these teachers to make changes at Shemrock and transformed their understanding about the inclusion of autistic children.

Chapter Eight: Reflective Teachers: Problematising Ableist Discourses and Disablist Practices

Chapter Overview

In the previous chapter, an analysis of the findings unpacked rights and inclusion discourses and the dominant discourses (developmental psychology, discipline and special education) that inform the practices observed at Shemrock and examined how these discourses provide evidence of ableism. This chapter explores how disability awareness and critical reflection on their practices have helped teachers in this study to examine their attitudes and practices toward autistic children. The importance of such reflective inquiry is emphasised by MacNaughton (2005) who suggests that ECE teachers should engage in critical reflection on their practices in order to resist power within discourses, negotiate subjectivities and even change discourses.

The data in this chapter is derived from the focus group discussion with four teachers at Shemrock. The focus group discussion provided an opportunity for teachers to look at the data/video recordings of their teaching practices, and with the support of reflective targeted questions, inquire critically into their practices. During the discussion, teachers' responses indicated a shift in their thinking; they appeared to interrogate their previously held assumptions about Kylee and Jason (autistic children). Teachers also suggested ideas, and reported that they had made changes in their teaching practices and the physical context at Shemrock.

Critical Reflection to Assist Inclusive Practice

Disability scholars note that in creating inclusive schools, it is essential to provide teachers with tools to critically examine their institutional policies and practices, identify whether they are complicit in oppression, and create a space to rethink their practices (Ballard, 2003; Lalvani, 2015). Giroux (2020) reminds us that critical reflection is an essential component of critical pedagogy that requires teachers to scrutinise the dominant discourses in society and interrogate the role of their own beliefs and practices in the systematic exclusion of specific individuals or groups. Recently, disability scholars have argued for critical pedagogy as a key tool for inclusive education and a means of countering ableist beliefs (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020). Baglieri and Lalvani (2020) suggest that teachers undertaking a critical inquiry into ableism needed to engage in three important components of social justice-oriented critical pedagogy: critical analysis, critical reflection, and social change. Critical analysis requires teachers to interrogate the taken for granted understandings and dominant discourses that perpetuate inequality for particular individuals and groups. Critical reflection extends the teachers' understanding of how these dominant disability discourses impact on their thinking and teaching which can result in changes to their practice (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020). The following is an extract from the video transcript and an extract from the teachers' focus group discussion of the video where teachers appear to reflect on their teaching practices (See Chapter Seven, p. 134 for Excerpt 6.14: Transcript of Video Observation).

Excerpt 7.2: Focus Group Discussion

Researcher: What could you all see going on at that moment?

Cherie: Could you please repeat the video, please?

Researcher: Yes, sure!

Cherie (Excerpt 7. 2. 1)**:** I think, It was one of those moments when Kylee had a meltdown. She was scratching her body. Sofia was trying to calm her. Sorry, I was not there, but I could see Kylee was upset that day

Sofia (Excerpt 7. 2. 2)***:*** Yes, Kylee was upset that day. It was mat time. Children were sitting on the mat. Stevie asked me to bring Kylee to the mat and sit beside her. She was playing in a sandpit. I asked Kylee to join the mat. I held her hand, and we sat near the door. She sat for a while, and then she started scratching her body. She started crying. I was trying to calm her. There was a point when she started screaming and was trying to pull off her pants. Then Stevie asked me to take her outside. I took her out, but she could not stop crying and scratching. I changed her nappy and clothes, but she did not stop crying. So I held her in my arms and took her to the family area. She enjoys playing there. Then, suddenly, she stopped crying. I thought she just did not want to sit on the mat.

Researcher: Could you identify how ableism might inform interactions in the shared video? (as I ask this question, the teachers started looking for the ways in which the environment and interactions in the shared video indicated ableist thinking).

> **Neah** (Excerpt 7. 2. 3)**:** I am not sure, but I think when Stevie asked Sofia to take Kylee outside.
>
> **Stevie** (Excerpt 7. 2. 4): When you earlier showed me this video, I reflected on it and found that it was not a good way of telling Sofia to take Kylee outside. It does not set a good example for other teachers and children. I thought that Kylee was resistant to sitting on the mat and wanted to go outside. Later, I realised that my approach was not right; we should have planned some tangible reward to encourage her to sit on the mat. Realising this, I thought that having similar expectations for all children is good, but expecting the same output should not be a goal because every child is different.

MacArthur and Kelly (2004) note that effective teachers critically reflect on their practices and their assumptions about the abilities of disabled children. In this way, teachers can seek to change and enhance their approaches so as to be responsive to the needs of disabled learners. The potential of critical reflection to prompt reconsideration of thinking and practices is evident in Stevie's comments here. She reassesses her expectations that all children should have the same learning outcomes without considering Kylee's impairmentrelated needs and their impact on her learning. In the above discussion, Stevie, who previously thought Kylee was resisting and setting a bad example for other children on the mat time, critically reviews her thinking and practice in this incident. She shares the learning from her reflection on her practice which is the need to acknowledge individual children's differences. Stevie's comment suggests some recognition of the need to diversify teaching approaches to accommodate children's different ways of learning and progressing.

Critical reflection helped teachers shift their thinking, and they also made significant changes to their ECE setting environment. As Neah (teacher) described:

> **Neah** (Excerpt 7. 2. 4): Have you observed a change in our environment? Now, we have shifted our two and three-year-olds together in a large space, and our four and five-yearolds are in the under two's room. Kylee and Jason [childen with ASD] are in our under two's room which is small and less noisy. This change has made a huge difference in Kylee's behaviour. She hardly had any meltdowns this week because this space is small and less noisy. When I look back on the days when we sent Kylee to under two's room, she was much happier and calmer than she was in the previous preschool room. We had

> realised this thing, and we were like Oh god! We never thought that our environment could be one of the reasons for Kylee's meltdown.

Here, Neah explained the change teachers had made in the physical environment at Shemrock and how that change helped with Kylee's behaviour. The discussion above indicates that reflection prompted a shift in focus from Kylee's impairment to the physical environment at Shemrock as a disabling factor for Kylee, and a different understanding of the possible reasons for her meltdowns. Neah's question is quite thought-provoking as it could make one think about how disablement (physical, institutional and structural barriers) shapes the daily functioning of autistic children.

The shift in Neah's understanding here is supported by scholars. For example, Baglieri and Lalvani (2020) suggest that ableism can be experienced when the built environment is disabling to those who experience disability. In this view, the problem is not a person's impairment but how our world is constructed to serve a particular group of people and disable others. While the social model of disability promotes accessibility for those with physical and sensory disabilities, adjustments around access may not meet the needs of people with invisible disabilities. In this regard, the DSE perspective argues that every child with disability has their individual experiences. Learning from those who experience disability and how disablement shapes their experiences can help teachers change their teaching and education environment.

Cherie (teacher) questioned the disablist practices (structural barriers and labelling) that exclude disabled children. She stated:

> **Cherie** (Excerpt 7.2.5)***:*** I believe autism is just a tag. We are not looking at Kylee as different from other tamāriki. But sometimes, we unknowingly say and expect something that seems usual to us. I mean, Stevie having the same expectation from Kylee was not wrong. But it required more planning about how to execute that goal. As we realised, it could be the noise, hunger, or thirst that was bothering her. When we give a label to a child, we see her/his behaviour as a consequence of that label. This way, we might become what you say ableist in our practice—now sitting together, talking through it, reflecting, and giving each other solutions helping us to understand more about our teaching.

During the focus group discussion, Cherie questions the impact of labelling. Cherie's view suggests that categorising and labelling disabilities mark children as ‘other’ in their minds and bodies. Cherie critiques the societal discourses that see disabled children as being less capable. She recognises that attributing Kylee’s behaviours to her autism label may reinforce disabling practices that could lead to different treatment of Kylee in her ECE setting (Shemrock). Cherie also articulated the teachers’ realisation that Kylee’s meltdowns could be related to environmental factors like noise, hunger and thirst rather than something problematic in her body and mind. Here Cherie's comments suggest that she and other teachers at Shemrock have shifted their attention from Kylee's impairment characteristic to recognising disabling practices in their ECE setting that impacted Kylee's learning. Significantly, Cherie points to the value of their collaborative reflective inquiry in assisting the teachers to reassess their assumptions when she says “talking through it, reflecting, and giving each other solutions helping us to understand more about our teaching” (Line 7-9, Excerpt 7.2.5).

The following section discusses the teachers’ responses that show a positive shift in their understanding of professional development for teachers in relation to working with disabled children.

Professional Development for Teachers: Shift in Teaching Perceptions

During the focus group discussion, I shared a common theme that I identified from individual interviews with teachers and asked teachers for their insights about this theme. The theme that emerged concerned professional development for teachers to assist in working with disabled children. Findings in the previous chapter identified that some teachers think they require expert help to include and support autistic children with their learning. However, the teachers' responses in the group discussion showed a change in teachers’ thinking. They seem to focus on changing the ECE environment and teachers’ attitudes to include children rather than making children adapt to the existing ECE environment. The following excerpts are from transcripts of teachers’ discussions on that theme. Cherie (teacher) said:

Excerpt 7. 3: Focus Group Discussion

> **Cherie:** Yes, it is good to have professional development, especially for someone like me because I did my degree 30 years ago when there was no paper on disability inclusion.

> However, I believe personal beliefs and interests also really matters. I have seen many educators who are well informed about children with disabilities, but still, their practices reflect the lack of interest and empathy towards disabled children. I have seen them [teachers] losing patience. I have a lived example of disability at my home. My brother had it. I have brought up seeing him as a whole human, not someone less than me, because he does not have a limb. I have reflected on these experiences in my teaching practices for 30 years—seeing children as a whole, not less because he/she has a disability.

In the above discussion, Cherie questions the practices of some teachers when working with disabled children, despite their knowledge and information about disability. She later suggested that the problem lies not within children but in teachers' attitudes. Moreover, she talked about how her experiences of having a family member with a disability informed her practices. Cherie's view suggests that she has problematised the ableist ideology of 'whole' or 'fully' human, which produces disabled people as less capable. Cherie's comments seem to align with DSE perspectives, as she argues that disabled people's differences need to be valued, and disabled people should be seen as whole, which challenges the medical view of disability as a deficit. Cherie's personal experiences and her beliefs about disability have informed her teaching and supported Cherie to view disabled children as equally competent as learners to their non-disabled peers.

Like Cherie, Sofia's comments recognise the importance of personal beliefs and experiences about disability. Sofia (teacher) articulated the need to learn from lived experiences of children with autism and their families. She said:

Excerpt 7. 4: Focus Group Discussion

> **Sofia:** I think learning from those whom themselves experienced disability and their family is a great thing. Like, I go to church every Wednesday evening. I think I told you this before about two mothers who shared their everyday experiences of their autistic children in one of the evenings at church. They shared their understanding, experiences and theories around autism. It was awesome for me just to hear about their experiences and success. I never thought about the daily life challenges that children with autism and their families face. After listening to them, my perspectives on autism had changed. I learned from their talk how even small achievements were a huge thing for them; we should celebrate even small achievements of our tamāriki [children].

A shift in Sofia's thinking was also evident. In the previous chapter, Sofia's comments expressed a perceived need for special training to teach disabled children, but now she appears to have broadened her views to learning from those who have lived experiences of children with autism and their families as a helpful tool for her teaching. Sharing her experience of attending a talk by mothers of autistic children, she commented that she had been unaware of the challenges children with autism and their family members could encounter in their daily lives. Learning from the experiences of family members who have children with autism has changed Sofia's perspectives on autism. Connor and Gabel (2010) note that insights for transforming pedagogy and educational environments emerge when we consider disability a valuable source of lived experiences rather than as something to be accommodated in the mainstream classroom. The framework of DSE has recognised the importance of lived experiences of disability as a tool for teachers to critically interrogate ableist beliefs and transform their teaching pedagogies and learning environment (Annamma et al., 2013; Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020). Sofia's comments suggest that understanding and recognising the individual experiences of autistic children in the teaching process can provide a critical starting point for teachers to support the participation and learning of autistic children in their ECE settings.

Researcher: Awesome! It's great to hear. What do you think, Neah?

Excerpt 7. 5: Focus Group Discussion

Neah: Stevie and I had attended the Autism New Zealand workshop. We really enjoyed our experiences. We could relate a lot to our learning with Jason and Kylee. It helped me personally to understand what could be the possible reasons for their behaviour. What are the difficulties that children with autism face in their everyday life. Eh? Stevie?

Excerpt 7. 6: Focus Group Discussion

Stevie: Yes, the workshop helped us relate to Jason and Kylee. In our regional meeting, I proposed having some professional development related to disability. We have PD on inclusion but not particularly for disability inclusion. I have encouraged all of my staff to attend the Incredible Years Programme for teachers. I think some of them [teachers] have enrolled.

Neah's and Stevie's comments expressed the importance of professional development to better understand the experiences of autistic children and the everyday challenges that children encounter within society. Neah's comments suggest that professional development helped her to understand how inaccessible physical and learning environments could be disabling for autistic children. Moreover, Stevie showed interest in continuing work toward inclusivity at Shemrock. As a part of this commitment, she has proposed the idea of having a professional workshop for teachers on disability inclusion in their regional meeting. Stevie also encouraged teachers to attend the Incredible Years Programme. However, scholars argue that the Incredible Years Programme for Teachers is based on the psychological understanding of identifying and preventing or managing behavioural problems in children, which does not align with the holistic approach of learning articulated in *Te Whāriki* (Arndt et al., 2015; Fergusson et al., 2013). Thus, there is a need for professional development experiences for teachers that support social and relational views of disability, targeted at recognising and removing barriers in the learning environment and providing teachers with tools for identifying and disrupting ableist beliefs and disabling practices.

Moving on, I discuss teachers' responses to what they understand by ableism and how this understanding helped them with the spirit and intention of inclusion.

Understanding Ableism: A Teaching and Learning Tool for ECE Teachers

To explore teachers' understandings of ableism and how this knowledge helped them make inclusion more effective, I asked participants the following questions: What do you all understand by the concept of ableism? How does knowledge about ableism shared in the introductory meeting help you in the inclusion of disabled children? Below are excerpts of transcripts of teachers' responses.

> **Cherie** (Excerpt 7.7)**:** For me, ableism means seeing the child as less than so-called 'normal'. As we all just talked about it that expecting the same for all the children is not ableism, expecting the same output is because every child is different in his/her way.
>
> **Researcher:** Hmm right. So how has it helped you as a teacher?
>
> **Cherie** (Excerpt 7. 8)***:*** It has helped me reflect not just on what you recorded but also on our everyday teaching. Sometimes, we try to do good for a child, but we become biased in our practice unknowingly. I don't know if biased is the right word or ableist in our practices. So, it helped me to question my beliefs toward disability.

Cherie's understanding of ableism appears to have been informed by reflection on culturally constructed, taken for granted knowledge about what is considered 'normal' in society and the ways in which teachers and people who encounter these discourses come to understand a child with disability as less or inferior. Moreover, Cherie's comments suggest that the focus group discussion provided her with an opportunity to reflect on her teaching practices and attitudes toward disability. Cherie seems to question the dominant discourse of developmental psychology in her recognition that teachers should consider diversity in children's learning abilities, rather than having the same expectations about each child's achievement. Planning teaching which considers the strengths, needs and abilities of an individual child is central to teaching and learning approaches in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) and the DSE perspectives.

> **Researcher**: Thanks, Cherie, for your response**.** What do you think, Stevie?
>
> **Stevie** (Excerpt 7. 9)***:*** Ableism is a term that I did not hear before you talked about it. I have worked in disability services in Australia. Even during that time, we were not aware of this. When I initially spoke to you about your research, I found it a valuable thing for our teachers to know. It helped me to think more deeply about inclusion. It is not only about welcoming children with different learning needs in our centre, which we always have been open to, but it is also about our attitudes and willingness to change our environment and teaching. It made a positive change in our environment and teaching. We have shifted our rooms. We don't have many children in our preschool room, and it is smaller than the one we had before. This really helped with Kylee's meltdowns. As I also told you that we are also planning to bring some professional development in disability in our monthly PD [professional development] sessions.

Stevie's comments suggest that even after working in the disability field, she had been unaware of the term ableism, and knowing about ableism helped her reflect deeply on the meaning of inclusion. She now believes that inclusion is about teachers' reflecting on their attitudes toward disabled children and teachers' willingness to make modifications in their teaching and learning environments in ECE settings. Stevie's view suggests a transformation in her thinking about what needed to be changed in providing inclusive education; she recognised that the ECE setting environment and teachers' attitudes can present barriers to some children's inclusion. Removing attitudinal, physical and social barriers to teaching and learning is central to the approach to inclusion espoused in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) and DSE. Employing DSE framing to understand inclusion in ECE, teachers can consider how they can create the more inclusive environment for children through identifying and removing barriers to children's learning and planning teaching programmes so children can participate meaningfully (Ferri &Bacon, 2011).

Knowing about ableism also helped Neah (teacher) to value the knowledge, skills and experiences that disabled children bring to their ECE setting. Neah stated:

> **Neah** (Excerpt 7. 10)***:*** As I told you in your last presentation. Knowing about ableism helped me to reflect on my practices for Jason. Sometimes, unknowingly I have engaged in practices where I see Jason as less capable than other children.
>
> **Neah** (Excerpt 7. 11)***:*** I really liked the idea of ableism. I have gone through your information sheet and learned more about ableism through this presentation and found how unknowingly we have been ableist in our practices. We humans are diverse. Thinking that being 'normal' we are more powerful than others is an idea that we have been unknowingly practising. After knowing about ableism, I reflected on my attitudes and practices and realised how I had been an ableist. For example, last year, we were planning a cultural tour. I sort of ignored Jason's participation, thinking that we would not be able to manage him with other kids. But when I saw him participating in dance and singing practices, then I realised how my attitude was ableist toward Jason by thinking that he wouldn't be able to participate as other kids. I found the idea of ableism very important for teachers to understand and realise how unknowingly we have been ableist (Introductory meeting, 14/April/2019).

Neah found understanding ableism beneficial for reflecting on her teaching practices and making her teaching more inclusive. In the introductory meeting, Neah talked about how knowing about ableism helped her link ableism with able-bodied privileges that a 'normal' group of people uphold in society. Then, sharing an incident, Neah reflects on how she unknowingly became ableist by seeing Jason as less competent to participate in cultural activities and her belief that it would be challenging to manage Jason at the cultural competition. Neah's comments appear to critically analyse the dominant discourse of 'ableism' and how this discourse reinforces her judgement about Jason's ability to participate and excel in cultural activities.

> **Researcher:** yeah…. Great to hear! Sofia, would you like to say something?
>
> **Sofia** (Excerpt 7.12): Yes, it was a good experience for me too. I have never participated in research before. I believe none of us have. Knowing about ableism helped me to be more inclusive in my teaching. Last year, we had a Matariki celebration where we planned

> some balancing exercises for children. Kylee was new to our centre, and she was not much into jumping and balancing. So I thought it would be good if she tried those exercises after other children's performances. But she somehow escaped from there. She might have observed other children balancing. She hopped on the rope, started walking and balanced so well. We all were amazed to see her balancing, which is when I realised that I should not think that way. I should see Kylee as competent as other children.

Like Neah, Sofia also shared an incident where she doubted Kylee's ability to participate in play activity alongside other non-disabled children. Baglieri and Lalvani (2020) note that ableism exists when teachers form misconceptions about children's abilities and hold lower expectations of disabled children. Accordingly, Sofia's lower expectation of Kylee's participation in a balancing activity is an example of not viewing Kylee as an equally capable learner as her peers. However, Neah and Sofia's reflections on their practices made them realise how they had previously devalued and made judgements about Kylee's and Jason's capabilities.

Chapter Summary

The CDA presented in this chapter indicates that teachers have critically reflected on their practices. As part of critical reflection, teachers' comments suggest that they have questioned both ableist beliefs (able-bodied ideology) and disablism practices (labelling, lower expectations, physical and attitudinal barriers) and reflected on how these discourses have underpinned their practices with Jason and Kylee. Some teachers interrogated able-bodied privileges, and others actively positioned disability as a form of diversity, which is a step toward recognising and dismantling ableism (Connor & Gabel, 2010). Sofia (teacher) highlighted the relevance of learning from those who have autism and their family members as an essential aspect of their teaching. Additionally, teachers made changes in the physical environment at Shemrock as a result of their new understandings. Stevie (curriculum leader and a teacher) generated proposals for professional development on disability inclusion and aspired to empower teachers to develop inclusive pedagogies and affect changes in their teaching. These findings have implications for teachers as they show how disability awareness and critical reflection on their practices can help teachers to identify and question the dominant discourses of ableism and disablism and how these discourses underpin their practices and negatively impacted the inclusion of autistic and other disabled children. The next chapter presents a discussion of findings in relation to theoretical perspectives and the literature reviewed in the study.

