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Cultural historical research in support of inclusive classrooms: two approaches in dialogue

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Abstract

This article showcases the potential of dialogue within cultural historical research (CHR) to enhance our understanding of and advocacy for inclusivity in schools. It illustrates how the authors, each rooted in distinct subfields – cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) and romantic science – employ a unique approach to knowledge production regarding inclusive classrooms. By refraining from the pursuit of agreement and instead fostering an environment where their studies are juxtaposed, the authors engage in what they term “inclusive coauthoring,” approaching each other’s methodologies with an asset-based, solidarity-seeking stance. The first author utilizes excerpts from an ethnographic study in an elementary classroom to demonstrate how CHAT can elucidate the intricate dynamics of diverse classrooms, shedding light on mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion and identifying potential barriers (opportunities) to inclusive practices. On the other hand, the second author illustrates how a romantic science perspective can empower educators to cultivate inclusivity in ways previously unexplored before their deep engagement with the study. Uniting in collaboration around shared goals rather than shared methods, led the authors to unforeseen advancements, particularly in one of the studies.

Keywords: cultural historical research; cultural-historical activity theory; romantic science; inclusive classrooms; playworld, schools.

Introduction

Designing inclusive classrooms is a pressing concern amid global challenges (e.g., the Covid-19 pandemic), geopolitical catastrophes (e.g., the Russian invasion of Ukraine and civil wars in various nations), and social movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter, climate activism). Many researchers and practitioners actively seek innovative tools to address educational inequities, in part by emphasizing that the classroom is a pivotal space for teaching about the value of diversity (Kozleski et al., 2021; Stepaniuk, 2020).

An inclusive classroom is a community of learners where *all* students' needs, cultures, and voices are recognized within decision-making and allocation of resources (Stepaniuk, 2020; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013). Inclusive classrooms are for all who wish to join, fostering a sense of value and care. In recognizing this, we consider inclusive classrooms as integral to rejecting the exclusion of students labeled with dis/abilities and others frequently marginalized, including emergent bilinguals, undocumented, Black, Indigenous, queer, and neurodivergent learners.

Approaches to addressing inclusivity in a classroom setting diverge across disciplines and research traditions (Artiles et al., 2011). Considerable work remains, particularly in understanding how (in)equities are both generated and perpetuated by practices considered inclusive (Artiles, 2015; Kozleski, 2020). Research has shown that cultural systems harboring beliefs and assumptions about the teaching of historically marginalized students often go unexamined in classroom routines and interactions (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007; Kozleski, 2020; Stepaniuk, 2020). Kozleski (2020) advocates for disrupting cultural systems, including tools, practices, and meanings deemed “inclusive” in schools.

Cultural historical research (CHR), rooted in Vygotsky's (1987), Leontiev's (1981), and Luria's (1976) work, provides a framework to explore the complex social interactions, activities, and meanings that humans jointly co-construct in a shared space over time. However, even among researchers affiliated with the same special interest group (at American Educational Research Association (AERA)), orientations and tools developed to address inequities in education often become isolated due to what can be termed “*academia's business as usual*”. This is partly because researchers, including the authors of this paper, tend to collaborate only with those sharing similar methodological logic and tools. While seemingly beneficial, this practice may undermine the inclusiveness of knowledge production and limit opportunities for dialogue with researchers in related traditions who use different approaches toward similar goals. The conventional practices in academia can lead to missed opportunities for collaboration with those who share common goals, hindering the potential for valuable insights; but the unique developmental trajectory of this special issue (see the introduction to the issue) allowed us to take advantage of one such opportunity.

In addressing the challenge of creating a more inclusive and equitable classroom for historically marginalized learners, we could have followed the “*academia's business as usual*” conventional practice and written two papers independently in response to the

challenge. However, with this paper, we are, in part, considering how the field of education, with its various divisions, might benefit from researchers who share a common goal but employ different methodologies, coming together to co-author papers.