Chapter Nine: Discussion

Chapter Overview

This study set out to explore whether and how ableism operates in ECE in New Zealand, and assess its impact on the inclusion of autistic children. Disability Studies in Education (DSE) and ableism were the theoretical frameworks for this study. Thematic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) were used to analyse *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) and *Success for All* (MoE, 2010), and observational, and interview data were gathered in a case study of an ECE setting in New Zealand. The study found that there was evidence of ableism operating in ECE policies and interactions through dominant discourses surrounding disability and ECE (developmental psychology, neoliberalism, special education and medical discourses of disability). Furthermore, the ways in which these ableist assumptions resulted in disabling practices such as inaccessible learning environments and teaching pedagogies were also identified. Reflecting on the findings and relevant literature, this chapter brings together key themes to address the research questions. Table 3 below outlines the themes generated from my data in relation to the research questions.

Table 3 Research Questions and Discussion themes

Research Questions	Themes
RQ 1. How do discourses of ableism frame the text, and ideologies of inclusion in ECE policies in New Zealand?	Theme One: The rhetorical discourse of inclusion: The tension between rights-based and special education discourses Theme Two: The ideal of neoliberal ableism: Positioning the child as a competent, healthy and autonomous individual
RQ 2. How does ableism inform teachers' understandings, beliefs and practices for autistic children in an ECE setting?	Theme Three: A complex understanding of disability: An overlap between the medical and social models Theme Four: Inclusive education is about presence, participation and learning Theme Five: Deficit theorising of autistic children as different in their bodies, minds and emotions Theme Six: A dominant discourse of developmental psychology in practice
RQ 3. What is the impact of ableism on families of autistic children?	Theme Seven: Parents negotiating inclusion for their child
RQ 4. How can disability and ableism awareness training and critical reflection on practice help teachers support inclusive practices for autistic children in an ECE setting?	Theme Eight: Teachers problematising ableism: Shifting the focus from the individual child to structural barriers

In the next section, I discuss two themes that emerged from the CDA of policy documents. These two themes address the first Research Question (RQ 1).

Rhetoric of Inclusion: A Tension between Rights-based and Special Education Discourses

The CDA of the two policy documents, *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) and *Success for All* (MoE, 2010), revealed a tension between rights-based and special education discourses. The view of inclusion in both the policy documents is grounded in a human rights approach that aims to ensure non-discriminatory practices for disabled children. A human rights approach promotes legislative and cultural provisions that aim to provide equitable learning opportunities for all learners and can be used to challenge the status quo and deficit-driven approaches to disability (Sayers, 2018). However, the rights-based discourse of inclusion apparent in these policy documents is sometimes awkwardly juxtaposed with deficit views of disability underpinned by developmental and special education discourses.

The rights-based approach to inclusion in *Te Whāriki* is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCROC] (United Nations, 1989) and Māori worldviews that support the rights of all children to participate and have equitable opportunities in their ECE setting, regardless of their "gender and ethnicity, diversity of ability and learning needs, family structures and values, socio-economic status and religion" (MoE, 2017, p. 13). The broad approach to inclusion in *Te Whāriki* seems to be underpinned by the principles of inclusion from the Salamanca Statement. The Salamanca Statement affirms that "schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups" (UNESCO, 1994, p. 6). However, the terms "disability" and "gifted children" are not explicitly recognised in *Te Whāriki.*

Furthermore, the rights-based discourse in the curriculum document orients teachers to seek extra support for children where teachers judge that this is needed. "From time to time, external expertise may be called on to support children's learning. This is important for all children, but particularly (my emphasis) so for those who need additional learning support" (MoE, 2017, p. 64). The discourse of extra learning support in *Te Whāriki* is intended to support equitable participation and access to learning opportunities for disabled children (and others) in ECE settings, as discussed in the key legislation, UNCROC and UNCRPD (United

Nations General Assembly,1989, 2006). According to this legislation, it would be discriminatory not to provide special education services, such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, communication support, access to assistive technology, to support the participation of disabled children. Special education services per se are not the problem; the concern is about when they are provided in isolation from systems changes. Any reference to systems changes in the curriculum document alongside seeking specialist help is absent and the ‘problem’ can correspondingly appear to reside with the child.

A tension within a rights-based approach is evident in the ways the discourse of developmental psychology may reinforce deficit views of disability underpinning special education assumptions. The discourse of developmental psychology in *Te Whāriki* prominently identifies the need for intervention and extra support for children. The curriculum states that “when children are observed not meeting the typical development characteristics, they should be provided with “further assessment, planning, interventions and support” (MoE, 2017, p. 13). The reference to “typical learning development” links to the notion of universal stages of ‘normal’ development that typify the experiences of nondisabled children. Although the curriculum authors discuss how development varies across time, context and culture, how the individual experiences of disabled children might impact their development trajectory is not considered within the document.

Moreover, the curriculum states, “Identifying the learning, progress to date, possible next steps, and whether additional support is required are the core elements in a formative assessment process” (p. 64). However, there are no explicit guidelines in *Te Whāri*ki about how teachers are expected to assess the additional learning needs of children. According to Aspden et al. (2022) there has been tension among teachers in relation to adopting the strengths-based approach outlined in *Te Whāriki,* instead of a developmental approach to assessment which focuses on assessing children’s developmental delays, and is aligned with the medical model of understanding disability. This tension was exemplified in Sofia’s developmental observation of Bali (Chapter Seven p. 141), where she made clear reference to “normal” children and her concern about Bali’s deviation from the norm. In this case, the discourse of developmental psychology seemed to help the teacher identify children’s needs. However, the practice that comes with this discourse instinctively may assume that disabled children are the problem. Consequently, teachers' focus remains on scrutiny of children in the form of various assessments that emphasise the child’s weaknesses and individual characteristics, diverting attention from educational structures and practices that create barriers for children who are different (Baglieri et al., 2011a; Macartney, 2011; Watson, 2017). Such practices could lead to assumptions about children's capabilities and justify the marginalisation of children, as the focus of practice remains on the perceived ‘normal’ child, and the disabled child is given a lack of attention and seen as a minority. This finding is consistent with arguments made by Goodley et al. (2016) who argue that dehumanising practices associated with psychological approaches can provide a view of disabled children “as less than fully human” (p. 775). Consequently, disabled children are “marginalized by or excluded from the expectations, opportunities and aspirations afforded to so-called typically developing children” (Goodley et al., 2016, p. 775).

The influence of the discourses of developmental psychology in *Te Whāriki* is in line with its pervasive presence in policy documents and curricula internationally, as reported in the literature (see for example, Antonsen, 2019; Burman, 2008; and McNaughton, 2006). Critiquing the discourse of developmental psychology, Burman (2008) argues that a key effect of this discourse in ECE policies lies in the resulting structuring of standards and norms which provide a rationale for seeking ‘special’ education provision for those who appear to deviate from the norm. Teachers' practices informed by “bell-curve thinking such as developmental norms to assess learning and identify and categorise learners by ability level” can serve to limit children’s learning and achievement rather than enhance it (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p. 826). Such practices create the binary of children who need and do not need additional learning support and its associated stigma that marks some children as different (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Alternatively, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) suggest that to meaningfully practise the concept of education for all, we need to shift attention from an approach of providing “something ‘additional’ or ‘different’ for those (some) who experience difficulties” toward developing inclusive pedagogy that focuses on “extend[ing] what is ordinarily available in the community of the classroom as a way of reducing the need to mark some learners as different” (p. 826). An example of extension is when teachers make different lesson plans available, based on their previous experiences and knowledge about children's interests, abilities, and needs (Florian, 2015). This approach of inclusive pedagogy is broadly related to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Florian, 2015).

Special education discourse is seen in the *Success for All* policy, notably in promoting the earliest possible identification of disabilities and early intervention. The *Success for All* policy views inclusion as an extended field of special education and highlights the importance of early intervention. The policy states that "we have implemented initiatives in recent years so we can identify students with special education needs earlier and more effectively. This includes the universal new-born hearing and early intervention services, as well as B4 School checks. More children are being identified, which increases the expectation of support" (MoE, 2014, p. 28). The discourse of special education in *Success for All* sends a mixed message. On the one hand, the ideology of early identification enables the identification of children's needs and provision of extra support, which conforms to the right to equitable learning opportunities. On the other hand, the practices underlying some special education interventions perpetuate the medical discourse of disability.

The medical discourse is seen in the early intervention services that are one of the components of the *Success for All* policy. As in other parts of the world, early intervention services in New Zealand focus on developmental and behavioural psychology through the identification of disability and a focus on remediating the effects of disability (Liberty, 2014). Teachers assessing children for early intervention services participate by sending referrals to a specialist and engaging in interventions like positive behaviour support and individual education plans. In this regard, the special education discourse may inform teachers' subject position as ethical and good teachers and place them in a powerful position to categorise and help children conform to the idea of the 'normal' child (Watson, 2017). This finding is consistent with the argument of MacArthur and Rutherford (2016) that in *Success for All* policy equity to education is primarily related to the distribution of special education resources. They argued that the needs-based approach of special education in *Success for All* policy "offers little to disavow disablist assumptions that 'special needs students' (homogenised as a group distinct from 'normal' students) are problematic, require extra resources and time, have limited/fixed ability, and may disrupt other students' learning through challenging behaviour and additional demands on teachers' time" (p. 160). Whereas, having its roots in equity and human rights, inclusive education values human diversity and demands transformation in the teaching and educational environment (MacArthur & Rutherford, 2016).

Accordingly, the special education discourse has implications for teachers' practices as it may reinforce the belief among teachers that there is something wrong with disabled children. The special education discourse also seemed to inform some teachers' beliefs in this study that they are not qualified enough to work with autistic children, as exemplified by Sofia's view that she was not educated to work with children with autism (reported on P. 141). This understanding that teaching autistic children requires different skills may reinforce "bell curve thinking" about children's ability levels and reflect assumptions about children's capacity to learn, which can adversely affect their educational outcomes (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p. 813). This finding is consistent with Purdue's (2009) New Zealand study where some teachers believed that they did not have the specialist skills and knowledge required to teach disabled children and that disabled children are the responsibility of specialists. This assumption might lead to exclusion of disabled children based on the judgement that the problem is inherent in the individual learner. Instead, teachers should focus on "the ways that teachers respond to individual differences, the pedagogical choices they make and how they utilise specialist knowledge that differentiates inclusive practice from other pedagogical approaches" (Florian, 2015, p. 8).

The contradictory discursive realities found entrenched in the policy documents (*Te Whāriki* and *Success for All* policy) are consistent with Fairclough's (2003) argument that policy consists of diverse discourses. As has been argued, discussion of the findings indicates that the discourses of developmental psychology and special education in *Te Whāriki* and *Success for All* policy provide a rationale for supporting disabled children's rights to equitable learning opportunities. Simultaneously, these discourses may also reinforce ableist beliefs and disabling practices that underpin negative attitudes toward disability.

The Ideal of Neoliberal-ableism: Positioning a Child as a Competent, Healthy and Autonomous Individual

In examining the policy documents using CDA, the discourse of 'neoliberal ableism' was found in *Success for All* (MoE, 2010). In Chapter Two, the Literature Review, I discussed that neoliberal-ableism focuses on improving children's competencies and values autonomous, productive and able-bodied citizens, and excludes those who do not meet this norm (Goodley, 2014). Literature in disability studies shows that the neoliberal model of education poses a challenge for inclusive education of disabled children as it shows preferences for ableness and focuses on nurturing neoliberal subjects through special education models (Goodley, 2014, 2017; Lyons, 2021; Mitchell & Synder, 2014; Romstein, 2015; Runswick-Cole, 2011; Runswick-Cole & Mallet, 2012; Slee, 2011).

The findings of this study have substantiated these claims. The discourse of neoliberal ableism in *Success for All* promotes the importance of special education in increasing the performativity of children to contribute to the country's future progress. The *Success for All* policy explicitly recognises the significance of special education. "<u>Special education is important</u> (my emphasis) for the future success of New Zealand and New Zealanders. It helps all children and young people achieve their potential, leading to better outcomes for them, their communities and broader society" (p. 31). Interestingly, the discourse of neoliberal ableism in the *Success for All* policy, whilst promoting the special education services for equality of opportunity for children, also appears to reinforce the remedial view that special education helps to enhance children's productive potential, which maximises individual self-sufficiency and produces fewer dependent adults. However, this view is only problematic when future productivity is the main purpose of education, and other broader purposes are narrowed.

Furthermore, the policy states that "In the face of rising demand, we need to maximise the impact of current resources" (MoE, 2014, p. 10). To maximise the impact of special education resources, the policy intends to increase the capacity of teachers and educationalists "to identify and better manage children and young people with special education needs. For example, signs of behavioural issues can be identified before specialist, one-on-one support is needed. This allows support to be given to children much earlier, at a lower cost, and with a greater likelihood of resolving the difficulty" (MoE, 2014, p. 29). In this regard, the policy guides teachers' practices through Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) which is the fourth component of the policy. PB4L includes professional development programmes like the *Incredible Years Programme for Teache*rs (IYPT), which focuses on how teachers can identify and manage children with problematic behaviour. IYPT guides teachers to identify problematic behaviours as compared with what is considered 'normal'/appropriate in a child's behaviour. Targeted interventions in the form of teaching strategies are suggested to resolve difficulties associated with a child's behaviour. The Ministry of Education (2013) sees positive behaviour as a "prerequisite to improving the engagement and achievement of children and young people" (p. 4). Behavioural theories underlying the programme encourage teachers' practices to focus on managing children's behaviour through social learning and operate conditioning techniques so that children can fit into desirable behaviour that society expects of them so as to become productive and responsible citizens. The purpose of education, teaching and learning is oriented towards a narrow range of "outcomes for children in terms of peer relationship improvements, school readiness outcomes and reduction of aggressive behaviours in the classroom" (WebsterStratton & Reid, 2009, p. 247). As a result, the focus of practice remains on normalising children's behaviour, and positive outcomes are measured in terms of individual behaviour rather than changes in teaching pedagogies and educational contexts.

This finding is consistent with the criticism by Arndt et al. (2015) of the *Incredible Years Programme for Teache*rs (IYPT). They argue that IYPT is underpinned by psychological and behavioural theories and recommends practices of reward and punishment and other individualised approaches, that assume children are passive receivers of interventions. Such approaches are not in line with the holistic and empowerment principles of teaching and learning that frame *Te Whāriki*. Considering this, Arndt et al. (2015) contend that IYPT does more than manage children's behaviours; it serves a neoliberal agenda that disciplines children in managing themselves, "normalized to lead useful, docile and practical lives" (Marshall & Marshall, 1999, p. 46 as cited in Arndt et al., 2015). In this way, through IYPT, the government seems to push an outcomes-based approach and productive citizenship by managing children's behaviours so they "will become employable and not a fiscal burden" on society (Arndt et al., 2015, p. 284).

Campbell (2009) claims that the double bind of ableism takes place within Western neoliberal society:

> On the one hand, discourses of equity proclaim inclusion by way of promoting positive attitudes (sometimes legislated in mission statements, marketing campaigns, equal opportunity protections) and yet, on the other hand, ableist discourses proclaim quite empathetically that disability is inherently negative, ontologically intolerable, in the end, a dispensable remnant (p. 12).

Affirming Campbell's (2009) claims, I have argued that while educational policies in New Zealand have placed increasing emphasis on rights and equitable participation, the discourse of neoliberal-ableism's focus on productivity might stigmatise disability. Thus, the discussion here suggests that the discourse of neoliberal-ableism found in *Success for All* accompanies the rhetoric of inclusion with contradictory messages.

The Silenced Discourse of Disability in *Te Whāriki*

The study also explored the silenced discourse of disability in *Te Whāriki*. The curriculum document highlights the role of ECE teachers in recognising and upholding the mana of all children and their families. Underpinning Māori values, mana is a central concept in *Te Whāriki* based on valuing an individual child's competencies, language and culture. The CDA of *Te Whāriki* shows that because the term 'disability' is not explicitly mentioned in *Te Whāriki*, disabled children and their families might be prevented from feeling empowered and having an equal right to participate and belong in their ECE settings. Although the term 'disability' is not explicitly considered in the curriculum, disabled children may be included in "children who may need additional learning support" (MoE, 2017, p. 12). However, the terminology of "children who may need additional learning support" can be problematic in the ways it may reinforce the assumption that these children need 'additional' resources to those usually provided in the ECE setting. Consequently, the focus remains on identifying children's additional support rather than also making changes in pedagogies, curriculum and routines. This focus counters the inclusive education approach in the curriculum that emphasises teachers planning pedagogy according to individual children's differences and abilities. As noted by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) "in the additional needs approach, the attention is focused on how to ensure that the student identified as needing something 'additional' or 'different' to others in the class can participate in the lesson" (p. 820). By contrast, inclusive pedagogy focuses on all children in the classroom to ensure how the teaching pedagogy can be modified to support the different needs of children and can "avoid the stigma of judging some students as less able" (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p. 827). Likewise, Curran and Runswick- Cole (2014) claim that while contemporary work in childhood studies has recognised diversity through gender, age and ethnicity, disability is still missing from the discussion. If disability is recognised, it is evident through deficit language and special education discourses.

Furthermore, my CDA of *Te Whāriki* shows that the silent discourse of disability is evident in the absence of discussion on disability and disability oppression like ableism in the section on theories underpinning the curriculum. The curriculum document explicitly discusses Kaupapa Māori and Pasifika cultural theories, to ensure that the culture, identity and language of all children are recognised and valued. A discussion of disability is not included in the section on the theoretical underpinnings of the curriculum. This omission could be seen as significant, as perspectives that are important for teachers to identify and challenge ableist beliefs and provide opportunities for children to discuss disability biases are not evident. The authors of *Te Whāriki* expect teachers to use critical theories to inform their practice "to challenge disparities, injustices, inequalities and perceived norms" (MoE, 2017, p. 62). However, the curriculum does not provide specific guidance for teachers on how they might use critical theory perspectives to reflect on the implications for disabled children policy and practices informed by assumed norms. Liasidou (2008) argues that diverse (dominant and silenced) discourses in policy shape the ways education is envisioned, and how we see and respond to disabled learners. The absence of explicit acknowledgement of disability in *Te Whāriki* might prevent teachers from seeing disability as a fundamental aspect of children's conception of themselves and the strengths and diversity they bring to their ECE settings. The absence of any discussion on disability oppression, such as through ableism awareness may reinforce the deficit medical and special education discourses that discount the identities and experiences of disabled children.

A Complex Understanding of Disability: An Overlap between the Medical and Social Models

This section discusses the main themes that emerged from the case study findings. The first four themes address Research Question Two (RQ 2): How does ableism inform teachers' understandings, beliefs and practices for autistic children in an ECE setting? The first theme demonstrates that the participants' understandings of disability are based on a combination of discourses that are sometimes contradictory. The findings show that participants mostly understood disability as a social construct resulting from negative attitudes and an inaccessible society. At the same time, participants saw disability as a functional limitation that restricts disabled people's participation. In response, participants considered that disabled people require extra support to perform their daily tasks. These views suggest that in the participants’ understandings, there is an overlap in the social and medical models of disability. This overlap is in keeping with the bio-psychosocial approach to understanding disability, underpinning the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health [ICF] model (WHO, 2001). The ICF model integrates both the medical and the social models of disability and considers disability as the complex interaction between an individual with health conditions and limitations and the barriers that society imposes on the individual (WHO, 2001). Within the ICF model, impairment is defined in relation to the statistically population-based standard of a ‘normal’ person. The standard of a ‘normal’ person is used to determine the body’s capacity and its functionality and to identify the absence, presence, or severity of disability (Gibson, 2016). In this regard, the conceptual understanding of the ICF model does not align with DSE perspectives as it sees impairment as a deviation from the normal body that requires intervention and perpetuates the marginalisation of disabled children rather than challenging discrimination. However, a different perspective of disability as a relational concept was evident in one participant’s understanding of disability as she drew on individual experiences of impairment and societal barriers she faced. Interpreting participants' understanding of disability from DSE perspectives indicates that while participants considered the role of negative societal attitudes and structural barriers in describing disability, most of their responses also indicated an ableist understanding of disability as a functional limitation of physical and cognitive ability in relation to the norm.

Inclusive Education is about Presence, Participation and Learning

The study also explored participants' understanding of inclusive education and their perception of an inclusive classroom. A theme that emerged in the responses of all participants was a view of inclusion as the responsibility for providing equitable learning opportunities for all children, an understanding that draws on the human rights approach. These findings highlight participants’ understanding of the ‘presence of all children’ as a foundational idea of inclusion embedded in anti-discrimination legislation (UNESCO, 1994; UNCRPD, 2006) and *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017).

Furthermore, participants’ responses to the question about how they practised inclusion suggest an inclusive pedagogy approach. One participant considered inclusion in practice as not discriminating against children on the ground of disability and providing extra support to children with very high needs. Other participants described inclusion in practice as supporting disabled children’s social skills and highlighted the teacher's responsibility in facilitating inclusion to ensure that learning experiences are planned according to each child’s needs, interests and abilities. These findings are broadly supported by an understanding of inclusive education as all children being present, participating, belonging and learning as reflected in *Te Whāriki*. There is an expectation in the curriculum that teachers will know all of the children in their ECE settings and plan inclusive pedagogy considering individual children’s interests and abilities to ensure they each participate in meaningful learning alongside their peers (MoE, 2017).

Deficit Theorising of Autistic Children as Different in their Bodies, Minds and Emotions

Chapter Six discussed findings concerning teachers' experiences of facilitating inclusive education for autistic children, which revealed the medical discourse of autism and associated deficit theorising. The medical discourse of autism privileges able-bodied individuals while pathologising those who do not meet the able-bodied criteria (Shildrick, 2005). The language used by participants to describe their experiences with autistic children implied the behaviour of autistic children has arisen mainly from their embodied differences, with little consideration given to the role of social and educational barriers in creating those challenges. These findings are supported in the literature that shows that dominant descriptions of autistic children are situated within medical perspectives in which children are frequently conceptualised as isolated and disengaged from the social world and restricted by their embodied deficits (Douglas et al., 2019; Mc Guire, 2011; Runswick-Cole et al., 2016).

The literature reviewed for this thesis showed that the medical model of disability has dominated practices in education (Fisher & Goodley, 2007; Lalvani, 2015b). The dominant medical perspectives of disability could be the reason why educators continue to be largely unaware of alternative ways of describing disability (Fisher & Goodley, 2007). The discussion of this study’s findings, in line with the literature reviewed, indicates that the dominance of medical discourses and limited understanding of alternative ways of understanding autism may determine participants’ use of the language of pathology to describe their experiences with autistic children.

In summary, the discussion of findings in Chapter Six suggests that participants critiqued the disabling society and the role of negative attitudes in restricting disabled children's participation. This understanding, informed by a social-relational model, can promote practices that try to counter social barriers. However, it was also apparent that this social relational understanding overlapped with the medical and special education discourses on disability and autism. These findings indicate the importance of teacher reflection about their thinking and practices. There is a need for teachers to recognise and challenge ableist deficit approaches to achieve inclusive practices for all children. Additionally, participants articulated an understanding of inclusive education as children's right to be present, participate and learn, a recognition that challenges the traditional understanding of inclusion as merely being about the presence of children in mainstream ECE settings. The next theme discusses how ableism can be seen to operate in ECE practices.

A Dominant Discourse of Developmental Psychology in Practice

The study's findings indicate that discourses of developmental psychology, discipline, and play provide evidence of ableism in ECE practices. Ableism is inherent in a society which privileges one (normal) way of being and discounts the identities and experience of disability. The discourse of developmental psychology and discipline formed teachers' expectations about the appropriate behaviour of children during group activities like mat time. As a result, autistic children who did not meet these behavioural expectations were considered by teachers as disruptive, not setting a good example and a potential threat to other children's safety. This finding corroborates Love and Beneke's (2021) argument that the discourse of developmental psychology reinforces the ableist notion of ability or normalcy in ECE. Correspondingly, ECE practices, meant to support children's participation, are dominated by expectations about appropriate behaviour that are intended to assimilate all children into the ableist norm without considering differences in children's ways of being and behaving in ECE.

The study's findings also suggest that when influenced by the discourse of developmental psychology, teachers did not notice how the learning environment, the structure of the activity, noise and close proximity among children could be overwhelming, resulting in autistic children's behaviour such as screaming, inability to follow teachers' instructions and running away from the mat time. This finding supports Goodley and Runswick-Cole's (2014) claim that autistic children can have difficulty engaging in some environments, which sometimes leads to what is considered socially inappropriate behaviour when judged against the notion of appropriate and socially acceptable behaviour. As a result, the normative assumptions underlying appropriate behaviour assume that autistic children show violent and inappropriate behaviour with the intention of causing harm. However, autistic children's behaviour may not be intentional, but rather expressions of their emotions resulting from sensory overstimulation in their learning environment and society.

In addition to behavioural expectations, the findings showed that the discourse of developmental psychology informed teachers' views about developmentally appropriate play in this study. Informed by an understanding of developmentally appropriate play, a teacher directs a child to become involved in group activity and controls the play situation without considering a child’s interest in and motivation to be involved. This finding echoes Papatheodoru’s (2006) argument that play as a means to serve developmental goals might impede the value of play as an intrinsic activity and is risky for disabled children as adults control the play, direct the goals and judge the level of achievement and ability that the child achieves (Papatheodoru, 2006). Similarly, Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2010) argued that the discourse of developmental psychology considers the play of normal children to be ‘typical’ and of ‘intrinsic value’. Conversely, for disabled children, play is perceived as a means of intervention, for teaching them social skills and assisting them in meeting other developmental milestones (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010). Similarly, consistent with the literature, the findings indicate that discourses of developmental psychology and play reinforce the teachers’ understanding of developmentally appropriate play and produce an autistic child as a passive learner who needs to be taught how to play.

These findings have implications for teachers to reflect on how the understanding of the ‘normal’ child underlying developmental psychology produces autistic children as ‘others’ and devalues their diverse way of playing, behaving and expressing emotions. Questioning the dominant ways of being and doing in ECE, underlying developmental approaches and understanding how the environment and teaching could be disabling for autistic children can help teachers to identify and change the ableist beliefs and promote inclusive practices that respond to the diversity of children’s needs.

The following theme addresses Research Question Four (RQ 4): What is the impact of ableism on families of autistic children?

Parents Negotiating Inclusion for their Autistic Child

The study’s findings suggest that teachers' interpretations of Kylee’s parent's experiences were informed by discourses of parental denial of their child’s disability and special education needs. The discourse of parental denial seemed to inform teachers' responses in that they believed Kylee’s parents were in denial about getting Kylee's diagnosis and seeking special education services. This finding accords with the work of Lalvani (2015a), who noted that teachers and other professionals interpret parents’ resistance to their children’s disability label and special education services as ‘denial’ about their children’s differences. Interpreting families' resistance to their child’s diagnosis as denial is consistent with the medical model that sees disability as individual pathology and fails to acknowledge how social and attitudinal barriers inform parents' experiences (Lalvani, 2015a). However, Lalvani (2015a) argued that parents’ disagreement with professionals and teachers regarding diagnosis and special education services might not be a denial of their child’s differences. Instead, the dispute may be over the labelling of disability and its associated stigma, otherness and lower expectations in education settings. In this respect, the findings of this study correspond with Lalvani’s (2015a) claim. Teachers realised that Kylee’s parents’ response might have been due to their fear of Kylee being labelled. However, teachers believed that for Kylee to be comfortable in her environment and learn with other children, her parents should consider special education support for Kylee. Therefore, to support Kylee’s full participation in the learning environment Shemrock, Kylee’s mother consented to teachers seeking special education support.

Furthermore, the discourse of special education shaped Kylee’s mother’s experiences when she showed concern about Kylee going to a special school rather than the mainstream primary school, in the event that Kylee did not start speaking. Kylee’s mother’s experiences may be influenced by ableist discourse, where verbal language is considered an important developmental milestone for children to express themselves and be able to comply with the academic standards imposed by the mainstream education system. These findings are consistent with the qualitative research findings of Gomez-Victoria and Pava-Ripoll (2021). A dominant theme from their analysis was the marginalisation that parents and disabled children experienced through ableism. The study found that parents' narratives show how the oppression of disabled children and their families is carried out by the neoliberal ableist system that values verbal language as a privileged form of communication. This privileging leads families to search for interventions that can help their children to fit into the regulatory norm of verbal language and become part of the mainstream education system.

This discussion of findings suggests that the discourses of denial and special education can reinforce the ableist beliefs trapped in standards, diagnosis and expectations about seeking interventions. These findings have implications for teachers inviting critical reflection on their assumptions that parents who do not agree with their child's diagnosis are in denial or grieving the loss of their child's normalcy. Instead, these parents might be rejecting the social judgements that come with the label. The findings suggest that teachers should find out about and consider the lived experiences of parenting and the impact that social and education systems have on parents' experiences of education of their disabled children. Moreover, these findings have implications for parents to understand the impact of special education discourses that privilege able-bodied children and question decisions founded on these perceptions.

The final theme discusses findings related to Research Question Five (RQ 5): How might disability awareness and knowledge about the effects of ableism on practices help teachers in an ECE setting to counter the impacts of ableism when responding to autistic children?

Teachers Problematising Ableism: Shifting the Focus from the Individual Child to Attitudinal and Structural Barriers

Disability awareness and critical reflection on their practices empowered teachers in this study to make changes in their thinking in favour of inclusion. This finding suggests that some knowledge about ableism shared through the introductory meeting on disability awareness and the focus group discussion helped teachers to reflect on taken for granted beliefs about the 'normal' child and autistic children. As a result, changes in teachers' thinking were evident as they discussed the importance of learning from the lived experiences of autistic people and their family members. Teachers also acknowledged the role of labelling, lower expectations, and physical barriers in disabling children. Furthermore, teachers critically reflected on how their practices, unintentionally informed by ableism, had constructed Kylee and Jason (autistic children) as less competent than their non-disabled peers.

This finding broadly supports recent work in disability studies that has discussed the link between disability studies and critical pedagogy to counter ableist assumptions (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Goodley, 2017; Lalvani & Bacon, 2018). Baglieri and Lalvani (2020) pointed out that teachers making critical inquiries about ableism need to interrogate deficit discourses surrounding disability and critically reflect on how these discourses are manifested in their thinking about and practices towards disabled children. Critical inquiry into ableism can subsequently lead to changes in teacher practice. This notion of critical inquiry or reflection is advocated by scholars in New Zealand who point out the importance of critical reflection for teachers to question and challenge their deficit assumptions about children and their families in ECE (Dalli, 2008; Mitchell & Cubey, 2003). Overall, this study's findings and the corresponding literature suggest that disability awareness and critical reflection can help teachers recognise deficit perspectives of disability and their influences on their practice. Correspondingly, such critical reflection needs to be routinely encouraged and facilitated.

Chapter Summary

The chapter has discussed the main findings and literature reviewed to provide insights into evidence of ableism in ECE and how teachers might challenge the effect of practices unintentionally informed by ableism. I explore two arguments in this chapter. The working of the dominant discourses of special education, neoliberalism, and developmental psychology provide evidence of ableism in ECE and their role in maintaining judgements about autistic children's abilities and disabling practices like attitudinal, physical and institutional barriers. Moreover, disability awareness and critical reflection can provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to recognise and change the ableist beliefs and dismantle barriers to learning and participation that ableism creates. The next chapter draws key conclusions, identifies implications for policy and practice, makes recommendations for future research and summarises the knowledge contribution of the study.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

Chapter Overview

The previous chapter discussed the main themes that emerged from the findings in relation to the theoretical perspectives and literature reviewed in this study. This concluding chapter draws on the study's findings to offer key ideas about enhancing inclusion for autistic and other disabled children in ECE policies and practices. In particular, I suggest that including Disability Studies in Education (DSE) perspectives in initial and ongoing teacher education and professional development can provide teachers with a range of strategies for resisting ableism and promoting inclusive practices. I also outline the contribution of this research study to the knowledge field of ECE inclusive education and DSE. Recognising the limitations of this study, I provide suggestions for future research. Finally, I discuss the social and personal implications of this study for the ECE community, parents of disabled children and myself.

Challenging Ableism: Implications for Policy

The discussion of policy analysis findings (Chapter Five) reveals the prevalence of discourses of developmental psychology, neoliberalism, and special education. These discourses are problematic for disabled children as they reinforce ableist assumptions and inform us about the practices of disablism (social, structural and learning barriers to the inclusion of autistic children). These findings suggest that a way to foreground an understanding of disability and inclusion from Disability Studies in Education (DSE) perspectives is to address the exclusionary effects of ableism.

Based on the findings of this study, I argue that professional development and teacher education about DSE can provide an immediate way for teachers to develop conceptual knowledge and attitudinal values necessary for challenging ableist beliefs and for improving practices. DSE perspectives align with the strengths-based model of teaching and learning underlying *Te Whāriki*. The strengths-based model focuses on pedagogical planning according to the needs, abilities, and interests of the individual child within a group setting and considers the voices of children and their families in facilitating inclusion. Integrating

DSE perspectives within professional development and learning programmes (PLD) on implementing *Te Whāriki* could enable teachers to recognise disability as a site for understanding and exploring human differences. Recognising disability as diversity and having an identity refutes the developmental discourse that represents the able body and mind as determinants of a 'normal' child. Moreover, disability as an identity and as an aspect of diversity provides a sense of belonging to disabled children and presents the experiences of disabled children as a site of knowledge rather than something to be accommodated and cured (Mitchell & Snyder, 2014).

PLD on inclusive education could also consider DSE alongside critical theory perspectives underpinning *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017). *Te Whāriki*, "challenges disparities, injustices, inequalities and perceived norms" underpinned by critical theory perspectives (p. 62). PLD on DSE and critical theory perspectives would support teachers to engage with the theories of disability studies which are essential to building critical literacy about ableism and understanding the historical struggle that disabled people faced to establish their civil rights. Furthermore, using critical theory perspectives (which are referred to but not explicit) in *Te Whāriki,* teachers can reflect on and interrogate the deficit discourses related to disability and ableism and how they problematise the intentions and spirit of inclusive ECE. Professional development can also provide opportunities for teachers and children to engage in ongoing discussions about disability as a part of their ECE community and local curriculum.

Introducing PLD on DSE and critical theory perspectives could also reorient the thinking in ECE away from the model of special education toward the conceptualisation of disability as part of human experience. This study's findings show that the discourse of special education is dominant in the *Success for All* policy. The DSE notion of social justice critiques the special education discourse and advocates for changing the educational context and teaching curricula to acknowledge the strengths and experiences that disabled children bring to their ECE settings. One key way that DSE perspectives can support inclusive practices is through Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Rose & Meyer, 2006). UDL aligns well with DSE perspectives by shifting the focus from the individual child to teaching practices. UDL as a pedagogical framework for teaching and learning challenges the myth of an average or normal child. In this way, UDL aims to reduce the barriers to learning and build accessible communities where every child can participate and belong (Meyer et al., 2014). Fornouf

(2020) argues that “UDL questions dominant narratives of ability as a static, individual attribute, as well as narratives that position inclusivity as a function of special education service provision” (p. 11). Adopting UDL perspectives, teachers see children beyond the label of special needs as this framework does not categorize children as those who need ‘additional support’ and those who do not need it. Rather UDL supports the view that all children experience differences; therefore, teachers should develop practices that are responsive to and respectful of children’s diversity (Underwood et al., 2012). Thus, UDL informed by the DSE framework can suggest ways to examine and reimagine early intervention and special education support for disabled children.

Another way ableism can be challenged is by introducing the DSE framework in initial teacher education programmes. Many scholars highlight the importance of incorporating DSE perspectives in teacher education to support teachers to identify deficit perspectives that marginalise disabled children and change their teaching practices accordingly (Ashby, 2012; Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Broderick & Lalvani, 2017; Pearson et al., 2016). In agreement with this literature, this study suggests that incorporating DSE perspectives in teacher education can provide teachers with conceptual knowledge of the social construction of disability and can invite critical analysis of ableist assumptions. This study’s findings outlined in Chapters Six and Seven demonstrate evidence of ableism in teachers’ beliefs and interactions through developmental, special education and medical discourses at Shemrock. Knowledge of the DSE framework can assist teachers to understand how these dominant discourses of ableism are formed and how they can shape teachers’ knowledge, and beliefs about disability and autistic children. The DSE framework can also help teachers to understand how these ableist assumptions can lead to disabling practices for autistic children and can negatively impact their inclusion. In this regard, the DSE framework can help existing teachers, who were initially educated to perceive disability as a medical problem needing fixing, to critically reflect on their beliefs and practices toward disabled children and think differently about inclusive education.

While teacher education about DSE can make a valuable contribution to change, shifting ingrained attitudes and practices is a difficult process. Additionally, a positive change in teachers’ thinking and practices requires an examination of self, emotions and practice. Critical pedagogy can help teachers to engage in the process of examination of self and systems. Critical pedagogy alongside DSE perspectives can help teachers dismantle ableism and initiate learning opportunities that are responsive to all learners. Critical pedagogy perspectives are shaped by critical theory and focus on helping teachers and children understand and critique society’s and their own beliefs and assumptions about oppression (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020). Critical pedagogy can help teachers overcome deficit theorising of disability and recognise hidden oppression [like ableism and other biases] and promote critical reflection about their roles and beliefs in perpetuating inequalities. Therefore, to sustain the transformation in understanding that teachers can achieve through PLD and education on DSE, they need to regularly engage in critical reflection on their practice individually and in teaching teams.

Critical Inquiry about Ableism: Implications for Practice

An approach that can support critical reflection on ableism is ‘teaching as inquiry’. Teaching as inquiry is an approach that encourages teachers to be reflective and assess the impact of their teaching practice on children’s learning and make changes to improve their teaching practices (Aitken, 2018). Inquiry can comprise an internal review of the whole setting as well as an individual teacher’s own reflective inquiry into their practice. The importance of reflective practice is outlined in a number of New Zealand ECE professional documents (Education Hub, 2018; New Zealand Teachers Council, 2007; 2009). The New Zealand Teachers Council’s requirements for teachers highlight the importance of teachers using evidence from their ECE setting and research to reflect on and improve their practice (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2007; 2009). New Zealand ECE scholars have also suggested that engaging in self-reflection is important professional behaviour for teachers (Dalli, 2008; Kahuroa, 2021; Mitchell & Cubey, 2003; White, 2007).

Through critical inquiry about ableism, teachers can ask themselves reflective questions about society and themselves such as: Who are considered to be normal and disabled children? What determines my perceptions of ‘normal’ and ‘disabled’ in terms of children and adults? Does the notion of ‘normal’ child development feature in my teaching and privilege decisions and practices that include some children and exclude others? What do I understand by the notion of extra support for disabled children? How might this understanding of extra support marginalise or support disabled children and their families? Are my aspirations for children underpinned by ableism?

Although critical reflection is advantageous for bringing about change, teachers may also experience conflict between newly acquired ideologies and the context in which they are working. Therefore, the work of critical inquiry into ableism should not necessarily be done alone; teachers can engage in conversations with their colleagues as whole centre professional development or sustained investigation through teaching as inquiry (Aitken, 2018). Teachers can share reflections and a new version of thinking with colleagues to consider how others make sense of their reflections and new thinking. The conversations with colleagues can support questions, responses, reactions, and recommendations, broaden teachers' understanding and pedagogical practices, and contribute to a collaborative transformational process towards inclusion. Hoffman-Kipp (2003) refers to teachers working in groups as "Communities of Practice", which are seen as essential for teachers to transform their thinking and practices related to social justice issues. Reflection and conversation with colleagues can also call on leaders in ECE settings who are aware of disability theory and DSE-informed inclusive practices to provide support and guidance to new and existing teachers (Ottesen, 2007).

In critical inquiry about ableism, the emphasis should be on forming collaborative and trusting relationships with parents, families and whānau that enable teachers to better understand the family experiences of disabled children. The whanaungatanga approach underlying the Family and Community principle of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) highlights the importance of responsive and reciprocal relationships between teachers, children and their families and whānau. Listening to the voices of disabled children's families can help teachers understand families' aspirations, and the barriers they face in accessing inclusive education for their children. This study provides evidence of critical reflection in collaborative practice. The viewing and discussion of video recordings of teachers' practices and discussion of themes from parent and teachers' interviews provided a space for teachers to critically reflect on their beliefs and practices in relation to autistic children. As a result, there was a positive transformation in teachers' thinking about autistic children [Jason and Kylee] (see Chapter Nine).

Furthermore, critical inquiry about ableism requires a safe and supportive learning environment. Teachers need to be provided with the resources and time to engage in critical inquiry about their teaching. Providing regular opportunities for teachers to engage in collaborative dialogue is essential for ongoing reflection on their practices to support the learning of all children. However, despite the importance of reflective teaching as professional development for improving teaching and learning and the ECE setting as a whole, New Zealand research indicates that there are numerous barriers to effective reflection by teachers. Some of these barriers include insufficient provision or the absence of noncontact time, limited opportunities to work collaboratively, lack of leadership and a culture of reflective practice, unqualified teachers and the imposition of management agenda for-profit philosophy. Any of these barriers can hinder teachers' ability to meet regularly and discuss teaching and learning matters (Education Review Office, 2010; Hedges, 2007; Kahuroa, 2021; Mitchell, 2008).