Thus, this paper showcases and discusses a dialogue between two researchers who are both striving to foster inclusive classrooms but are following these two different approaches within CHR: Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) or romantic science. (The latter could be described as broader category than CHR, possibly encompassing some CHR (instead of vice versa); but is described as within CHR, here, in an effort to create a dialogue with CHAT.) Therefore, the paper revolves around two questions:

1. How can a co-authorship activity between two researchers, each working from a different CHR approach, foster knowledge production concerning their shared goal in the field of education?
2. How can the juxtaposition of two distinct CHR approaches – CHAT and romantic science – contribute to a better understanding of and, hopefully, the promotion of inclusive classrooms?

In this paper, we begin by establishing our positionality and the co-authorship context, followed by the exploration of two CHR approaches – CHAT and romantic science – and their implications for inclusive classrooms. Subsequently, we present two sections where we offer two examples from studies we have conducted. We conclude with a discussion, elaborating on the insights gained throughout the co-authorship process.

Positioning Ourselves and Co-Authorship Context

The first author, Inna, is a white, able-bodied, neurotypical, straight, cisgender woman, and a settler on the unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the səliilwətaʔl (Tseil-Waututh), kwikwəłəm (Kwikwetlem), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations, known today as the city of Burnaby in Canada. Inna grounds her work within critical inclusive education, disability studies, and teacher education fields. She studies education systems from decolonial and cultural historical activity theories perspectives to understand ways in which inclusive and equitable learning, development, and change can be nurtured in schools.

The second author, Beth, is a white, able-bodied, autistic, queer, cisgender woman, and a settler working on the unceded traditional territories of the Lənape (Lenape) Peoples, specifically Mən'si·w Lənape (Munsee Lenape), known today as New York City in the United States. She studies playworlds: a form of adult-child joint play and a way of being, in which play is combined with art or science. Her research focuses on play, imagination, creativity, perezhivanie, early childhood education and care, and methods for the study of all of these.

As members of the Cultural Historical Research Special Interest Group (CHR SIG) within the AERA, we independently joined and were paired in the mentorship program initiated by the CHR SIG's co-chairs. The co-chairs then issued a call for a special issue, prompting contributors to reflect on the advantages of utilizing CHR for promoting equity in education. Viewing the call as an excellent opportunity for collaboration and mutual learning, we were inspired to share and compare how each of us employs CHR to advance inclusive practices. As we shared our work with each other, we realized that each of us is situated within one of two interrelated but distinct CHR traditions, while both of us engage in research that aims to support inclusive environments. Drawing on findings from our research projects, which were each conducted over several years, we recognized CHR's affordances in addressing inclusion. This prompted us to wonder about the contributions that two CHR perspectives might make to supporting inclusivity in a classroom, when they are put in dialogue without an intention to choose one or the other.

CHAT as a Lens for Understanding Classrooms

CHAT centers culture and history within an activity and emphasizes its impact on the ways in which humans make sense of and conceptualize their roles in activities (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). Following CHAT, a classroom is a complex, multifaceted cultural activity arena where students and adults bring their funds of knowledge and experiences to collectively engage in activities. They are introduced to tools and practices – *mediating artifacts* – through which they learn and participate in classroom activities. As mediating artifacts are inherited across time, they carry assumptions about the education of students with differing needs and abilities (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Kozleski et al., 2020). Through various tools and practices, educators co-construct the meaning of what constitutes learning and inclusive teaching. Those meanings are then reflected in and reinforced via classroom structures, practices, and routines until they are normalized and institutionalized (Kozleski et al., 2014; 2020).

In efforts to dismantle inequities in education, Skrtic (1995) argued for the interrogation of taken-for-granted meanings and practices in education, especially concerning teaching students identified with dis/abilities in a general education classroom. Similarly, Lee (2003) urged us to consider “how we attend to patterns of cultural practices that are repeated across the settings of schools and community life and understand their consequences for student learning” (p. 394). In this regard, CHAT offers analytical means that allow us to map out the classroom complexities associated with pursuing the goal of inclusive education (Engeström & Sannino, 2021; Cenci et al., 2020; Stepaniuk, 2020).