Thus, ensuring teachers have facilitative working conditions requires commitment from leaders to developing more inclusive cultures in ECE settings and ensuring the building of trusting relationships with staff to foster teamwork and collaboration. Engaging in the DSE framework is not an easy task for teachers, as it requires them to question their current beliefs and practices toward disabled children, and commit to inclusive pedagogical practices. Road (2018) argues that leadership support plays an important role in supporting teachers "to act as agents of change and retain commitments to DSE" (p. 35). Thus, teachers seeking positive change in their practices, require leadership that offers good working conditions that include continuous support for teachers to document practice, critically reflect on it and co-construct pedagogy, through team discussion and professional support.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study's findings contribute to current literature on inclusive early childhood education and Disability Studies in Education (DSE) and inform inclusive practices. DSE provides critical perspectives that examine and question discourses of ableism and offers alternative perspectives for understanding inclusive education (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Bacon & Baglieri, 2021; Ferri & Bacon, 2011). This study supports the purpose of DSE in two ways. First, this study found evidence of ableism operating in an ECE setting through the dominant discourses of special education, developmental psychology, and neoliberalism. These discourses have been shown to have shaped the text of two key policies as well as the everyday practices of ECE teachers at Shemrock. The study also uncovered discourses of ableism in one parent's interactions with the ECE setting that their autistic child attended.

Secondly, this study showed how providing a space for teachers to critically reflect on their practices helped to transform thinking about autistic children and empowered them to make changes in their practice. As a consequence of this finding, the need to provide spaces for teachers to critically reflect on their perceptions, attitudes and practices towards disabled children is recommended.

This study also provides a starting point to understanding the potential role of the DSE framework to support everyone to work against ableism. The DSE framework supports the production of knowledge that values disabled children's experiences and the diversity they bring with their participation in learning and life. There are two areas in which the integration of DSE perspectives in ECE policy and practice in New Zealand will be useful: 1) conducting a critical inquiry into ableism, and 2) introducing teacher educators and professional development on the DSE framework in line with the strengths-based sociocultural approach underlying *Te Whāriki* which positions disability as a site for understanding human diversity, and reorienting inclusive practices in ECE.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited in several ways. The first limitation was that only a single interview was conducted with one parent of an autistic child. Only one parent interview was possible as other parents who were invited did not make themselves available for an interview. Therefore, the study is limited in the way that parents' experiences are articulated. Other parents could have different experiences to share, which may or may not have reflected ableism. The second imitation is the number of focus group discussions that were conducted. Initially, I set out to conduct two focus group discussions; one to share the interview themes and the other to share video observations and facilitate subsequent discussion. Given the Coronavirus pandemic, the focus group discussion was delayed for two months. Later, the centre manager only provided time for one focus group discussion. This factor meant that I had to limit the number of videos shared with the participants. However, I tried my best to ensure all points were covered in the one focus group. Nevertheless, it was impossible to show more than two videos to the participants in the given time-frame.

Future research could extend the methods used to investigate the inclusion of disabled children as participants in exploring their experiences of ableism. In this study, the use of video observations as an observation method ensured that autistic and non-disabled children had an active presence in research about their lives. By using video observations involving children, my aim was to make visible the children's intentions, interests, feeling, emotions, and interactions with their peers, and teachers (verbal and non-verbal communication) in relation to the specific context of the ECE setting (Shemrock). Thus, video recording as a method of observation supported autistic children to participate in this study at their own pace and time and utilise their different modes of communication. However, it would be beneficial for further research to use diverse methods. Some examples of diverse methods are a play-based approach (Kellet, 2011), mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001; Pascal & Bertram, 2009) and artistic methods (Carter & Ford, 2013) that can include disabled children as active participants to explore their experiences of ableism and inclusion.

It is also suggested that future research on the topic could use similar theoretical perspectives as this study, but add to the issues that are explored. Further research could consider issues such as: What structural challenges are faced by disabled children and their families in ECE? What impact do these challenges have on children and their families? What and how can possibilities for change emerge when these challenges are questioned? Another worthwhile direction for future work could be to focus on action research exploring the implications and importance of introducing the DSE framework to ECE teachers to support them in promoting inclusive philosophies and practices, and in resisting ableism and other exclusionary biases.

Impact of the Study

Social impact

This study explored how the marginalisation of autistic children occurs through the taken-forgranted constitution and maintenance of ableist discourses in ECE policy and practice. The knowledge produced in this study can benefit student teachers, teachers, policymakers and other ECE practitioners in understanding how the notions of ability, independence and competencies underlying ableism can impact the participation and inclusion of autistic and other disabled children. Thus, for promoting the inclusion of disabled children, and exposing and challenging ableism, new ways of thinking about disability and inclusion from DSE perspectives will be beneficial. Moreover, the study has the potential to positively influence the understanding of parents of disabled children about ableism and related disabling practices, for example, judgments about children's abilities and attitudinal and educational barriers that exist within education settings for disabled children.

Personal impact

This research study helped me to reflect on my former practice as a special education teacher and my positionality as an able-bodied researcher. The theoretical perspectives used in this study enabled me to better understand deficit theorising - how 'normal' or 'able' bodies and minds are more valued than others. This new knowledge has helped me to understand, analyse and reflect on ableist assumptions that I held for years in my professional roles. During the data collection process, while observing teachers' interactions with autistic children, I was able to see how the powerful idea of the normal child was produced and operated through their practices without the participating teachers knowing about the negative impact of these normative assumptions on autistic children. I put myself in their position and realised how I had been ableist through producing normative assumptions and expectations in my practices as a special education teacher. Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2013) note that "ableism operates both 'out there' and 'in here' as its oppressive practices become internalised and reproduced by the Disabled Other" (p. 322). I asked myself how hard it could have been for teachers to progress the spirit and intention of inclusive education when ableist discourses remain hidden and difficult to see.

Concluding Thoughts

This study set out to explore whether and how ableism operates in ECE in New Zealand, and to assess its impact on the inclusion of autistic children. This study found that special education, developmental psychology, neoliberalism and the medical discourse of disability provide evidence of ableism in key ECE policy and practice and can negatively impact the inclusion of autistic children. An exciting contribution of this study is that at least some degree of transformation was evident in teachers' thinking and practices favouring the inclusion of autistic children through critical reflection in an ECE setting. This study contributes to recent work in Critical Disability Studies and Disability Studies in Education that seeks to trouble the norm of ability established by ableism and introduce alternative perspectives to promote inclusive practices for disabled children. As evident by the discussion of the study, DSE offers alternative views of disability and inclusion in ECE policies and practices that remind us that inclusivity is not just about placing disabled children in mainstream ECE settings. Inclusivity can ensue in an ECE environment where teachers engage all children in meaningful learning, embrace disability as an identity, and critically question ableist discourses. In this way, we could embrace disabled children for who they are and the different abilities and strengths they bring, rather than pushing them to conform to the approximate ‘norms’ of being, developing, and behaving in ECE settings.

References

Adolfsson, M., Sjoman, M., & Akesson, E. (2018). ICF-CY as a framework for understanding child engagement in preschool. *Frontiers in Education, 3,* 1-12. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00036

Aitken, G. (2018). *Teaching as an inquiry for ECE settings.* The Education Hub. https://theeducationhub.org.nz/teaching-as-inquiry-for-ece-settings/

Allen, M. (2017). Observational research methods. *In the Sage encyclopaedia of communication research methods* (vol. 1-4). Sage Publications. https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411.n385

American Psychiatric Association (APA). (1980). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (3rd Ed.) (DSM-III).*

American Psychiatric Association (APA). (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-V (5th Eds.).*

Annamma, S. A., Connor, D., & Ferri, B. (2013). Dis/ability critical race studies: Theorizing at the intersections of race and dis/ability. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, *16*(1), 1–31. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X18759041

Antonsen, M. E. (2019). Children's bodies in British Colombia's child care regulations: A critical discourse analysis. *Journal of Childhood Studies*, *44*(2), 1-12. http://dx.doi.org/10.18357/jcs442201919056

Arndt, S., Gibbons, A., & Fitzsimons, P. (2015). Thriving and surviving? The incredible problem of constructions of normality and otherness in early childhood settings. *Global Studies of Childhood*, *5*(3), 279–290. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610615597144

Arndt, S. K., & Tesar, M. (2015). *Early childhood assessment in Aotearoa New Zealand: Critical perspectives and fresh openings*. De Gruyter.

Armstrong, A., Armstrong, D., & Spandagou, I. (2010). *Inclusive education international policy and practice*. Sage Publications.

Ashby, C. (2012). Disability studies and inclusive teacher preparation: A socially just path for teacher education. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, *37*(2), 89–99. https://doi.org/10.1177/154079691203700204

Aspden, K., Baxter, S. M., Clendon, S., & McLaughlin, T. W. (2022). Identification and referral for early intervention services in New Zealand: A look at teachers' perspectives – past and present. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, *41*(4), 294–306. https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121419881640]

Attwood, T. (2008). *The complete guide to Asperger's syndrome*. Jessica_Kingsley Publishers.

Atwal A., & Caldwell, K. (2005). Do all health and social care professionals interact equally: A study of interactions in multidisciplinary teams in the United Kingdom. *Scand J Caring Science, 19*(3), 268-73. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6712.2005.00338.x

Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2002). Teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion: A review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 17*(2), 129-147.https://doi.org/10.1080/08856250210129056

Bacon, J., & Baglieri, S. (2021). Perspectives of students labelled intellectually disabled at college: Using disability studies in education as a lens to contemplate inclusive postsecondary education. *Journal of Disability Studies in Education*, 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1163/25888803-bja10007

Baglieri, S., & Bacon, J. (2020). Disability studies in education and inclusive education. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, 1-25. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1245

Baglieri, S., & Lalvani, P. (2020). *Undoing ableism: Teaching about disability in K–12 classroom*s. Routledge. https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.4324/9781351002868=

Baglieri, S., & Shapiro, A. (2017). *Disability studies and the inclusive classroom: Critical practices for embracing diversity in education.* Taylor & Francis.

Baglieri, S., Bejoian, L., Broderick, A., Connor, D., & Valle, J. (2011a). [Re]claiming "inclusive education" toward cohesion in educational reform: Disability studies unravels the myth of the normal child. *Teachers College Record, 113*(10), 2122 – 2154.

Baglieri, S., Valle, J. W., Connor, D. J., & Gallagher, D. J. (2011b). Disability studies in education: The need for a plurality of perspectives on disability. *Remedial and Special Education, 32*(4), 267–278. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932510362200

Baker, B. (2002). The hunt for disability: Eugenics and the normalization of school children. *Teachers College Record*, *104,* 663–703.

Ball, S. (1994). *Educational reform: A critical and post-structural approach*. Open University Press.

Ballard, K. (2004). Children and disability: Special or included? *Waikato Journal of Education, 10,* 315-326.

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388128 Barnes, C. (1990). *Cabbage syndrome: The social construction of dependence*. Falmer Press

Baron-Cohen, S. (2001). Theory of mind and autism: A review. In L. M. Glidden (Eds.), *International review of research in mental retardation: Autism* (Vol. 23, pp. 169–184). Academic Press.

Barton, L. (2000). Profile. Len Barton. In P. Clough & J. Corbett (Eds.), *Theories of inclusive education international voices on disability and justice* (pp. 51-54). Paul Chapman.

Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Anchor. http://perflensburg.se/Berger%20socialconstruction-of-reality.pdf

Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, *15*(2), 219–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/146879411246847

Bevan-Brown, J. (2010). Messages from parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). *Kairaranga*, *11*(2), 16-21.

Black-Hawkins, K., & Florian, L. (2012). Classroom teachers' craft knowledge of their inclusive practice. *Teachers and Teaching, Theory and Practice*, *18*(5), 567–584. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2012.709732

Bogdan, R, C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education. An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Pearson Education Inc.

Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2016). *The index for inclusion: A guide to school development led by inclusive values*. Index for Inclusion Network (IfIN).

Botha, M., Hanlon, J., & Williams, G. L. (2021). Does language matter? Identity-first versus person-first language use in autism research: A response to Vivanti. *J Autism Dev Disord*, 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04858-w

Bowden, N., Thabrew, H., Kokaua, J., Audas, R., Milne, B., Smiler, K., Stace, H., Taylor, B., & Gibb, S. (2020). Autism spectrum disorder/Takiwātanga: An integrated data infrastructure-based approach to autism spectrum disorder research in New Zealand. *Autism*, *24*(8), 2213–2227. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320939329

Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. Polity.

Brantlinger, E. (2009). Impediments to social justice: Hierarchy, science, faith, and imposed identity (disability classification). In W. Ayers, D. Stovall & T. Quinn (Eds.), *Handbook of social justice education* (pp. 400–416). Routledge.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A.T. Panter, D. Rindskopf & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, research designs: Quantitative, Qualitative, neuropsychological and biological (pp. 57-71). American Psychological Association.*

Brillante, P., & Nemeth, K. N. (2018). *Universal design for learning in the early childhood classroom: Teaching children of all languages, cultures and abilities, birth-8 years*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003148432

Broadfoot, P. (2007). *An introduction to assessment.* Continuum.

Broderick, A., & Lalvani, P. (2017). Dysconscious ableism: Toward a liberatory praxis in teacher education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 21*(9), 894–905. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1296034

Brown, S. (1997). Special Education 2000: Developing a policy for inclusive education in New Zealand. *New Zealand Annual Review of Education, 5,* 141-156.

Brown, W. (2015). Undoing democracy: Neoliberalism remaking of state and subject. In *undoing the demos: neoliberalism's stealth revolution* (pp. 17-46). Zone Books. https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.

Brusca-Vega, R., & Trekles, A. (2020). Access to the curriculum for students With disabilities: Moving closer to the promise of UDL in inclusive US classrooms. In *universal access through inclusive instructional design* (1st ed., pp. 85–94). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429435515-11

Buchner, T. (2015). Mediating ableism: Border work and resistance in the biographical narratives of young disabled people. *Zeitschrift Für Inklusion, 9*(2), 1- 23. https://www.inklusion-online.net/index.php/inklusion-online/article/view/272=

Burke, J. (2009). Enabling play: Insider accounts of disabled children's play worlds inaccessible playgrounds [Doctoral thesis, University of Ballart]. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/212996491.pdf

Burman, E. (2008). *Deconstructing developmental psychology*. Routledge.

Burman, E. (2017). *Deconstructing developmental psychology (3rd ed.)*. Routledge.

Burns, B. R. (2000). *Introduction to research methods*. Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.2001.2045a.x=

Burr, V. (2015). *Social constructionism* (3rd ed.). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group

Campbell, F. K. (2008). Exploring internalised ableism using critical race theory. *Disability and Society, 23*(2), 151–162. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687590701841190

Campbell F. K. (2012). Stalking ableism: Using disability to expose 'abled' narcissism. In D. Goodley. B. Hughes & L. Davis (Eds.), *Disability and social theory* (pp. 212-230). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137023001_13

Campbell, F. K. (2001). 'Inciting legal fictions: 'Disability's date with ontology and the ableist body of the law". *Griffith Law Review, 10,* 42 – 62. http://hdl.handle.net/10072/3714 Campbell, F. K. (2003). *The great divide: Ableism and technologies of disability production* [Doctoral thesis, Queensland University of Technology].

Campbell, F. K. (2009). *Contours of Ableism: The production of disability and abledness*. Palgrave Macmillan. 10.1057/9780230245181

Campbell, F. K. (2013, June). *Ableism: A theory of everything?* (International conference on linking concepts of critical ableism and racism studies on conflicts of participation). University of Hamburg.

Campbell, F. K. (2018). Refocusing on the paradigm shift: From disability to studies in ableism. In A. Ghai (Eds.), *Disability in south Asia: Knowledge and experience* (pp. 39-57). Sage Publications. https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/disability-in-southasia/book263322

Campbell, F. K. (2019). Precision ableism: A studies in ableism approach to developing of disability and Abledment. *Rethinking History, 23*(2), 138-156 https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2019.1607475

Cannella, G. S. (1997). *Deconstructing early childhood education: Social justice & revolution*. Peter Lang.

Carr, M. & May, H. (1993). Choosing a model. Reflecting on the development process of Te Whāriki: National early childhood guidelines in New Zealand. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 1*(3), 7-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966976930010302

Carr, M. A. (2001). *Assessment in early childhood settings: Learning Stories*. Paul Chapman Publishing.

Carr, M., & Lee, W. (2012). *Learning stories: Constructing earner identities in early education*. Sage Publications Ltd.

Carr, M., & May, H. (1993). Choosing a model: Reflecting on the development process of Te Whāriki: National early childhood guidelines in New Zealand. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 1*(3), 7-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966976930010302

Carter, B., & Ford, K. (2013). Researching children's health experiences: The place for participatory, child-centred, arts-based approaches. *Research in Nursing & Health, 36*(1), 95–107. 10.1002/nur.21517

CAST (2018). *UDL and the learning brain.* http://www.cast.org/our-work/publications/2018/udl-learning-brain-neuroscience.html

CAST. (2021). The UDL guidelines. Centre for Applied Special Technology. https://udlguidelines.cast.org/

Ciesielska, M., Bostrom, W . K., & Ohlander, M. (2018). Observation methods. In *Qualitative methodologies in organisation studies* (pp. 33-52). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_2

Clark, A., & Moss, P. (2017). *Listening to young children: A guide to understanding and using the mosaic approach*(3rd ed.). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Cocks, A. (2008). Researching the lives of disabled children: The process of participant observation in seeking inclusivity. *Qualitative Social Work*, *7*(2), 163–180. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325008089628

Cohen, L. (2008). Foucault and the early childhood classroom. *Educational Studies, 44(*1), 7-21. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131940802224948

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2011.01222.x

Coleman, P. (2011). Special Education 2000 policy: Our leaky home? *Kairaranga, 12*(1), 3-10. https://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE25301 462

Cologon, K. (2014). 'Not just being accepted, but embraced': Family perspectives on inclusion. In *inclusive education in the early years: Right from the start* (pp. 91-115). Oxford University Press.

Cologon, K. (2020). Is inclusive education really for everyone? Family stories of children and young people labelled with 'severe and multiple' or 'profound' 'disabilities'. *Research Papers in Education, 37*, 395 – 417.

Conn-Powers, M., Cross, A., Traub, E., & Pishgahi, L. (2006). *The universal design of early education*. The National Association for the Education of Young Children. https://fpg.unc.edu/sites/fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/presentations-and-webinars/ConnPowersBTJ%281%29.pdf

Connor, D. (2012). Does dis/ability now sit at the table(s) of social justice and multicultural education? A descriptive survey of three recent anthologies. *Disability Studies Quartley, 32*(3).

Connor, D. J., & Gabel, L.S., Gallagher, J. D., & Morton, M. (2008). Disability studies and inclusive education — implications for theory, research, and practice. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 12* (5-6), 441-457. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110802377482

Connor, D. J., & Gabel, S. L. (2010). Welcoming the unwelcome: Disability and diversity. In T. K. Chapman & N. Hobbel (Eds.), *Social justice pedagogy across the curriculum*. Routledge.

Connor, D. J. (2016). "Analyzing school cultures and determining dynamics to enact coteaching from a disability studies perspective. In M. Cosier & C. Ashby(Eds.), *Enacting change from within: Disability studies meets teaching and teacher education* (pp. 221-242). Peter Lang Publishing.

Connor, D., & Gabel, S. L. (2013). “Cripping” the curriculum through academic activism: Working toward increasing global exchanges to reframe (Dis)ability and education. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 46*(1), 100–118. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2013.750186

Connors, C., & Stalker, K. (2006). Children’s experiences of disability: Pointers to a social model of childhood disability. *Disability & Society, 22*(1), 19-33. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687590601056

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Crocker, M., & French, S. (1998). *Disability discourse*. Open University Press.

Crow, L. (1996). Including all our lives: Renewing the social model of disability. In J. Morris (Eds), *Encounters with strangers: Feminism and disability* (pp. 1-21). Women’s Press. http://www.roaring-girl.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Including-All-ofOur-Lives.pdf

Curran, T., & Runswick-Cole, K. (2014). Disabled children's childhood studies: A distinct approach? *Disability & Society, 29*(10), 1617–1630. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2014.966187

Dalkilic, M., & Vadeboncoeur, J. A. (2016). Regulating the child in early childhood education: The paradox of inclusion. *Global Studies of Childhood, 6*(1), 17–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610615619982

Dalton, E. M., Lyner-Cleophas, M., Ferguson, B. T., & McKenzie, J. (2019). Inclusion, universal design and universal design for learning in higher education: South Africa and the United States. *African journal of disability*, *8*, 519. https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v8i0.51

Dalli, C. (2008). Pedagogy, knowledge and collaboration: Towards a ground-up perspective on professionalism. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 16*(2), 171-185.