By analyzing the core elements of a classroom activity – division of labor, community, rules, subjects, mediating artifacts, and goals/objects (Engeström & Sannino, 2021), CHAT reveals and brings to light structures, relations, and processes that might otherwise remain unnoticed (Kozleski, 2011; Martínez-Álvarez, 2023; Stepaniuk, 2020). This framework provides analytical constructs, language, and tools to identify factors that can either facilitate or impede practices intended to foster equitable learning outcomes for *all* students. CHAT illuminates the day-to-day realities of a classroom, offering insights

into how dynamics of inclusion/exclusion may manifest at the individual, collective, or intermediate levels.

Additionally, CHAT introduces the concept of *contradictions*, which might initially be perceived as problems or cultural conflicts in the pursuit of inclusive classrooms. However, contradictions are later defined as driving forces for inclusive changes, including the transformation of activities and roles in a classroom (Cakir et al., 2022; Engeström, 2001; Engeström & Sannino, 2011). Similar to mediating artifacts, contradictions are culturally and historically predetermined and are expressed through actions. Engeström and Sannino (2011) underscore that “contradictions do not speak for themselves; they are recognized when practitioners articulate and construct them in words and actions” (p. 371).

For example, in examining school-university partnerships for the implementation of inclusive education, Waitoller and Kozleski (2013) revealed that educators’ assumptions about student academic success led to the establishment of ableist accountability systems. These systems marginalized and undermined the sense of belonging for students with dis/abilities in a school. The concept of contradictions proves pivotal in the design of inclusive classroom communities, facilitating the identification of activity elements, relationships, and processes that may preclude students from meaningful participation in learning (Cakir et al., 2022; Kozleski, 2020; Stepaniuk, 2020).

Thus, following CHAT, teachers’ and students’ learning and development stem from their interactions with culturally and historically determined tools used to communicate actions, thereby co-constructing meanings and practices in education (Cole, 1991; Daniels et al., 2007; Rogoff, 2003). Two CHAT constructs – mediating artifacts and contradictions – serve as critical instruments for identifying barriers to pursuing inclusivity and equity in a classroom.

Romantic Science and Playworlds

The work of Vygotsky (through the work of Alexander Luria) leads us, also, to romantic science. We start this section of the paper by stressing that there is no need, here, to nest some of CHAT work within romantic science or *visa-versa*; nor to decide if they can or cannot be considered to be contrasting, as, perhaps, romantic science is too broad to be considered a method. These discussions are not uninteresting, but our goal in this paper is to place two very different CHR studies of inclusion in elementary school classrooms side by side, in an effort to unite in dialogue CHR scholars and, so, a body of CHR work consisting of studies that hope to foster inclusivity in elementary school classrooms.

Inna wrote the section on CHAT, above, on her own. Beth will, now, first introduce playworlds as a specific and unique romantic science method, and use this introduction to take us to a brief discussion of romantic science. Keeping our voices distinct at this point, just as each author will present their own studies in the following

sections of the paper, on their own, is important in relation to the goals of the paper: we are not trying to merge methods but to create a dialogue.

Playworlds and romantic science

Playworlds (Lindqvist, 1995) are a form of adult-child joint play in which play is combined with art or science (Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2011). Playworlds both call out for (when they are studied), and can become, (Ferholt, 2009; Ferholt, 2018) a form of romantic science (Ferholt et al., in press). By this we mean that playworlds challenge the divide between method and object in conventional social science (Ferholt, 2009). Classical science cannot make playworlds available for analysis in their full dynamic complexity. Simultaneously, playworlds, which can be described as the common denominator of play and art (Lindqvist, 1995), and which are also a scientific method in and of themselves, can make themselves available for analysis in their full dynamic complexity. Thus, playworlds can help us to present romantic science from two angles.

The term *playworld* comes from the creative pedagogy of play, a preschool pedagogy designed by the Swedish scholar, Gunilla Lindqvist, in the 1990's (Lindqvist, 1995); and the International Playworld Network (IPWNW) has developed the term over their twenty years of working together to create and study playworlds (Ferholt et al., 2023; Ferholt et al., in press; Playworld of Creative Research, 2021). Playworlds have been shown to support a host of important aspects of development, as well to make many phenomena visible and so available for study, and playworlds can be studied in a variety of ways (Ferholt et al., 2023; Ferholt et al., in press). However, the challenge of studying playworlds is that they are each unique, and their uniqueness is one of their defining characteristics.

To explain this quality of playworlds, it is helpful to understand playworlds as ways of being¹ (Ferholt et al., in press). As discussed in depth in Kiyotaka Miyazaki's Japanese playworld studies (Ferholt et al., in press), playworlds emerge when teachers and caregivers, who have been developing their unique practices at their sites, encounter children, seniors, artists, imaginary characters, and also, sometimes, university-based researchers, who have each been developing their unique personal history of life. Each playworld is a unique product of people gathering in a certain place at a certain time; and the uniqueness of playworlds emerges from the personal histories in which people have encountered worlds, culture, and other people.

Playworlds as ways of being, thus, require of researcher participants who are scientists a scientific method that can study uniqueness. Romantic science focuses on the uniqueness of things, people, and events. Luria wrote two books that are prime and seminal examples of romantic science: *The Mind of a Mnemonist* (1968) and *The Man with a Shattered World* (1972). Oliver Sacks is another famous practitioner of romantic science. If classical scientific texts are analytic, these romantic scientific texts are biographical, Sacks explains (1999).

¹ Heidegger (1962) allows us to understand ways of being as ways of changing the world through people's actions toward the world, on the one hand; and ways of changing selves through the world's influencing us, on the other hand (see Chapter Two and Introduction of Ferholt et al., in press).

Romantic science and the case-history

A key aspect of romantic science is to elaborate case-histories. Case-histories keep events such as playworlds alive (see Ferholt, 2018). And these words of Luria's can explain why these case histories are essential: "Truly scientific observation is not merely pure description of separate facts. Its main goal is to view an event from as many perspectives as possible ..." (Luria, 1979 (The Making of Mind), pp. 177-178, as quoted in Sacks, 1990). This is a powerful starting point for understanding the role of science, which, Luria explains, can be achieved by combining the aims of classical science with those of romantic science. "When done properly, observation accomplishes the classical aim of explaining facts, while not losing sight of the romantic aim of preserving the manifold richness of the subject" (Luria et al., 2006, p. 178).

Two of Oliver Sack's books, *Awakenings* (1999) and *On the Move: A Life* (2015), offer particularly concise examples and discussions of how romantic science works. Sacks explains in *Awakenings*: "There is nothing alive which is not individual: our health is ours; our diseases are ours; our reactions are ours" (1999, p. 304). Sacks writes here of diseases, but we can apply his words to playworlds: "Diseases have a character of their own, but they also partake of our character; we have a character of our own, but we also partake of the world's character: character is monadic or microcosmic, worlds within worlds within worlds, worlds which express worlds" (1999, p. 613). We too consider it to be the case that playworlds and "(e)verything real and concrete, in a sense, has a history and a life" (p. 315). We therefore try to create "a perfectly shaped and detailed history, (or disclosure), or biography (of unique playworlds), an integral combination of science and art" (p. 315).

In studying playworlds and studying with playworlds, we pursue "the dream of a novelist and a scientist combined" (1987 (forward to Luria's *The Man with a Shattered World*), p. xii; as quoted in Cole, 1996, p. 346). As playworld participants and researchers, we are "(r)omantics in science (who) want neither to split living reality into its elementary components nor to represent the wealth of life's concrete events as abstract models that lose the properties of the phenomena themselves" (Luria, 1979 (The Making of Mind), p. 174; as quoted in Cole, 1996, p. 344). These rather abstract points will become concrete in the Trolls' Playworld description below.