Darragh, J. (2007). Universal Design for Early Childhood Education: Ensuring Access and Equity for All. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *35*(2), 167–171. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-007-0177-4

David, L. (2020). Human rights as an ideology? obstacles and benefits. *Critical Sociology*, *46*(1), 37–50. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920518798015

Davies, T., & Prangnell, A. (1999). *Special Education 2000 - A national framework*. Paper presented at the Special Education 2000 Research Conference.

Davis, L. J. (1995). Constructing normalcy. In *enforcing normalcy: Disability, deafness, and the body (pp. 23-49)*. Verso. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.02823.0001.001

Davis, L. J. (1997). Constructing normalcy. The bell curve, the novel, and the invention of the disability body in the nineteenth century. *In the disability studies* readers (2nd ed., pp. 3-16). Routledge.

Davis, L. J. (2002). Bending over backwards: Disability, dismodernism and other difficult. *Contemporary Sociology: Sage Journal*. https//10.1080/1030431100379749 Davis, L. J. (2013). *The disability studies reader* (4th ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203077887

Degener, T. (2016). *Disability in a human right context. Laws*, *5*(3:35). https://doi.org/10.3390/laws5030035

Department of Education. (1987). *The draft review of special education*. New Zealand: Author.

Department of Education. (1988). *Before five: Early childhood care and education in New Zealand*. New Zealand: Author.

Dempsey, I. (2012). The Use of Individual Education Programs for Children in Australian Schools. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, *36*(1), 21–31. https://doi.org/10.1017/jse.2012.5

Dolmage, J. (2017). Introduction: The approach. *In academic ableism: Disability and higher education* (pp.1-40). University of Michigan Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvr33d50.3

Douglas, P. *(2010)*. 'Problematising' inclusion: Education and the question of autism. *Pedagogy Culture and Society, 18*(2), 105-121. 10.1080/14681366.2010.488039

Douglas, P., & Santinele Martino, A. (2020). Introduction: Disability studies in education— critical conversations. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies, 9*(5), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v9i5.688

Douglas, P., Rice, C., Runswick-Cole, K., Easton, A., Gisbon, M. F., & Gruson-Wood, J. (2019). Re-storying autism: A body becoming disability studies in education approach. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 25*(5), 605-622. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1563835

Early Childhood Taskforce (2011). *An agenda for amazing children: Final report of the ECE Taskforce*. Ministry of Educatio

Education Review Office. (2009). Implementing self-review in early childhood services. www.ero.govt.nz/National-Reports/(category)/Early%20

Eilers, N. (2020). Critical disability studies and ‘inclusive’ early childhood education: The ongoing divide. *Journal of Disability Studies in Education, 1*, 64-89.

Eileen Road, C. (2018). Socially justice educators staying true to themselves: The role of administrators within or outside of their social support network. *Review of Disability Studies: An international Journal, 14*(3), 22-39.

Erevelles, N. (2011). Of ghosts and ghetto politics: Embodying educational policy as if disability matters. In *disability and difference in global contexts enabling a transformative body politic*s (pp. 65-93). Palgrave Macmillan.

Fairclough, N. (1989). Introduction: Critical language study. In *Language and power* (pp. 116). Longman Group Limited.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis*. Longman.

Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T. van Dijk (Eds.), *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction* (Vol. 2, pp. 258-284). Sage Publications.

Fairclough, N. (2000). Language and neo-Liberalism. *Discourse & Society, 11(2*), 147–148. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926500011002001=

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (2009). A dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 162-187). Sage Publications.

Fairclough, N., Mulderrig, J., & Wodak, R. (2011). Critical discourse analysis. In T. A. Van Dijk (Eds.). *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction* (pp. 357-378). Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446289068.n17

Fergusson, D. M, Horwood, L. J., & Stanley, L. (2013). A preliminary evaluation of the Incredible Years teacher programme. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology 42*(2): 51–56.

Ferri, B. A. (2015). Inclusion for the 21st century: Why we need disabilities studies in education. *Italian Journal of Special Education for Inclusion, 2,* 11-22.

Ferri, B. A., & Bacon, J. (2011). Beyond inclusion: Disability studies in early childhood teacher education. In B. Fennimore & A. Goodwin (Eds.), *Promoting social justice for young children* (pp. 137–146). Springer.

Ferri, B. A., & Connor, D. J. (2005). Tools of exclusion: Race, disability, and (Re)segregated education. *Teachers College Record*, *107*(*3*), 453–474. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.14679620.2005.00483.x

Feinstein, A. (2010). *A history of autism: Conversations with the pioneers* (illustrated eds.). John Wiley and Sons.

Fisher, P., & Goodley, D. (2007). The linear medical model of disability: Mothers of disabled babies resist with counter-narratives. *Social Health Illness, 29*(1), 66-81. 10.1111/j.1467-9566.2007.00518.x. PMID: 17286706

Fitzgerald, H. , & Stride, A. (2012). Stories about physical education from young people with disabilities. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 58*(3), 283-293. 10.1080/1034912x.2012.697743

Flick, U., & Foster, J. (2008). 'Social representations'. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 195–214). Sage Publications.

Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. *British Educational Research Journal, 37*(5), 813–82.

Florian, L. (2015). Inclusive pedagogy: A transformative approach to individual differences. *Scottish Educational Review, 47*(1), 5-14. http://www.scotedreview.org.uk/media/scottish-educationalreview/articles/2015/2015_47-1_May_03_Florian.pdf

Fornauf, B. (2020). *Indefinable forces: How teachers negotiate narratives of ability and inclusivity while applying Universal Design for Learning* [Doctoral thesis, University of New Hampshire].

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. Tavistock.

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Vintage.

Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-77*. Pantheon.

Fovet, F. (2022). Shifting the inclusion agenda away from a politico-historical adherence to deficit model practices: Potential of universal design for learning. In Banks, J. (Ed.), *The inclusion dialogue: Debating issues, challenges and tensions with global experts* (pp. 73-92). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003263425

Franck, K. (2013). Normality and deviance in Norwegian day-care institutions. *Childhoods Today, 7* (1), 1–19.

Fox, N. J., & Alldred, P. (2022). New materialism. In P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, A. Cernat, J. W. Sakshaug, & R. A. Williams (Eds.), *Sage research methods foundations*. Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/978152642103676846

Frigerio, A., Benozzo, A., Holmes, R., & Runswick-Cole, K. (2017) The doing and undoing of the "autistic child": Cutting together and apart interview-based empirical materials. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1-33. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417735132 Fulcher, R. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis*. Longman.

Freedman, J. (2016). Disability studies in education (DSE) and the epistemology of special education. In *encyclopaedia of educational philosophy and theory*. http://works.bepress.com/justin-freedman/4/

Gabel, S., & Peters, S. (2004). Presage of a paradigm shift? Beyond the social model of disability toward resistance theories of disability. *Disability & Society, 19*(6), 585-600. https://doi.org/10.1080/0968759042000252515

Garland-Thomson, R. (1997). *Extraordinary bodies: Figuring physical disability in American culture and literature*. Columbia University Press.

Garland-Thomson, R. (2002). Integrating disability, transforming feminist theory. *Feminist formations*, 14(3), 1-32. 10.1353/nwsa.2003.0005

Galkiene, A., & Monkeviciene, O. (2021). *Improving inclusive education through Universal Design for Learning*. Springer International Publishing AG

Gibson, B. (2016). Rehabilitation: A critical approach. Boca Raton.

Giroux, H. (2020). *On critical pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury Academic.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Englewood Cliffs. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/43.1.127

Gomez-Victoria, N., & Pava-Ripoll, N. (2021). Why privilege a single form of communication if there are many? *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research, 23*(1), 236–246. https://doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.808

Gomez, A., & Mckee, A. (2020). When special education and disability studies intertwine: Addressing educational inequities through processes and programming. *Frontiers in Education: Special Educational Needs, 1,* https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.587045

Goodall, C. (2019). *Understanding the voices and educational experiences of autistic young people: From research to practice* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429287183

Goodall, E. (2014). Supporting teachers' journeys towards full inclusion of students of the Autism Spectrum in New Zealand. *The Journal of the International Association of Special Education, 15*(2), 133-141.

Goodley, D. (1997). "Locating self-advocacy in models of disability: Understanding disability in the support of self-advocates with learning difficulties". *Disability & Society, 12 (*3), 367–379. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599727227

Goodley, D. (2013). Dis/entangling critical disability studies. *Disability and Society, 28*(5), 631-644. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2012.717884

Goodley, D. (2014). Dis/ability studies: Theorising disableism and ableism, *Disability & Society, 30*(4), 659-662. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2015.1014669

Goodley, D. (2016). *Disability Studies: An interdisciplinary introduction* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Goodley, D. (2017). Education: Challenge neoliberal-ableist education through critical pedagogy. In D. Goodley (Ed.). *Disability studies: An interdisciplinary introduction* (2nd ed., pp. 170-186). Sage Publications.

Goodley, D. (2018). The dis/ability complex. *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies, 5*(1), 5-22. https://doi.org.10.11116/digest.5.1.1

Goodley, D., & Runswick Cole, K. (2015). Critical psychologies of disability: Boundaries, borders and bodies in the lives of disabled children. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 20* (1), 51-63.

Goodley, D., Runswick-Cole, K., & Liddiard, K. (2016). The dishuman child. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education,* 37(5), 770-784. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1075731

Goodley, D., & Runswick-Cole, K. (2010). Emancipating play: Dis/abled children, development and deconstruction. *Disability & Society*, *25*(*4*), 499–512. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687591003755914

Gordon-Burns, D., Gunn, A., Surtees, N., & Purdue, K. (2020). Introduction: Thinking differently about early childhood inclusive education in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond. In A. Gunn, N. Surtees, D. Gordon-Burns, & K . Purdue (Eds.), *Te aotūroa tātaki: Inclusive early childhood education: Perspectives on inclusion, social justice, and equality from Aotearoa New Zealand* (pp. 1-17). NZCER Press.

Gould, S. J. (1996). *The mismeasure of man (2nd ed.).* Penguin Books.

Greaves, A. (2003). Special Education 2000: Rhetoric or reform? *ACE Papers*, *12*, 58-74. https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/docs/uoa-docs/rights.htm

Grieshaber, S., & Mc Ardle, F. (2010). *The trouble with play*. Open University Press.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 191–215). Sage Publications.

Gunn, A. C. (2019). Foucauldian discourse analysis in early childhood education. In G. Noblit (Eds.), *Oxford Research Encyclopaedias*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.333

Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar*. Edward Arnold.

Hammersley, M., & Paul. A. (2019). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. Taylor & Francis Group. https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/detail.action?docID=5750609

Hart, C. (2011). Legitimising assertions and the logico-rhetorical module: Evidence and epistemic vigilance in media discourse on immigration. *Discourse Studies*, *13*(*6*), 751-769. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445611421360

Hedges, H. (2007). Funds of knowledge in early childhood communities of inquiry [Doctoral thesis, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand].

Hehir, T. (2002). Eliminating ableism in education. *Harvard Educational Review, 72*(1), 1–32. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.72.1.03866528702g2105

Hehir, T. (2007). Confronting ableism. *Educational Leadership, 64*(5), 8-14. ISSN-00131784.

Hennink. M, M. (2014). Understanding focus group discussion. In *writing focus group methods* (1st ed., pp. 1-30). Oxford University Press.

Herrnstein, R., & Murray, C. (1994). *The bell curve: Intelligence and class structure in American life*. The Free Press.

Hickey, H. (2015). Tätau tätau: Engaging with whänau hauä from within a cultural framework. In J. Bevan-Brown (Ed.), *Working with Mäori chil- dren with special education needs: He mihi whakahirahira* (pp. 70–84). New Zealand Council of Educational Research.

Hickey, H., & Wilson, D. (2017). Whānau Hauā: Reframing disability from indigenous perspectives. *MAI Journal, 6*(1), 82-94. https://doi.org/10.20507/MAIJournal.2017.6.1.7

Higgins, N., MacArthur, J., & Kelly, B. (2009). Including disabled children at school: Is it really as simple as 'a, c, d'? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 13*(5), 471–
487. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110701791452

Hodge, N., & Runswick-Cole, K (2013). 'They never pass me the ball': Exposing ableism through the leisure experiences of disabled children, young people and their families, *Children's Geographies*, *11*(3), 311-325. https://doi.org/
10.1080/14733285.2013.812275

Hodge, N., Rice. J, E., & Reidy, L. (2019). 'They're told all the time they're different': How educators understand development of sense of self for autistic pupils. *Disability & Society*, *34 (*9-10), 1353-1378
.https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1594700

Hoffman-Kipp, P., Artiles, A. J., & López-Torres, L. (2003). Beyond reflection: Teacher learning as praxis. *Theory into Practice*, *42*(3), 248-254. https://parents.education.govt.nz/assets/Parents/Documents/Early-Learning/ECEChoices-

Hughes, B., & Paterson, K. (1997). The social model of disability and the disappearing body: Towards a sociology of impairment. *Disability and Society, 12*, 325-340. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599727209

Imrie, R. (2004). Demystifying disability: A review of the International Classification of Functioning. *Disability and Health. Soc Health Illness, 26*(3), 287-305.

James A., & James A. (2008). Changing childhood in the UK: Reconstructing discourses of ‘risk’ and ‘protection’. *European Childhoods* (pp. 105-128). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230582095

James, A. (2007). Giving voice to children’s voices: Practices and problems, pitfalls and potentials. *American Anthropologist, 109*(2), 261–272.

James, A., & Prout, A. (1997). *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*. Falmer Press.

James, A., Jenks, C., & Prout, A. (1998). *Theorizing childhood*. Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Jenson, K. (2018). Discourses of disability and inclusive education. *He Kupu, 5*(4), 52-59. https://www.hekupu.ac.nz/article/discourses-disability-and-inclusive-education

Kafer, A. (2013). *Feminist, queer, crip*. Indiana University Press.

Kahuroa, R. D. E. (2021). *Critical pedagogy in early childhood education: Four case studies in Aotearoa New Zealand* [PhD thesis, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand]. https://hdl.handle.net/10289/14527

Kamberelis, G., & Dimitriadis, G. (2005). Focus groups: Strategic articulations of pedagogy, politic, and inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 887–907). Sage Publications.

Kang, J. (2009). A teacher’s deconstruction of disability: A discourse analysis. *Disability Studies Quarterly, 29*(1). https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v29i1.173

Kanner, L. (1943). Autistic disturbances of affective contact. *Nervous Child, 2*(2), 217-230

Kearney, A. (2016). The right to education: What is happening for disabled students in New Zealand? *Disability Studies Quarterly, 36*(1). https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v36i1.4278 Kearney, A., & Kane, R. (2006). Inclusive education policy in New Zealand: Reality or ruse? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 10*(2-3). 201-219. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110500256145

Kearney, S., Brittain, I., & Kipnis, E. (2019). “Superdisabilities” vs “disabilities”? Theorizing the role of ableism in (mis)representational mythology of disability in the marketplace. *Consumption, Markets and Culture, 22*(5-6), 545–567.

https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2018.1562701

Kellett, M. (2011). *Engaging with children and young people* (Centre for Children and Young People: Background Briefing Series No. no. 3). Southern Cross University. http://epubs.scu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1029&context=ccyp_pubs

Komesaroff, L., & McLean, M. (2006). Being there is not enough: Inclusion is both deaf and hearing. *Deafness and Education International, 8*(2), 88–100.

Kostera, M. (2007). *Organizational ethnography: Methods and inspirations*. Sociology: Semantic.

Kress, G., & Hodge, R. (1998). *Social semiotics.* Polity Press.

Lalvani, P. (2015b). Rethinking disability and inclusive education: A teacher study group. *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, *11*(3).

Lalvani, P., & Bacon, J. (2018). Rethinking “we are all special”: Anti-ableism curricula in early childhood classrooms. *Young Exceptional Children*, *22*(*2*), 87–100. https://doi.org/10.1177/1096250618810706

Lalvani, P. (2014). The enforcement of normalcy in schools and the disablement of families: Unpacking master narratives on parental denial. *Disability & Society, 29*(8), 1221–1233. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2014.923748

Lalvani, P. (2015a). Disability, stigma and otherness: Perspectives of parents and teachers. *International Journal of Disability Development and Education, 62*(4), 1-15.

Lange, D. (1988). Before five: Early childhood care and education in New Zealand. New Zealand: Author.

Lawless, B., & Chen, Y. (2019). Developing a method of critical thematic analysis for qualitative communication inquiry. *Howard Journal of Communications, 30*, 106-92.

Lawson, A., & Beckett, A. E. (2021). The social and human rights models of disability: Towards a complementarity thesis. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, *25*(2), 348–379. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2020.1783533

Lee, W., Carr, M., Soutar, B., & Mitchell, L. (2013). *Understanding the Te Whāriki approach: Early years education in practice*. Routledge.

Leonard. (2016). Becoming and being: Developments in the sociology of childhood. In M. Leonard, *The sociology of children, childhood and generation* (pp. 11-37). Sage Publications Ltd.

Leonardi, M., Bickenbach, J. E., Stün, T. B., Kostanjsek, N., & Chatterji, S. (2006). The definition of disability: What's in a name? *The Lancet, 368*(9543), 1219–1221. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(06)69498-1

Lester J. N., Karim, K., & O'Reilly, M. (2014). Autism itself actually isn't a disability': Negotiating a 'normal' versus 'abnormal' autistic identity. *Commun Med, 11*(2), 139-52. https://doi.org/10.1558/cam.v11i2.20371

Liasidou. (2008). Critical discourse analysis and inclusive educational policies: The power to exclude. *Journal of Education Policy, 23*(5), 483–500. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930802148933

Liddiard, K. (2012). (S)*exploring disability* [PhD thesis], University of Warwick

Linton, S. (2005). What is disability studies? *PMLA, 120*(2), 518–522. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25486177

Linton, S. (1998). Disability studies/not disability studies. *Disability & Society, 13*(4), 525-539. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599826588

Liberty, K. (2014). Early intervention in Aotearoa New Zealand: Services and challenges. *NZ Research in Early Childhood Education Journal. Special Issue: Early Childhood Policy, 17,* 115-146

Love, H. R., & Beneke, M. R. (2021). Pursuing justice-driven inclusive education research: Disability critical race theory (DisCrit) in early childhood. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 41*(1), 31–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121421990833

Lyons-McAdam, L. (2021). *Kei hea ahau ināianai? Where am I now? An examination of the positioning of disabled children in the discourses of long-day early childhood education and care centres in Aotearoa New Zealand* [PhD thesis, University of Waikato]. https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/handle/10289/14077

Lyons, L. (2013) Transformed understanding or enlightened ableism? The gap between policy and practice for children with disabilities in Aotearoa New Zealand. *International Journal of Early Childhood, 45,* 237-249. https://doi.org/

10.1007/s13158-013-0086-1

Mac Carthaigh. (2020). Beyond biomedicine: Challenging conventional conceptualisations of autism spectrum conditions. *Disability & Society*, *35*(1), 52–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1605884

MacArthur, J. (2009). *Learning better together: Working toward inclusive education in New Zealand schools. IHC.* https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/assets/inclusiveeducation/resources/files/learning-better-together.pdf

MacArthur, J. (2009). *Learning better together: Working toward inclusive education in New Zealand schools*. IHC. https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/assets/inclusiveeducation/resources/files/learning-better-together.pdf

MacArthur, J., & Kelly, B. (2004). Inclusion from the perspectives of students with disabilities. *New Zealand Council of Educational Research, 2.* https://www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/journals/set/downloads/set2004_2_044_0.pdf

MacArthur, J., & Rutherford, G. (2016). Success for All? Re-envisioning New Zealand schools and classrooms as places where "Rights" replace "Special." *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 51*(2), 157–174. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40841-0160066-8

Macartney, B. (2011*). Disabled by discourse: Two families' narratives of inclusion, exclusion and resistance in education* [PhD thesis, University of Canterbury]. https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10092/5307/Thesis_fulltext.pdf?se quence =2&isAllowed

Macartney, B. (2016). *Early childhood education and barriers to inclusivity: Working toward a fairer system*. Child Poverty Action Group. https://ieag.org.nz/assets/Uploads/EarlyChildhood-eductaion-barriers-to-inclusivity-.pdf

Macartney, B. (2019). Moving Te Whāriki from rhetoric to reality for disabled children and their whānau in early childhood. In A. C. Gunn & J. Nuttall (Eds.), *Weaving Te Whāriki: Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document in theory and practice* (3rd ed., pp.119-134). New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Macartney, B., & Morton, M. (2011). Kinds of participation: Teachers and special education perceptions and practices of inclusion in early childhood and primary school settings. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *17,* 776-792. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2011.602529

Mackenzie, M., Cologon, K., & Fenech, M. (2016). 'Embracing everybody': Approaching the inclusive early childhood education of a child labelled with autism from a social relational understanding of disability. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *41*(2), 4-12. https://doi.org/10.1177/18369391160410020

MacNaughton, G. (2005). *Doing Foucault in early childhood studies*. Routledge.