CHAT: A Study of a Classroom in a Daisy School

Study Context

Daisy (pseudonym) is a suburban public school for Kindergarten through Grade 5 located in the Midwest of the United States. Like many other public schools in the U.S., Daisy school had been subjected (at the time of this study) to a series of educational reforms. These reforms included large-scale assessments (Verger et al., 2019), science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) initiatives (Maltese et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2022), and inclusive education (Stepaniuk, 2020). These federal initiatives, combined with the state's and the school's histories, significantly shaped the lives of students and teachers in the classrooms (Stepaniuk, 2020). Despite being only a

few years old, Daisy school was positioned as a “STEM-inclusive school” by the school district, resembling the national school profile of the U.S. where the majority of teachers are white, speak English as their first language, and teach a racially, linguistically, and ability-diverse student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Daisy school had nearly 700 students, with 25% coming from families with incomes below the poverty level.

Methods and Participants

Inna spent four months in an elementary classroom observing and learning how general and special education teachers navigated their roles to support students’ diverse needs. A combination of classroom observations, interviews, and video recordings of classroom teaching provided rich accounts of life in the classroom. Casey (pseudonym) was a general education teacher with more than fifteen years of teaching experience in kindergarten and elementary-grade classrooms. In Daisy school, Casey’s classroom was known as the “classroom with behavior kids” because, as she explained, 12 out of 23 students were identified as having emotional-behavioral, learning, and speech needs. Throughout the day, Margaret (pseudonym), a special educator with more than ten years of teaching experience, supported Casey’s classroom with whole-class and small-group instruction. Margaret also provided one-on-one support to students identified as having behavioral and learning challenges.

Classroom as Activity Arena

Casey’s classroom, like any classroom, was a complex, non-linear site of human activities (Naraian, 2011; Stepaniuk, 2020). Despite having years of experience, both educators acknowledged the challenges in navigating students’ diverse needs, including behavior, socio-emotional, and learning needs. To manage the classroom, Casey and Margaret implemented daily routines and practices. For example, in examining the morning routine – a whole-class read-aloud activity – through the CHAT lens, it became apparent how the institutionalized elements of the activity worked together to produce specific experiences and identities in a school (see Excerpt 1, Figure 1):

Excerpt 1:

1. Casey: *I need every person in this room to sit on their bottom, crisscrossed. The reason I’m asking you to sit crisscrossed is so that you don’t take up a lot of space and bump into your neighbours. Please put your hands in your lap.*
2. While trying to find his assigned seat on the carpet, a student accidentally bumps into a peer.
3. Casey: *Watch out, scoot your feet in.*
4. Casey grabs a book from a shelf.
5. Casey: *Jabari (student pseudonym), I told you to sit crisscrossed. Use your carpet seat or you are going to sit in the peace corner.*
6. Margaret takes a chair and sits outside the rug area behind Jabari.
7. Without saying anything, Casey turns her body and faces the “Sitting on the Carpet Success Criteria” anchor chart on the wall (see Image 1).

8. Several students follow and move their bodies to face the anchor chart.
9. Margaret taps on Jabari's shoulder. When he turns, she points with her finger to the anchor chart.
10. Jabari follows by moving his body toward the pointed direction and staring at the anchor chart.
11. Casey breaks the silence: *Alright, let's read a story. We've already lost a lot of time.*

Image 1.