Majoko, T. (2016). Inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorders: Listening and hearing to voices from the grassroots. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *46*, 1429-1440.

Mallett R., & Runswick-Cole K. (2012). Commodifying autism: The cultural contexts of 'disability' in the academy. In D. Goodley, B. Hughes & L. Davis (Ed.). *Disability and social theory*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137023001_

Mallett, R., & Runswick-Cole, K. (2014). *Approaching disability: Critical issues and perspectives*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315765464

Manalili, M. (2021). Ableist ideologies stifle neurodiversity and hinder inclusive education. *Ought: The Journal of Autistic Culture*, *3*(1), 22-36.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, B. G . (2006). *Designing qualitative research* (4th ed.). Sage Publication.

May, H. (2002). Aotearoa-New Zealand: An overview of history, policy and curriculum. *McGill Journal of Education, 37*(*1*), 19–36.

Mathwasa, J., & Sibanda, L. (2021). Inclusion in early childhood development settings: A reality or an oasis. In O. a. A. de la Rosa & L. M. V. Angulo & C. Giambrone (Eds.), *Education in childhood*. Intech Open. https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.87330

McAnelly, K., & Gaffney, M. (2020). Producing an understanding of autistic tamariki in early childhood settings: The case for a new materialist approach. In A. C. Gunn, N. Surtees, D. Gordon-Burns & K. Purdue (Eds.), *Te aotūroa tātaki:*

Inclusive early childhood education: Perspectives on inclusion, social justice and equity from Aotearoa New Zealand (2nd ed., pp. 109-125). NZCER Press.

McConnell, D., Savage, A., Sobsey, D., & Uditsky, B. (2015). Benefit-finding or finding benefits? The positive impact of having a disabled child. *Disability & Society*, *30*(1), 29–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2014.984803

McGuire, A. (2011). *The war on autism: On normative violence and the cultural production of autism advocacy* [PhD Thesis, University of Toronto].

McGuire, A. (2016). *War on autism: On the cultural logic of normative violence.* University of Michigan Press.

McLaughlin, J., & Coleman-Fountain, E. (2019). Visual methods and voice in disabled childhoods research: troubling narrative authenticity. *Qualitative Research*, *19*(4), 363–381. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794118760705

McLean, A. M. (2008). Teaching about disability: An ethical responsibility? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *12*(5), 605–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110802377649=

McRuer, R. (2006). *Crip theory: Cultural signs of queerness and disability*. New York University.

Meekosha, H., & Shuttleworth, R. (2009). What ‘so’ critical about critical disability studies. *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, *15*, 47-75. https://doi.org/10.1080/1323238X.2009.11910861=

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey Bass.

Meyer, A., Rose, D. H., & Gordon, D. (2014). *Universal design for learning: Theory and practice*. Wakefield, MA: CAST Professional Publishing.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook.* Sage Publications.

Millei, Z. (2005). The discourse of control: Disruption and Foucault in an early childhood classroom. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood,* 6(2), 126-139. doi/pdf/10.2304/ciec.2005.6.2.3=

Ministry of Education (1996). *Special education 2000*. New Zealand: Author.

Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki: Early childhood curriculum*. New Zealand: Author. https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early-Childhood/Te-

Whariki-Early-Childhood-Curriculum-ENG-Web.pdf

Ministry of Education. (2008). *The licensing criteria for early childhood education services*. https://www.education.govt.nz/earlychildhood/licensing-and-regulations/theregulatory-framework-forece/licensing-criteria/centre-based-ece-services

Ministry of Education. (2010). *Success for all: Every school, every child*. New Zealand: Author. https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/School/Inclusiveeducation/SuccessForAllEnglish.pdf

Ministry of Education. (2010b). *Review of special education: Public response*. New Zealand: Author. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/learning-support/thereview-of-special-education-2010-public-response-summary

Ministry of Education. (2011). *Early intervention services: Information for parents and caregivers*. New Zealand: Author. https://parents.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Special-Education/EarlyIntervention-Service.pdf

Ministry of Education. (2012). *Ministry of Education supports and services for learners with special education needs/disabilities*. New Zealand: Author. https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Publications/AnnualReports/MOEAnnualReport2012FullWeb.pdf

Ministry of Education (2013). Positive behaviour for learning: Update 2013. New Zealand: Author.

Ministry of Education. (2014). *Success for All: Briefing to incoming minister*. New Zealand: Author. fhttps://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Publications/Briefings-toIncoming-Ministers/SuccessForAllSpecialEducation.pdf

Ministry of Education. (2014a). *Choices in early childhood education. New Zealand*: Author. Ministry of Education. (2015). *Report of the advisory group on early learning.* New Zealand: Author. https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/ consultations/Report-of-the-Advisory-Group-on-Early-Learning.pdf

Ministry of Education. (2017). *Te Whāriki: Early childhood curriculum*. New Zealand: Author. https://education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early-Childhood/ELS-Te-Whariki-Early-Childhood-Curriculum-ENG-Web.pdf

Ministry of Health. (2019). *Annual data explorer 2017/18: New Zealand Health Survey*. https://minhealthnz.shinyapps.io/nz-health-survey-2017-18-annual-dataexplorer/_w_0811ceee/_w_38feb34f/#!/home Google Scholar

Ministry of Health. (2015). *Whāia Te Ao Mārama 2018 to 2022: The Māori disability action plan*. New Zealand: Author.

Ministries of Health and Education. (2016). *New Zealand autism spectrum guidelines*. New Zealand: Author. https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/new-zealand-autismspectrum-disorder-guideline

Ministry of Education. (2017b). *Update of Te Whāriki: Summary of engagement findings*. New Zealand: Author. https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/EarlyChildhood/307406-ELS-Te-Whariki-WEB2.PDF

Mitchell, D. R. (2000). Policies and systems for students with special education needs. In M. Thrupp (Eds.)., *A decade of reform in New Zealand: Where to now*? (pp. 199-210). Dept. of Education, New Zealand.

Mitchell, D. R., & Mitchell, J. W. (1985). *Out of the shadows: A chronology of significant events in the development of services for exceptional children and young persons in New Zealand, 1850-1983*. Dept. of Education, New Zealand.

Mitchell, D., & Snyder, S. L. (2014). "[Every] child left behind": Curricular cripistemologies and the crip/queer art of failure. *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, *8*(3), 295–31.https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2014.24

Mitchell, K. (2008). *Assessment practices and aspects of the curriculum in early childhood education: Results of the 2007 MZCER national survey for ECE services*. https://www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/16544.pdf

Mitchell, L., & Cubey, P. (2003). Characteristics *of professional development linked to enhanced pedagogy and children's learning in early childhood settings: Best evidence synthesis*. Ministry of Education. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/7703/bespro fessional-development.pdf

Mollow, A. (2017). Disability studies. In M. Szeman, S. Blacker., & J. Sully (Eds.), *A companion to critical and cultural theory* (pp. 339-356). John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Morrow, R. A., & Torres, C. A. (1995). *Social theory and education: A critique of theories of social and cultural reproduction*. State University of New York Press.

Mortlock, A., Green, A., Mary, S., & Jonhston, M. (2014). Working together at mat time: Politics of participation. *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work, 11*(2), 187-200.https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1230313.pdf

Morton, M. (2014). "Using DSE to recognize, resist, and reshape policy and practices in Aotearoa New Zealand." In D. Connor, J. W. Valle & C. Hale, *Practicing disability studies in education: Acting toward social change* (Vol. 17., pp. 197–216). Peter Lang.

Morton, M., & McMenamin, T. (2011). Learning together: Collaboration to develop curriculum assessment that promotes belonging. *Support for Learning, 26*, 109-114.

Morton, M., McIlroy, A., Macarthur, J., & Olsen, P. (2021). Disability studies in and for inclusive teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1882059

Morin, A. (2018). Universal design for learning (UDL): What you need to know. Understood. https://www.readingrockets.org/article/universal-design-learning-udl-what-you-need-know

Mosleh, D. (2019). Critical disability studies with rehabilitation: Re-thinking the human in rehabilitation research and practice. *Critical Research and Perspectives*, 1-12.

Mosleh, D., & Gibson, B. E. (2022). Abnormal-becoming- normal: Conceptualizations of childhood disability in children's rehabilitation textbooks. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research, 24*(1), 122–135. http://doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.877

Mutch, C. (2004). The Rise and rise of early childhood education in New Zealand. *Citizenship, Social and Economic Education,n6*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.2304/csee.2004.6.1.1

National Disability Authority. (2009). *Ethical guidance for research with people with disabilities*, 5-15. http://nda.ie/Policy-and-research/Research/Research-Ethics/EthicalGuidance-for-Research-with-People-with-Disabilities.html

National Centre for Learning Disabilities. (2012). *What is universal design for learning?* http://ncld.org/students-disabilities/ld-educationteachers/what-is-universal-design-learning

Nadesan, M. (2005). The dialectics of autism: Theorizing autism, performing autism, remediating autism, and resisting autism, In *constructing autism: Unravelling the truth and understanding the social* (pp. 179-213). Routledge. https://doiorg.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.4324/9780203299500

New Zealand Government. (1989). *Education Act*. New Zealand: Author. http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1989/0080/latest/DLM175959.html

New Zealand Government. (2001). A guide to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi as expressed by the courts & the Waitangi tribunal. Author. Retrieved from tpk-treaty overview-2001-en%20(1).pdf

New Zealand Teachers Council. (2007). *Graduating teacher standards*. http://www.teacherscouncil.govt.nz/te/gts/index.stm

New Zealand Teachers Council. (2009). *Registered teacher criteria*. http://www. teacherscouncil.govt.nz/rtc/rtc.stm#h2.

Norwich, B. (2008). *Dilemmas of difference, inclusion and disability*. Routledge.

O'Hara M., Carter C., Dewis P., Kay J., & Wainwright J. (2011). *Successful dissertations: The complete guide for education, childhood and early childhood studies students*. Continuum.

O’Kane, C. (2008). The development of participatory techniques: Facilitating children’s views about decisions that affect them. In P. J. Christensen, P., & A. James (Eds.), *Research with children: Perspectives and practices (pp. 125-155)*. Routledge.

O’Reilly, M., Nina Lester, J., Muskett, T., & Karim, K. (2017). How parents build a case for autism spectrum disorder during initial assessments: ‘We’re fighting a losing battle.’ *Discourse Studies*, *19*(1), 69–83. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445616683590

Odom, S. L., & Wolery, M. (2003). A unified theory of practice in early intervention/early childhood special education: Evidence-based practices. *The*

Journal of Special Education, *37*(3), 164–173. https://doi.org/10.1177/00224669030370030601

Office for Disability Issues. (2001). *The New Zealand disability strategy: Making a world of difference*. http://www.nzds.govt.n

Office for Disability Issues. (2016). *The New Zealand disability strategy 2016-2026.* https://www.odi.govt.nz/nz-disability-strategy/about-the-strategy/new-zealanddisability-strategy-2016-2026/

Oliver M. (1990) The Social construction of the disability problem. In *the politics of disablement. Critical texts in social work and the welfare state*. Palgrave. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-20895-1_6

Oliver M. (1990) The Social construction of the disability problem. In *the politics of disablement. Critical texts in social work and the welfare state*. Palgrave. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-20895-1_6

Oliver, M. (1983). *Social work with disabled people*. Macmillan.

Oliver, M. (1990). *The politics of disablement*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Oliver, M. (1996). *Understanding disability: From theory to practice*. Palgrave

Oliver, M., & Barnes, C. (2012). *The new politics of disablement*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Oliver, P. (2003). *The student's guide to research ethics* (2nd ed.). Open University Press

Oliver, M. (2009). *Understanding disability: From theory to practice* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Openshaw, R. (2009). *Reforming New Zealand secondary education: The picot report and the road to radical reform*. Palgrave McMillian. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230100701

Ottesen. (2007). Reflection in teacher education. *Reflective Practice*, *8*(1), 31–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623940601138899

Overboe, J. (2012). Theory, impairment and impersonal singularities: Deleuze, guattari and agamben. In D. Goodley, B. Hughes & L. Davis (Eds.), *Disability and social* theory (pp. 112-126). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137023001_7

Owens, J. (2014). Exploring the critiques of the social model of disability: The transformative possibility of Arendt's notion of power. *Sociology of Health & Illness*,*37*(3), 385–403. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.121

Papatheodoru, T. (2006). “Play and special needs”. In J. Moyles, *The excellence of play* (pp. 39–58). Open University Press

Parekh, G. (2017). *Ableism in education: Rethinking school practices and policies*. Norton Professional Boo.

Pascal, C., & Bertram, T. (2009). Listening to young citizens: The struggle to make real a participatory paradigm in research with young children. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *17*(2), 249–262. 10.1080/13502930902951486

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods (*3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Pearson, Cosier, M., Kim, J. J., Gomez, A. M., Hines, C., McKee, A. A., & Ruiz, L. Z. (2016). The impact of disability studies curriculum on education professionals’ perspectives and practice: Implications for education, social justice, and social change. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *36*(2). https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v36i2.4406

Peters, M. (2013). Managerialism and the neoliberal university: prospects for new forms of ‘open management’ in higher education. *Contemporary readings in law and social justice, 5*(1), 11-26.

Porter. L, G. (1988). *The regular education initiative. The debate over educational reform*. Syracuse University.

Purdue, K. (2006). Children and disability in early childhood education: “Special” or inclusive education?. *Early Childhood Folio, 10,* 12-15. https://www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/journals/early-childhoodfolio/downloads/ECFolio_10_2006_012_0.pdf

Purdue, K. (2009). Barriers to and facilitators of inclusion for children with disabilities in early childhood education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 10*(2), 133-143. https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2009.10.2.133

Rietveld, C. M. (2008). Contextual factors affecting inclusion during children’s transitions from preschool to school. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 33*(3), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1177/183693910803300302

Reddington, S., & Price, D. (2018). Pedagogy of new materialism: Advancing the educational inclusion agenda for children and youth with disabilities. *Disability Studies Quarterly, 38*(1). https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/5945/4879

Roberts, P. (2007). Neoliberalism, performativity and research. *International Review of Education / Internationale Zeitschrift Für Erziehungswissenschaft / Revu Internationale de l'Education*, *53*(4), 349–365. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27715397

Romstein, K. (2015). *Neoliberal values and disability: Critical approach to inclusive education*. Bulgarian Comparative Education Society.

Rose, D. H., & Meyer, A. (2006). *A practical reader in Universal Design for Learning*. Harvard Education Press.

Rose, N. (1999). *Governing the soul: The shaping of the private self* (2nd ed.). Free Associations Books.

Runswick-Cole, K., & Hodge, N. (2009). Needs or rights? A challenge to the discourse of special education. *British Journal of Special Education. 36*(4). 198-203. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8578.2009.00438.x

Runswick-Cole, K., Mallet, R., & Timimi, S. (201*6). Re-thinking autism: Diagnosis, identity and equality*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Runswick-Cole, K. (2011). Time to end the bias towards inclusive education? *British Journal of Special Education*, *38*(3), 112–119. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.14678578.2011.00514.x

Rutherford, G. (2008). *Different ways of knowing? Understanding disabled students' and teacher aides' school experiences within a context of relational social justice* [Doctoral thesis, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand].

Rutherford, G. (2011). ''Doing right by'': Teacher aides, students with disabilities, and relational social justice. *Harvard Educational Review, 81*(1), 95–119. https://doi.org/ 10.17763/haer.81.1.wu14717488wx2001

Salkind, N. J. (2011). *Exploring research* (8th ed.). Pearson.

Sayers, D. (2018). Rights not needs: Changing the legal model for special educational needs (SEN) In K. Runswick-Cole (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of disabled children 's childhood studies (pp. 617-640).* https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54446-9-37

Scully, J. L. (2012). Disability and the thinking Body. In S. Gonzalez-Arnal. G. Jagger & K. Lennon (eds), *Embodied selves (pp. 139-159).* Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137283696_9

Scuro, J. (2017). *Addressing ableism: Philosophical questions via disability studies*. Lexington books.

Seidman, I. E. (1991). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences.* Teachers College Press.

Simonsen, V., Blake, M., La Hood, A., Haggerty, M., Mitchell, L., & Wray, L. (2009).*Wadestown Kindergarten: A curriculum whāriki of multimodal literacies*. Education Counts.

Shakespeare, T. (2006). *Disability rights and wrongs*. Routledge.

Shakespeare, T., & Watson, N. (1995). The social model of disability: an outdated ideology? *Research in Social Science and Disability, 2,* 9-28.

Shakespeare, T. (2010). The social model of disability. In J. Davis (Eds.), *The disability studies reader* (pp. 266-73). Routledge.

Shakespeare, T. (2013). *Disability rights and wrongs revisited*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315887456=

Shakespeare, T., & Watson, N. (2010). Beyond models: Understanding the complexity of disabled people's lives. In G. Scambler & S. Scambler (Eds.), *New directions in the sociology of chronic and disabling conditions: Assaults on the lifeworld*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Sherry, M. (2006). *If I only had a brain: Deconstructing brain injury*. Routledge.

Shildrick M. (2009) *Corporealities*. In *dangerous discourses of disability, subjectivity and sexuality* (pp. 17-38). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230244641_2

Shildrick, M. (2005). The disabled body, genealogy and undecidability. *Cultural Studies*, *19*(6), 755–770. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380500365754

Shyman, E. (2016). The reinforcement of ableism: Normality, the medical model of disability, and humanism in applied behaviour analysis and ASD. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, *54*(5), 336-376. https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556- 54.5.366

Shuker, M. J., & Cherrington, S. (2016). Diversity in New Zealand early childhood education: Challenges and opportunities. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, *24*(2), 172–187. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2016.1155148

Singer, J. (2017). *Neurodiversity: The birth of an idea*. Amazon Kindle eBook

Slee, R. (2001). Social justice and the changing directions in educational research: The case of inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *5*(2/3), 167–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110010035832

Slee, R. (2001). Social justice and the changing directions in educational research: The case of inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 5*(2/3), 167–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110010035832

Slee, R. (2011). *The irregular School: Exclusion, schooling and inclusive education*. Routledge.

Slee, R., Corcoran, T., & Best, M. (2019). Disability studies in education – building platforms to reclaim disability and recognise disablement, *Journal of Disability Studies in Education*, *1*(1-2), 3-13. https://doi.org/10.1163/25888803-00101002

Smith, P. (2004). Whiteness, normal theory and disability studies. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *24*(2*)*. http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/491/668

Smith, R. M., Gallagher, D., Owen, V., & Skrtic, T. (2009). Disability studies in education: Guidelines and ethical practice for educators. In J. Andrzejewski. M. P. Baltodano & L. Symcox (Eds.), *Social justice, peace, and environmental education: Transformative standards*. Routledge.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study*. Sage Publications.

Storey, K. (2007). *Combating ableism in schools*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254347205=

Taylor, S. (2008). Before it had a name: Exploring the historical roots of disability studies in education. In S. Danforth & S. L. Gabel (Eds.), *Vital questions facing disability studies in education* (xii-xxiii). Peter Lang Publishing.

Te One, S. (2003). The context for Te Whāriki: Contemporary issues of influence. In J. Nuttall (Eds.), *Weaving Te Whāriki: Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood* curriculum document in theory and practice (1st ed., pp. 17-49). New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Te One, S. (2013). Te Whāriki: Historical accounts and contemporary influences 1990–2012. In J. Nutall, Weaving Te Whāriki - Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document in theory and practice (2nd ed., pp. 7-34). New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

The Education Hub. (2018). *How to undertake teaching as inquiry*.

http://eduhub.koparacreative.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/How-to-undertakeinquiry.pdf

Thérèse King, P. (2019). *Māori with lived experience of disability part I*. Ministry of Justice, New Zealand: Author. https://forms.justice.govt.nz/search/Documents/WT/wt_DOC_150437272/Wai%2025 75%2C%20B022.pdf

Thomas, C. (1999). *Female forms: Experiencing and understanding disability*. Open University Press.

Thomas, C. (2001) The body and society: Some reflections on the concepts disability and impairment. In N. Watson & S. Cunningham-Burley (Eds.), *Reframing the body*. Palgrave.

Thomas, C. (2007). *Sociologies of disability, impairment, and chronic illness: Ideas in disability studies and medical sociology*. Palgrave.

Thomas, C. (2010). Medical sociology and disability theory. In G. Scambler & S. Scambler (Eds), *New directions in the sociology of chronic and disabling conditions: Assaults on the lifeworld*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Thomas, C., & Corker, M. (2002). A journey around the social model, In M. Corker & T. Shakespeare (Eds.), *Disability/postmodernity: Embodying disability theory* (pp. 18-3). Continuum.

Thomas, G. (2019). Case Study. In P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, A. Cernat, J.W. Sakshaug & R.A. Williams (Eds.), *Sage research methods Foundations.* https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036812890

Thomas, G. M. (2021). Dis-mantling stigma: Parenting disabled children in an age of 'neoliberal-ableism'. *The Sociological Review*, *69*(2), 451–467. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120963481

Thornton, C., & Underwood, K. (2013). Conceptualisations of disability and inclusion: Perspectives of educators of young children. *Early Years: An International Journal in Research and Development*, *33*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/0.1080/09575146.2012.682975

Thrupp, M. (1999). *A decade of educational reform in New Zealand education: Where to now*? University of Waikato.

Tisdall, E. K. M. (2012). The challenge and challenges of childhood studies? Learning from disability studies and research with disabled children. *Children & Society, 26*, 181– 191.

Timberlake, M. (2020). Recognizing ableism in educational initiatives: Reading between the Lines. *Research in Educational Policy and Management, 2*(1), 84-100. https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.02.01.5

Tossebro, J. (2004). Understanding disability: Introduction to the special issues of SJDR. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research, 6*, 3-7.

Tremain, S. (2001). On the government of disability. *Social Theory and Practice*, 27(*4*), 617-636. https://doi.org/10.5840/soctheorpract200127432

Tremain, S. (2002). On the subject of impairment. In M. Corker & T. Shakespeare (Eds.), *Disability/postmodernity* (pp. 32-47). Continuum.

Underwood, K., & Parekh, G. (2020). Inclusion in early childhood: Difference, disability and social justice. Oxford Bibliography. 10.1093/OBO/9780199756810-0265

Underwood, K., Moreno-Angarita, M., Curran, T., Runswick-Cole, K., & Wertlieb, D. (2020). An international conversation on disabled children's childhoods: Theory, ethics and methods. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies, 9*(5). 302-327. https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v9i5.699

Underwood, K., Valeo, A., & Wood, R. (2012). Understanding inclusive early childhood education: A capability approach. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, *13*(4), 290–299. https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2012.13.4.290

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO]. (1994, June). *Report on world conference on special needs education: Access and quality*. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000110753

United Nations General Assembly. (1989). *Convention on the rights of the child. https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html*

United Nations General Assembly. (2006). *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities*. https://www.refworld.org/docid/45f973632.html

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR). (2016). *General Comment No. 4 on the rights to inclusive education*.

https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/generalcomments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-4-article-24-right-inclusive

UPIAS. (1976). *Fundamental principles of disability*. https://disabilitystudies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/UPIAS-fundamentalprinciples.pdf

Valle, J. W., & Connor, D. J. (2011). *Rethinking disability: A Disability Studies approach to inclusive practices*. McGraw-Hill.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2008). Context and language. In *discourse and context: A socio cognitive approach* (pp. 28-56). Cambridge University Press.

Van Leeuwen, T. (1996).'The representation of social actors'. In C.R. Caldas-Coulthard & M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Text and practices: Readings in critical discourse analysis* (pp. 32-70). Routledge.

Waddington, H. (2019). *Supporting children with autism in ECE*. The Education Hub. https://theeducationhub.org.nz/supporting-children-with-autism-in-ece/ Watson, K. (2017). *Inside the 'inclusive' early childhood classroom: The power of the 'normal*'. Peter Lang.

Watson, N. (2012). Theorising the lives of disabled children: How can disability theory help? *Children & Society, 26*(3), 192–202. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.10990860.2012.00432.x

White, E. J. (2007). Systematic inquiry as evaluative activity: Self-review in early childhood education. *Early Education, 42*, 26-29.

Wilson, D. (2017). Reimagining disability and inclusive education through universal design for learning. *Disability Studies Quartley, 37*(2). https://dsqsds.org/article/view/5417/4650

Wodak, R. (2002). Aspects of critical discourse analysis. *Zeitschift fur Angewandte Linguistik (ZfAL), 36*, 5-31.

Wodak, R., & Meyer, M (Eds). (2009). Critical discourse analysis: History, agenda, theory and methodology. In *methods of critical discourse analysis* (2nd ed., pp. 1-34). Sage Publications.

Woodfield, C., & Freedman, J. (2021). Barriers to knowing and being known: Constructions of (in)competencies in Research. *Philosophical Inquiry in Education, 8*(2), 176-194. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1314268.pdf

World Health Organization [WHO]. (2001). *The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*. http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/

World Health Organization [WHO]. (2007). *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth (ICF-CY).*

Yin, R. K. (1994). Discovering the future of the case study: Method in evaluation research. *Evaluation Practice*, *15*(3), 283–290. https://doi.org/10.1177/109821409401500309

Ware, L. (2013). Special education teacher preparation: Growing disability studies in the absence of resistance. In G. Wilgus (Ed.), *Knowledge, pedagogy and post multiculturalist: Shifting the locus of learning in urban teacher education* (pp. 153176). Palgrave.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Schedule for ECE Teachers

Name	
Age	Please tick the age band: ○ under 25 ○ 25-29 ○ 30-35 ○ 36-39 ○ 40-49 ○ 50 & over
Gender	
Higher educational qualification	
Teaching experience in ECE	
Any other relevant experience, specify	

Note: This is a semi-structured interview carried out in conversational way. The following questions are proposed questions and will be asked with prompts such as

- Can you give me an example?
- What else would you like to specify?

1. What do you understand by the term disability?
2. What is the role of the physical environment in creating disability?
3. What is the role of the social environment (family, school, teachers and peers) in creating disability?
4. What is your experience of working with children with disabilities?
5. What have informed your beliefs and perceptions about disability?

6. How do your thoughts, perceptions and beliefs about disability impact your teaching practices for children with disabilities?
7. What are your experiences teaching children with ASD? what impact did experiences have on your thinking and approach as a teacher?
8. What teaching strategies and approaches do you use when teaching children with ASD? How did you learn about these ideas/approaches?
9. What are the challenges that you have faced when teaching a child with ASD? According to you, what are the challenges that teachers generally face when teaching a child with ASD?
10. What sort of help do you require the most when it comes to overcoming these challenges? What resources did you feel you needed at the time when you were facing these challenges?
11. How does your centre support you for the resources you require when teaching a child with ASD? What supports would you like to have in the future?
12. What does an inclusive classroom look like to you?
13. What approaches/strategies do you use to facilitate the inclusion of children with ASD?
14. What are the areas where inclusion of children with ASD is difficult to achieve? Why do you think this might be? What do you think needs to happen in these situations for children to be included?
15. Anything else you’d like to say?

Appendix B: Interview Schedule for Education Support Worker

Background Information

Name	
Age	Please tick the age band: ○ under 25 ○ 25-29 ○ 30-35 ○ 36-39 ○ 40-49 ○ 50 & over
Gender	
Higher educational Qualification	
Teaching experience in ECE	
Any other relevant experience, please specify	

Note: This is a semi-structured interview carried out in conversational way. The following questions are proposed questions and will be asked with prompts such as

- Can you give me an example?
- What else would you like to specify?

1. What do you understand by the term disability?
2. What is the role of the physical environment in creating disability?
3. What is the role of the social environment (family, school, teachers and peers) in creating disability?
4. What have informed your beliefs and perception about disability?
5. How do your perceptions and beliefs about disability impact your teaching practices for children with disabilities?
6. Do you have any experience working with children with ASD?
7. What is your current role as a teacher aide?

8. How confident do you feel in supporting children with ASD?
9. What resources do you use to support a child with ASD in the classroom?
10. Have you had any professional training for working with children with ASD?
11. What are the challenges/barriers that you have faced when supporting a child with ASD?
12. What does an inclusive classroom look like to you?
13. What approaches/strategies do you use to facilitate the inclusion of children with ASD?
14. Anything else you’d like to say?

Appendix C: Interview Schedule ECE Supervisor/Curriculum Leader

Background Information

Name	
Age	Please tick the age band: ○ under 25 ○ 25-29 ○ 30-35 ○ 36-39 ○ 40-49 ○ 50 & over
Gender	
Higher educational Qualification	
Teaching experience in ECE	
Any other relevant experience, please specify	

Note: This is a semi-structured interview carried out in conversational way. The following questions are proposed questions and will be asked with prompts such as

- Can you give me an example?
- What else would you like to specify?

1. How many students attend your centre?
2. How many disabled children attend your centre?
3. What do you understand by the term disability?
4. What is the role of the physical environment in creating disability?
5. What is the role of the social environment (family, school, teachers and peers) in creating disability?
6. What have informed your beliefs and perception about disability?

7. How do your thoughts, perceptions and beliefs about disability impact your teaching practices for children with disabilities?
8. What are the service and resources your centre provides for children with ASD?
9. Do you facilitate any professional training for teachers and teacher aide working with children with ASD?
10. How do you celebrate diversity in your centre?
11. What are your thoughts on inclusive education? How do you think it benefits children with ASD?
12. What are the challenges /barriers you have faced to facilitate the inclusion of children with ASD in your centre?
13. Anything else you’d like to say?

Appendix-D: Interview Schedule for Parents of Autistic Children

Background Information

Name	
Age	Please tick the age band: ○ under 25 ○ 25-29 ○ 30-35 ○ 36-39 ○ 40-49 ○ 50 & over
Gender	
Higher educational qualification	
Occupation	

Note: This is a semi-structured interview carried out in conversational way. The following questions are proposed questions and will be asked with prompts such as

- Can you give me an example?
- What else would you like to specify?

1. Tell me about your child? What kind of things does he/she like to do?
2. Could you please make some comments regarding the pathway to your child's diagnosis?
3. How did your family and friends respond to your child's diagnosis?
4. What kind of educational setting is your child enrolled? Have you been happy with this setting?
5. How would you describe your relationship and interactions with the staff of your child's ECE centre?
6. What would you like the teachers and other staff involved in the ECE centre with your child to know?

7. Do you feel the experience of a child’s schooling is different for parents of children who have ASD and parents of children who don’t? If yes, in what ways?
8. Has parenting a child with ASD had any financial impacts on your family?
9. Are you aware of the government services and support for children with ASD?
10. Are you getting any services and support from the government for your child? If yes, what are these?
11. What comments can you make about government services and support for children with ASD?
12. Anything else you’d like to say

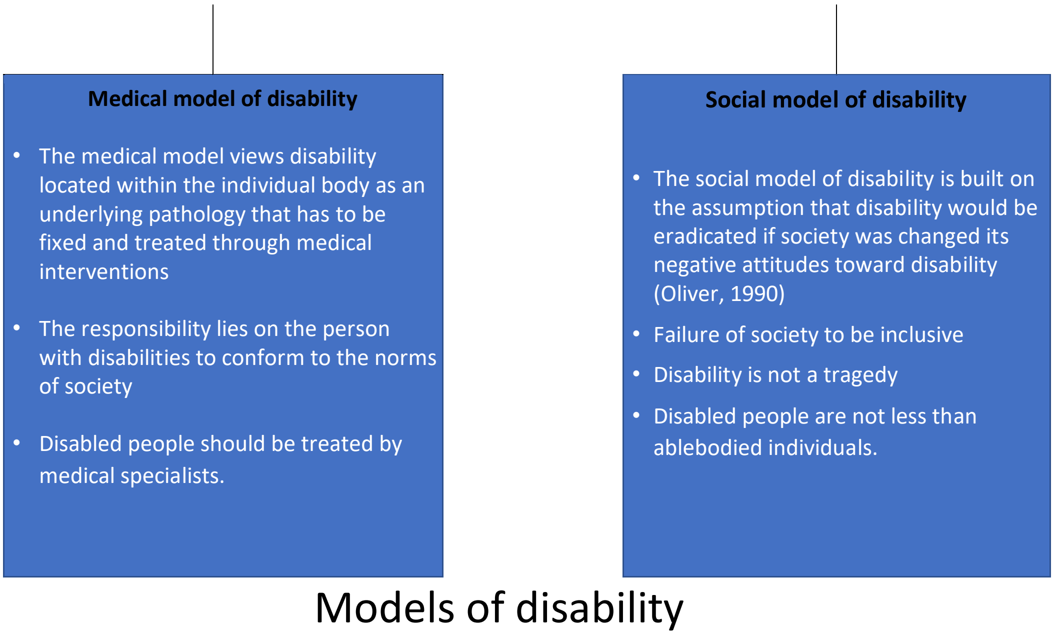
Appendix-E: Introductory Meeting Presentation

KO TE TANGATA

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Understanding disability and ableism: Introduction to the research

Silky Sharma
PhD candidate
Faculty of Education, University of Waikato



Medical model of disability

- The medical model views disability located within the individual body as an underlying pathology that has to be fixed and treated through medical interventions
- The responsibility lies on the person with disabilities to conform to the norms of society
- Disabled people should be treated by medical specialists.

Social model of disability

- The social model of disability is built on the assumption that disability would be eradicated if society was changed its negative attitudes toward disability (Oliver, 1990)
- Failure of society to be inclusive
- Disability is not a tragedy
- Disabled people are not less than ablebodied individuals.

Models of disability

Ableism

Ableism is a form of discrimination based on the perception that being able-bodied is the normal human condition and is superior to being disabled... ableism stems from deeply held, negative societal attitudes towards disability (Hehir, 2005).

It can be:

❑About attitudes and structures or systems that assume that everyone can see, walk, talk and
hear

❑Intentional or
accidental

Ableism is made up of two core elements:

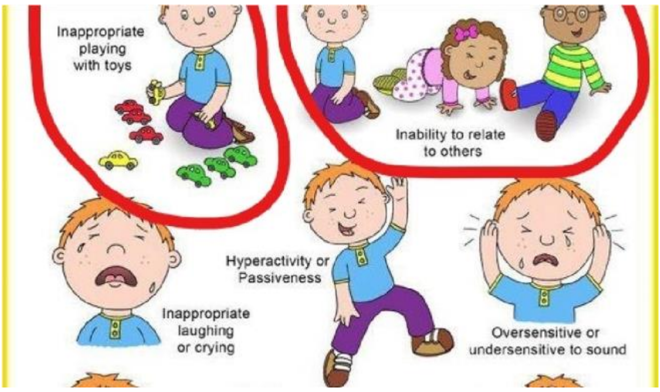
- Normal individual
- Constitutional divide between normal and abnormal individuals (Campbell, 2009).

Examples of everyday ableism

Able-bodied people failing to check their privilege

Examples of everyday ableism

Failing to provide accessibility beyond wheelchair ramps



Example of everyday ableism

The Signs of Autismexamples of ableist language

Confronting ableist culture in the classroom

❑ Ableism as disability discrimination is not always explicit. It can be implicit and exist in tiny spaces within inclusive

environments ❑A child’s label says little about

a child’s abilities

❑Provide children with opportunities to understand disability and explore the issues of disability biases through introducing disability content in learning activities (reading books, showing video clips with the images and stories of disabled children and their families, and sharing real-life examples)

❑Critically reflect your assumptions and beliefs about disability and interactions with disabled children in your ECE settings and society (Lalavani & Bacon, 2018).

What your participation in the research would mean?

Research Title: “**Understanding how ableism affects inclusion of autistic children in an ECE setting”**

Research activities ❑Semi-structured interviews

❑Observations
❑Document analysis

❑Focus group discussion: Sharing themes from interviews
Sharing videos of inclusive and ableist practices
Asking for participants insights

References

- Campbell, F. K. (2009). *Contours of Ableism: The production of disability and abledness*. Palgrave Macmillan. 10.1057/9780230245181
- Oliver, M. (1990). *The politics of disablement*. Palgrave Macmillan
- Hehir, T. (2005). New directions in special education: Eliminating ableism in poly and dpractice. *Harvard Educational Press, 72*(1), 1-32
- Lalvani, P., & Bacon, J. K. (2019). Rethinking “We Are All Special”: Anti-ableism curricula in early childhood classrooms. *Young Exceptional Children*, *22*(2), 87–100. https://doi.org/10.1177/1096250618810706

Appendix-F: List of Interview Themes for Focus Group Discussion

- Teachers understand that special education support is important to facilitate inclusion
- Lack of resources, funding, and extra teacher support (teacher aide/education support worker) for disabled children
- Teachers show willingness for professional development to understand the different learning needs of children and teaching strategies to work effectively with autistic and disabled children
- Lack of communication between parents/families of autistic children and teachers about parents' aspirations for their children's learning
- Parents agree with teachers' suggestion of seeking special education support to negotiate their child's inclusion in ECE and mainstream primary school.

Appendix-G: Information Sheet

My name is Silky Sharma and I am a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education, University of Waikato. I am conducting research as a requirement of my Doctoral Degree. The title of my research is

“Understanding how ableism affects children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an Early Childhood Education Setting”.

In my study, the term ableism means the “belief that it is better or superior not to have a disability than to have one and that it is better to do things in the way that non -

led people do”

(Storey, 2007, p.56). The research has been given ethical

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to find how the effects of ableism can influence the everyday practices of people working in an ECE setting with children with ASD. Would knowledge about ableism be helpful for teachers and other people working in the ECE setting?

What I want to know more about is:

- How might ableism influence the everyday interactions and practices of teachers and other people involved in an ECE setting for children with ASD?
- How might understanding ableism and knowledge about the effects of ableism on practices help teachers counter the impact of ableism when responding to disabled children?

The research involves a case study of an ECE setting. I am using the following activities:

- Semi-structured interviews for teachers and education support workers.
- Semi-structured interview for supervisor/ head teacher of the centre.
- Semi-structured interviews of parents of children with ASD. and time suitable for participants.

Each interview will take approximately 1 hour to conduct and will be conducted at a suitable place and time for the participants

- A thematic analysis of relevant documents - centre policies, IEP's and assessment documents such as learning portfolio/learning stories.

- Observations will be made using video, pictures and field notes to observe patterns of interaction in the ECE setting.
- A final focus group discussion will be organised for teachers, education support workers, ECE supervisor/ head teacher. This discussion aims to share the feedback (e.g. video clips) example from observations and themes from interviews. This discussion will approximately take 1 hour to conduct.

The long-term goal of this study is to make sure that ECE teachers and other ECE staff are well supported to work inclusively with children with ASD and other disabled children. I also hope that the knowledge gained through this research will add to our understanding of how ableism could possibly disrupt the inclusion of disabled children and their families in ECE settings. And, how teachers could resist ableism.

Participants can have access to the electronic copy of the thesis, which will be widely available in the University of Waikato digital repository: Research Commons URL- https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/

All the information gathered will be confidential to the researcher and will only be used for this research and any publications and presentations resulting from it. I will maintain the confidentiality of all participants, with pseudonyms used in the reporting. There will be no coding or reference that can link the centre or any individual to the research. I hope that you will be interested in taking part in my research study. If you need further information, or have questions, please contact me at:

Silky.luthra18@gmail.com or ss610@students.waikato.ac.nz.

Supervisors for my study are

Associate Professor Linda Mitchell at

linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz Dr Carol Hamilton at

hamiltca@waikato.ac.nz.

Yours sincerely,

Silky Sharma (PhD Candidate)

Faculty of Education, University of Waikato

Appendix-H: Centre Manager Letter

Dear Centre Manager/Owner

My name is Silky Sharma, and I am conducting research as a requirement of my Doctoral Degree. I am requesting permission to enter your centre and carry out my study. I attach a copy of the information sheet for my research study with this letter.

What your involvement would mean.

- **Introductory meeting**: The purpose of this meeting is to introduce the concept of ableism, discuss the aim and procedures of my study and invite your centre to participate in my study.
- Permission to hold a presentation for the teachers, education support workers, supervisor/head teacher at a staff meeting.
- Permission for access to centre's material.

I also invite teachers, education support workers, ECE supervisor/head teacher and parents of children with ASD of your centre to participate in the following research activities:

- **Semi structured interviews for teachers and education support workers.** The purpose of this interview is to understand the knowledge, beliefs and perspectives of the teachers and education support workers about the 1) concept of disability and 2) children with ASD, how these might influence their teaching practice.
- **Semi-structured interview for supervisor/ head teacher of the centre**. The purpose of this interview is to understand the knowledge, beliefs, and perspectives of the ECE supervisor/head teacher about the concept of disability and 2) ECE centre philosophy and policies for children with ASD.
- **Semi-structured interviews of parents of children with ASD.** The purpose of this interview is to understand the parent's experience of ECE services for their children.

Each interview will take approximately 1 hour to conduct and be conducted at a suitable place and time for the participants.

- **Documents analysis:** A thematic analysis of relevant documents - centre policies, IEP's and assessment documents such as learning portfolio/learning stories. Documents analysis may also require up to 1 hour of your centre to find and provide the documents.
- **Observations:** Observations will be made using video, pictures and field notes to observe patterns of interaction in the ECE centre. The observations will be conducted for two weeks in shifts for 4 hours to observe the daily activities of your ECE setting. At the time of observation, participants can continue with their daily activities because the process of observation will not necessarily require their time. Consent from parents for their child's participation will be taken before conducting the observation. If parents do not consent for their child to be involved, they will not participate in this observation process.
- **Focus group discussion:** A final focus group discussion will be organised for teachers, education support workers, ECE supervisor/ head teacher. This discussion aims to share the feedback (e.g. video clips) example from observations and interview themes. This discussion will approximately take 1 hour to conduct.