Seating on the Carpet Success Criteria

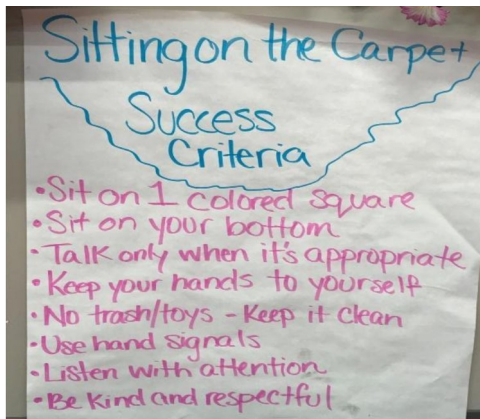
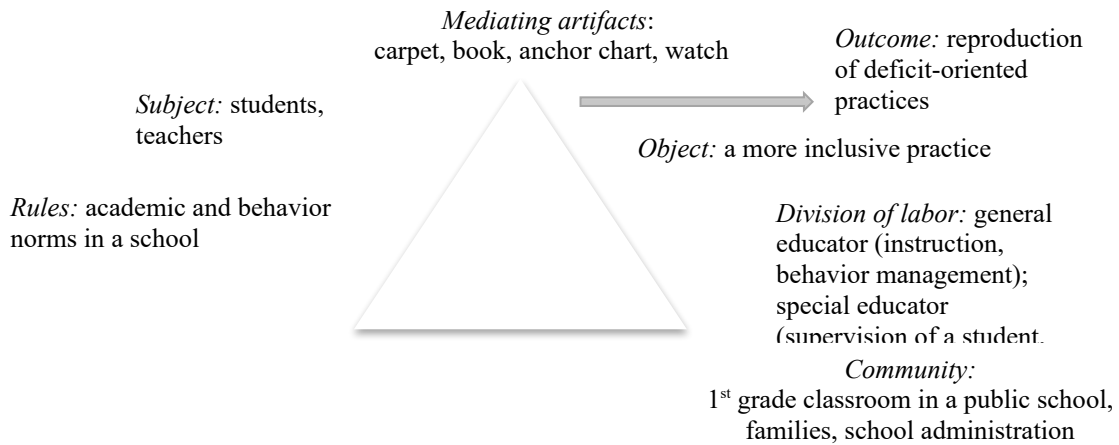


Image description: The anchor chart is made of white paper and features blue and pink writing. At the top, in blue, it states “Sitting on the Carpet Success Criteria”. Below, in pink, is a bullet-point list that reads as follows: sit on one colored square, sit on your bottom, talk only when it’s appropriate, keep your hands to yourself, no trash slash toys dash keep it clean, use hand signals, listen with attention, be kind and respectful.

Utilizing CHAT’s language and its analytical constructs, Casey’s classroom can be conceptualized as the activity arena where cultural tools (such as the carpet, anchor chart, and the teacher’s watch for tracking time) and social elements (including general and special educators) mediate the relationship between the object (a more inclusive practice) and the subject (the students, teachers). The subject is an integral part of the community (a 1st-grade classroom in a public school) where established rules (academic and behavior norms in a school) mediate the relationships among its members, including Jabari, the teachers, and other students. Simultaneously, the division of labor between special and general education teachers regulates the relationship between the community (the 1st-grade classroom) and an object (the attempt at more inclusive practice). These elements do not operate in isolation; they interact and, ultimately, influence each other and the extent to which the intended outcome (a more inclusive practice) is achieved (Martínez-Álvarez, 2023; Sannino & Engeström, 2018) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.
Classroom Activity Arena



Mapping out each element of the whole-class read-aloud activity allows us to examine the relationships among and across the activity elements and determine the degree to which they promoted inclusive classroom environment.

Romantic Science: A Study of the Trolls' Playworld

Study Context

The Trolls' Playworld was developed as a part of an ethnographic study of playworlds and took place over the course of one school year. Participants included a public elementary school kindergarten class of 25 children (aged 4–6 years at the start of the project), the class's teacher, three teachers from two of the three other kindergarten classes in the public elementary school, one freelance teaching artist, and two visual artists. The artists contributed photographs and video footage of the playworld on three separate occasions.

Methods and Participants

The playworld was in part initiated by the teachers as a means for them to learn more about the practice of Pedagogical Documentation (from the ECEC approach of Reggio Emilia (Rinaldi, 2006)). Data sources included field notes and audio recordings of teacher's meetings and rehearsals with the teaching artist. Handwritten notes, photographs, and video recordings of class meetings and playworld sessions were produced by all participants and were incorporated into the pedagogical documentation practice.

An Event in a Playworld

One of the children in the class, Joseph, was having a difficult time during the year of the Trolls' Playworld, a playworld in which two teachers appeared in the classroom as

trolls, and which was generated in part from a story about trolls. Joseph's difficulties were such that he had a paraprofessional aid assigned to him to keep him from disrupting the class or hurting himself. Joseph did not often participate in the playworld activity, either because he had to be taken out of the room by the aid or because he chose not to join the activity.