Participants can have access to the electronic copy of the thesis, which will be widely available in the University of Waikato digital repository: Research Commons URL- https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/

I would be happy to follow up with a phone call to arrange a meeting to discuss my study.

Yours sincerely,

Silky Sharma

PhD Candidate

Faculty of Education, University of Waikato

Appendix-I: Consent form for ECE Setting

Title of research: Understanding how ableism affects children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an Early Childhood Education Setting.

Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken from New Zealand tertiary institutions require that participant explicitly agree to be part of the research and how the information contained in the research will be used. Therefore, I am asking you to read the following information to certify that you agree with these

- I, [Name, Position, X, Name of the centre] give permission for Silky Sharma to approach the teachers, education support workers, ECE head teacher and parents at (Name of the centre) with a view to having them participate in her PhD study knowing that Silky will conduct this research ethically.
- I understand that all data gathered will be securely stored at the Faculty of Education, University of Waikato and destroyed after five years.
- I understand that the research will be used to write Silky's Ph.D. thesis and other related academic articles and presentations. The thesis will be widely available as a digital copy is permanently lodged in the University of Waikato digital repository: Research Commons.
- I understand that I can request to meet with Silky at any time to be informed about the progress of the research.

By Signing this consent form I agree to participate in the research study

Name of the Centre ______________________________________

Signature of Centre Manager ____

E-mail ____

Date: ________________________________

Contact details:

Silky.luthra18@gmail.com or ss610@students.waikato.ac.nz.

Supervisors for my study are

Associate Professor Linda Mitchell at

linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz Dr Carol Hamilton at

hamiltca@waikato.ac.nz.

Yours sincerely,

Silky Sharma (PhD Candidate)

Faculty of Education, University of Waikato

Appendix-J: Letter Inviting the Participation of Teachers, Education Support Workers and Curriculum Leader

Dear teachers, education support worker and curriculum leader

My name is Silky Sharma and I am a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education, University of Waikato. I am conducting research as a requirement of my Doctoral Degree. The title of my research is

"Understanding how ableism affects children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an Early Childhood Education Setting".

In my study, the term ableism means the "belief that it is better or

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to find how the effects of ableism can influence the everyday practices of people working in an ECE setting with children with ASD. Would knowledge about ableism be helpful for people working in the ECE setting?

What I want to know more about is:

- How might ableism influence the everyday interactions and practices of teachers and other people involved in an ECE setting for children with ASD?
- How might understanding ableism and knowledge about the effects of ableism on practices help teachers counter the impact of ableism when responding to disabled children?

What your involvement would mean

I invite you to be a part of the following research activities:

- **Introductory Meeting:** To introduce my study, I will hold a presentation for the participants (teachers, education support workers, and supervisor/head teacher) of your centre. The purpose of this presentation will be to inform participants about 1) the aims of the study, 2) the concept of ableism and how it can be seen in their teaching practices, and 3) procedures to be used in the study. The presentation will be conducted in a staff meeting of your centre and will take approximately 1 hour to conduct.

- **Observations:** Observations will be made using video, pictures and field notes to observe patterns of interaction in the ECE centre. The observations will be conducted for two weeks in shifts for 4 hours to observe the daily activities of ECE centres. At the time of observation, participants can continue with their daily activities because the process of observation will not necessarily require their time.
- **Semi-structured interview**: The purpose of this interview is to understand the knowledge, beliefs and perspectives of the teachers about the 1) concept of disability and 2) children with ASD, how these might influence their teaching practice. The interview will take approximately 1 hour to conduct and be conducted at a suitable place and time suitable for participants.
- **Focus group discussion:** This discussion will be organised for teachers, education support workers, ECE supervisor/ head teacher. This discussion aims to share the feedback (video clips) example from observation, where 1) ableism and 2) inclusion are being practised. The participants will be asked to comment on the shared video and give their input on the part of the videos, where ableism is being practised and how it can be challenged. This discussion will last for approximately 1 hour and will be conducted at a time and place suitable for participants.

Participant's time: An estimated total teacher's time of 3 hours will be required for participating in the research activities.

The long-term goal of this study is to make sure that ECE teachers and other ECE staff are well supported to work inclusively with children with ASD and other disabled children. I also hope that the knowledge gained through this research will add to our understanding of how ableism could possibly disrupt the inclusion of disabled children and their families in ECE settings. How teachers could resist ableism.

Participants can have access to the electronic copy of the thesis, which will be widely available in the University of Waikato digital repository: Research Commons URL- https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/

All the information gathered will be confidential to the researcher and will only be used for this research, and any publications and presentations resulting from it. I will maintain the confidentiality of all participants, with pseudonyms used in the reporting. There will be no coding or reference that can link the centre or any individual to the research.

I hope that you will be interested in taking part in my research study. If you need further information, or have questions; please contact me at:

Silky.luthra18@gmail.com or ss610@students.waikato.ac.nz.

Supervisors for my study are
Associate Professor Linda Mitchell at
linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz Dr Carol Hamilton at
hamiltca@waikato.ac.nz.
Yours sincerely,
Silky Sharma (PhD Candidate)
Faculty of Education, University of Waikato

Appendix-K: Consent Form for Teachers, Curriculum Leader and Education Support Worker

Institution: Faculty of Education, University of Waikato.

Research project title: Understanding how ableism affects children with Autism Spectrum
Disorder (ASD) in an Early Childhood Education Setting

Researcher: Silky Sharma

What the research involves:

The research invites you to fill the consent if you wish to participate in the following research activities:

Semi-structured interview: Semi-structured interview for teachers. The purpose of this interview is to understand the knowledge, beliefs, and perspective of the teachers about the 1) concept of disability and 2) children with ASD, how these might influence their teaching practice.

Observation: Observations will be made using video, pictures and field notes to observe patterns of interaction in the ECE centre.

Focus group discussion: This discussion aims to share the feedback (e.g. video clips) example from observation.

Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken from New Zealand tertiary institutions require that participant explicitly agree to be part of the research and how the information contained in the research (interview, observation, and focus group discussion) will be used. Therefore, I am asking you to read the following information to certify that you agree with these:

Tick each statement to show that you are willing to participate in interview, observation and focus group discussion.

Agreement to research activities (interview, observation and focus group discussion)

[ ] I understand that my participation in the research (interview, observation and focus group discussion) is entirely voluntary.

[ ] I have read the Invitation to Participate information and have had all of my questions answered.

[ ] I understand I can withdraw from the research (interview, observation and focus group discussion) at any time without penalty, and I do not have to say why. Participants will be advised that in case they decide to withdraw data, they will have to inform me about that no later than three weeks after receiving their transcripts. If they decide to do it, they will not be required to give me any reasons for their withdrawal.

[ ] I understand that the purpose of focus group discussion is to encourage each participant to provide strategies to challenge Ableism and not to take video as a chance to pass negative comments to criticise practices of any of the participants.

Recording and Transcribing

Semi-structured interview

[ ] I agree to an audio recording of my responses and discussions within the interview to be made.

[ ] I understand that the transcription of the interview will be analysed by the researcher

(Silky Sharma)

[ ] I understand that I will be e-mailed a transcript of what has been discussed during the interview.

[ ] I understand that access to interview transcripts will be limited to Silky Sharma and her supervisory panel.

[ ] I understand that I can alter or withdraw any or all of the interview material within seven days of receiving the transcript.

Observations:

[ ] I understand that observation will be recorded using a video recorder, photographs, and field notes.

[ ] I agree to wear a microphone for audio recording during my teaching.

[ ] I understand that the transcription of the observation will be analysed by the researcher

(Silky Sharma)

[ ] I understand that access to field notes and video clips transcripts will be limited to Silky Sharma and her supervisory panel.

Focus group discussion

[ ] I agree to an audio recording of my responses and discussions within the discussion to be Made.

[ ] I understand that due to the collectively-generated nature of the focus group discussion, I will not be able to review or withdraw any of the data I will contribute to the focus group discussion.

[ ] I understand that the transcription of the interview will be analysed by the researcher

(Silky Sharma)

[ ] I understand that access to interview transcripts will be limited to Silky Sharma and her supervisory panel.

Data Storage and Dissemination

[ ] I understand that data collected through the interview, observations and focus group discussion will be used in research. Every effort will be made to maintain anonymity such as the use of pseudonyms. **However, anonymity cannot be completely guaranteed**.

[ ] I understand that data of interview, observation and focus group discussion will be securely kept for five years and then destroyed.

[ ] I agree to be quoted directly if my real name is not disclosed and a pseudonym is used. [ ] I understand that any information I have shared which has already been published may not be withdrawn.

[ ] I would like to be kept informed about any publication of research material. [ ] I have read and understood all comments on this sheet. I agree to participate in this Study.

Researcher signature: ____________________________ Date: ___/___/2019

Participant's signature ____________________________ Date: ___/_____/2019

Contact Information

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Researcher: Silky Sharma

Full address: 10 A, Steele Road, Forest Lake, Hamilton, 3200, New Zealand

Tel: 0276266682, E-mail: Silky.luthra18@gmail.com or ss610@students.waikato.ac.nz.

Appendix-L: Letter Inviting the Participation of Parents of Autistic Children

Dear parents,

My name is Silky Sharma and I am a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education, University of Waikato. I am conducting research as a requirement of my Doctoral Degree The title of my research is

"Understanding how ableism affects children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an Early Childhood Education Setting". In my study, the term Ableism means the "belief that it is better or superior not to have a disability than to have one and that it is better to do things in the way that non-disabled people do" (Storey, 2007, p.56). The research has been given ethical approval by the Faculty of Education

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to find how the effects of ableism can influence the everyday practices of people working in an ECE setting with children with ASD. Would knowledge about ableism be helpful for people working in the ECE setting?

What I want to know more about is:

- How might ableism influence the everyday discourses and practices of teachers and other people involved in an ECE setting for children with ASD?
- How might understanding of ableism and knowledge about the effects of ableism on practices help teachers counter the impact of ableism when responding to disabled children?

What your involvement would mean

I invite you to participate in a semi-structured interview. The purpose of this interview is to understand the parent's experience of ECE services for their children. The interview will take approximately 1 hour to conduct and will be conducted at a place, date and time suitable for you.

Participant's time: An estimated total time of 1 hour of parents will be required for participating in the research activity (interview).

The long-term goal of this study is to make sure that ECE teachers and other ECE staff are well supported to work inclusively with children with ASD and other disabled children in their settings. I also hope that the knowledge gained through this research will add to our understanding of how ableism could possibly disrupt the inclusion of disabled children and their families in ECE settings. How teachers could resist ableism.

Participants can have access to the electronic copy of the thesis, which will be widely available in the University of Waikato digital repository: Research Commons URL- https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/

All the information gathered will be confidential to the researcher and will only be used for this research, and any publications and presentations resulting from it. I will maintain the anonymity of all participants, with pseudonyms used in the reporting. There will be no coding or reference that can link the centre or any individual to the research.

I hope that you will be interested in taking part in my research study. If you need further information, or have questions; please contact me at:

Silky.luthra18@gmail.com or ss610@students.waikato.ac.nz.

Supervisors for my study are
Associate Professor Linda Mitchell at
linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz Dr Carol Hamilton at
hamiltca@waikato.ac.nz.

Yours sincerely,
Silky Sharma (PhD Candidate)
Faculty of Education, University of Waikato

Appendix-M: Consent Form for Parents of Autistic children

Institution: Faculty of Education, University of Waikato.

Research project title: Understanding how ableism affects children with Autism Spectrum

Disorder (ASD) in an Early Childhood Education Setting

Researcher: Silky Sharma

What the research involves:

The research invites you to fill out the consent if you wish to participate in the following activity:

- **Semi-structured interview:** The purpose of this interview is to understand the parent's experience of ECE services for their children.

Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken from New Zealand tertiary institutions require that participant explicitly agree to be part of the research and how the information contained in their interview, observation and focus group discussion will be used. Therefore, I am asking you to read the following information to certify that you agree with these: Tick each statement to show that you are willing to participate in interview, observation and focus group discussion.

1. Agreement to Interview

[ ] I understand that my participation in this interview is entirely voluntary.

[ ] I have read the Invitation to Participate information and have had all of my questions answered.

[ ] I understand I can withdraw from this at any time without penalty, and I do not have to say why. Participants will be advised that in case they decide to withdraw data, they will have to inform me about that no later than three weeks after receiving their transcripts. If they decide to do it, they will not be required to give me any reasons for their withdrawal.

2. Recording and Transcribing

[ ] I agree to an audio recording of my responses and discussions within the interview to be made.

[ ] I understand that the transcription of the interview will be analysed by the researcher (Silky Sharma)

[ ] I understand that I will be e-mailed a transcript of what has been discussed during the interview.

[ ] I understand that access to interview transcripts will be limited to Silky Sharma and her supervisory panel.

[ ] I understand that I can alter or withdraw any or all of the interview material within seven days of receiving the transcript.

3. Data Storage and Dissemination

[ ] I understand that data collected through this interview will be used in research. Every effort will be made to maintain anonymity such as the use of pseudonyms. **However, anonymity cannot be completely guaranteed**.

[ ] I understand that audio recording of the interview will be securely kept for the required five years and then destroyed.

[ ] I agree to be quoted directly if my real name is not disclosed and a pseudonym is used. [ ] I understand that any information I have shared which has already been published may not be withdrawn.

[ ] I would like to be kept informed about any publication of research material.

[ ] I have read and understood all comments on this sheet. I agree to participate in this study.

Researcher signature: ___________________________ Date: ___/___/2019

Participant's signature ____________________________ Date: ___/____/2019

Contact Information

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Researcher: Silky Sharma

Full address: 10 A, Steele Road, Forest Lake, Hamilton, 3200, New Zealand

Tel: 0276266682

E-mail: Silky.luthra18@gmail.com or ss610@students.waikato.ac.nz.

Appendix-N: Letter to Parents Seeking Permission for their Child's Participation

Dear parents,

My name is Silky Sharma and I am a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education, University of Waikato. I am conducting research as a requirement of my Doctoral Degree The title of my research is

"Understanding how ableism affects children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an Early Childhood Education Setting". In my study, the term Ableism means the "belief that it is better or superior not to have a disability than to have one and that it is better to do things in the way that non-disabled people do" (Storey, 2007, p.56).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to find how the effects of ableism can influence the everyday practices of people working in an ECE setting with children with ASD. Would knowledge about ableism be helpful for people working in the ECE setting?

What I want to know more about is:

- How might ableism influence the everyday interactions and practices of teachers and other people involved in an ECE setting for children with ASD?
- How might understanding ableism and knowledge about the effects of ableism on practices help teachers counter the impact of ableism when responding to disabled children?

What your child's involvement would mean

Observations: Observations will be made using video, pictures and field notes to capture patterns of interaction in the ECE centre. I will observe your child's interaction with the teacher, education support workers, head teacher, and other children at the centre. The observation will be conducted for two weeks in shifts for 4 hours to observe the daily activities of ECE centres. At the time of observation, participants can continue with their daily activities because the process of observation will not necessarily require their time.

The long-term goal of this study is to make sure that ECE teachers and other ECE staff are well supported to work inclusively with children with ASD and other disabled children in their settings. I also hope that the knowledge gained through this research will add to our understanding of how ableism could possibly disrupt the inclusion of disabled children and their families in ECE settings. How teachers could resist ableism.

Participants can have access to the electronic copy of the thesis, which will be widely available in the University of Waikato digital repository: Research Commons URL- https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/

All the information gathered will be confidential to the researcher and will only be used for this research, and any publications and presentations resulting from it. I will maintain the anonymity of all participants, with pseudonyms (another name) used in the reporting. There will be no coding or reference that can link the centre or any individual to the research. The pseudonym will be used for children and other participants in the research to protect participants' identities and maintain the value and integrity of participants' experiences.

I hope that you will be interested in taking part in my research study. If you need further information, or have questions; please contact me at:

Silky.luthra18@gmail.com or ss610@students.waikato.ac.nz.

Supervisors for my study are
Associate Professor Linda Mitchell at
linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz Dr Carol Hamilton at
hamiltca@waikato.ac.nz.

Yours sincerely,
Silky Sharma (PhD Candidate)
Faculty of Education, University of Waikato

Appendix-O: Consent Form for Parents Seeking Permission for their Child's Participation

Institution: Faculty of Education, University of Waikato.

Research project title: Understanding how ableism affects children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an Early Childhood Education

Setting **What the research involves:**

We would like your permission to use items collected about your child in the research.

Please circle Yes/No	**To be collected and analysed for this research**	**To be used in the presentation**	**To be used in academic publication**	**To be used on the University of Waikato website**
Written observation of child interaction with children and adults involved in ECE centre	Yes/ No	Yes/ No	Yes/ No	Yes/ No
Learning stories and excerpts from child's portfolio	Yes/ No	Yes/ No	Yes/ No	Yes/ No
	Yes/ No	Yes/ No	Yes/ No	Yes/ No

Photographs of my child				
Video recordings of my child	Yes/ No	Yes/ No	Yes/ No	Yes/ No

I will maintain the anonymity of all participants, with pseudonyms (another name) used in the reporting. The pseudonym will be used for children and other participants in the research to protect participants' identities and maintain the value and integrity of participants' experiences.

Please suggest another name for your child to be used in this research study:

____

I understand that at any time, I can say no to the further collection of work for the project

PARENT/CAREGIVER'S FULL NAME

_______________ __________________

(First name) (Last Name)

SIGNATURE _______________ Date ________________

NAME OF CENTRE ___________________

Contact Information

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Researcher: Silky Sharma

Full address: 10 A, Steele Road, Forest Lake, Hamilton, 3200, New Zealand

Tel: 0276266682

E-mail: Silky.luthra18@gmail.com or ss610@students.waikato.ac.nz

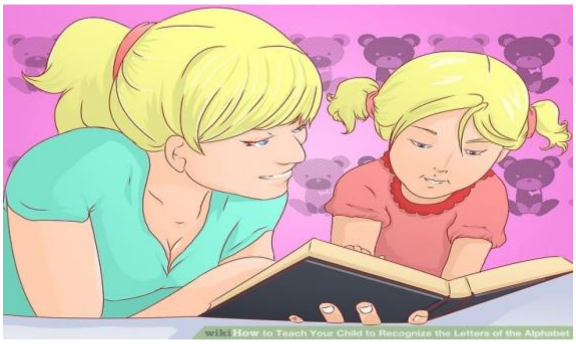
Appendix-P: Assent Form for Children

Title of research: Understanding how ableism affects children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an Early Childhood Education Setting

[To be read with children by the teacher/researcher only after PARENTAL CONSENT has been gained]

Hi, my name is Silky Sharma and I am a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education, University of Waikato (New Zealand). I am going to be visiting your kindergarten lots this year. I am writing a report about what you are learning at kindergarten with other children. I want to share what you say and do, and how you get on with other children, teacher and other adults in

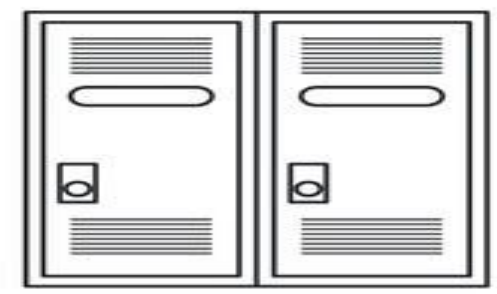
the centre). The research has been given ethical approval by the Faculty of Please put a mark on the following pictures if you agree to me finding out about you in these ways:

	Talking to me and asking me questions 
	Making notes and writing down what I say

	 **Using my Learning Stories in your report** 
	Taking photos and videos of my friends and me 

	Watching me while I play

	 **I can say tell you to go away if I want to be alone or with my friends** 
	You will keep everything safely locked away

What other name would you like to be used for this research study?

____

(NB: Please avoid TV or film character’ names or names of other children attending kindergarten)

Appendix-Q: Notice about Video Recording

This notice is to let you know that Mrs. Silky Sharma from The University of Waikato will be video recording here today for her PhD research project, **understanding how ableism affects children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an Early Childhood Education Setting** at the [Name centre]. If you haven’t given consent for your child to be involved, they will not be part of this video recording.

Photo of the researcher
(Mrs. Silky Sharma)

Contact details: Silky.luthra18@gmail.com or ss610@students.waikato.ac.nz.

Supervisors for this study are
Associate Professor Linda Mitchell at
linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz Dr Carol Hamilton at
hamiltca@waikato.ac.nz.