However, shortly before the last playworld session was to occur, a classroom discussion took place. Sarafina, Beth, and all the children were present. During this discussion, it became clear that Joseph had actually been engaged with the playworld activity all along. Joseph's aid was absent on the day of the discussion. He had been intermittently lying on Sarafina's lap, restless and anxious. Suddenly, Joseph raised his hand, sat up on a chair, and gave a long explanation about an aspect of the playworld that seemed to be about hiding, fear, and death.

As the children were apt to do in the Trolls' Playworld, a class-wide philosophical discussion about important issues was taking place. Sarafina helped the children take turns speaking and asking questions to clarify what someone was saying. These conversations were often about some detail in the playworld (the only discussion prompt was for the children who had participated in the playworld that day to tell the others what had happened). The conversation on this day was partly about ghosts. Joseph, whom we had thought was not following the playworld activity very closely during the year, was now explaining to his classmates that he had been hiding behind a copy machine in the hall for many days and that he had very strong ("supersonic") ears, so he always heard the trolls arriving, even if he was not in the room for many of the playworld sessions. Then Joseph spoke at length to his classmates about ghosts and trolls. Joseph discussed: how the trolls had interacted with the other children in the class, pranks the troll played on the children; if ghosts and trolls are real; kindness; death; fear; etc. His tone, expressions, and gestures established him as an expert to his peers and the adults in the room, on all these interrelated topics.

The adults found the discussion difficult to follow but the children began asking Joseph questions that made it appear that they understood every word. The children asked Joseph to call on them, to answer their questions, and to explain things to them. In a very short time, Joseph moved from being severely disruptive of the playworld activity and other activities in the room, to being the agreed-upon playworld authority, and he was still leading the discussion after thirteen minutes when it was time to end the conversation for lunch.

During the discussion, Sarafina repeatedly looked over at Beth. In joint analysis, Sarafina and Beth agreed that this was in part because Sarafina wanted confirmation that the conversation, and Joseph's transformation, was as amazing as she thought it was. Over the course of the conversation, Sarafina explicitly supported Joseph, both verbally and physically, in speaking, calling on the other children himself, and moving freely about the circle, listening to his classmates when they spoke.

Sarafina: *Joseph, you want to say something? What do you want to say?*

Joseph: *It's just that ghosts are spirits and when spirits are ghosts it makes* (Sarafina looks over at Beth to mark this moment) *it makes it* (Sarafina moves her arm to Joseph's back

and looks at him speaking as he sits up straight in his chair) *look like this idea of ghosts* (Sarafina has removed her hand so Joseph is sitting without being touched) *but if you went behind the copy machine and you went like in the office to see him you knew what was going on — Nigel, wake up!* (This last part is almost shouted at a child who has fallen asleep while sitting in the circle.)

S: *He's very tired. Go ahead* (tapping Joseph's arm).

(Then, as the children laugh, Sarafina explains that Nigel lost his tooth, that he's probably tired from that, etc.)

S: *But go ahead, tell us about the spirits ...*

(Joseph stutters as the children wiggle and talk, and then Sarafina interrupts Joseph)

S: *Wait, wait. Time out. Is this fair to Joseph? We should be giving Joseph the attention he deserves. Go ahead, Joseph.*

J: *So, if I was there, I would look behind the copy machine because some ghosts like to hide behind stuff, you can't see it but, if, if, if you think it's a ghost, it might seem like a ghost but it's not what you think. It's not what you think. If it — If you think it's real, it's actually not real, because things cannot be, and if things are things, they are things. And some things are not as special as you seem. Some you love* (he makes a heart with his hands), *some you don't love* (he opens his hands, palms up). *That's life.*

(The adults may not know what Joseph is talking about, but we are paying as intense attention to Joseph as the children are. His tone and delivery are commanding and intriguing.)

Allison: *I have a question for Joseph.*

S: *You have a question for Joseph? OK, ask him a question.*

(Allison asks a long question about the color of ghosts and how we see them or not, and about scariness.)

S: *Did anything else happen?*

J: *I have a question to add to her.*

S: *OK, ask her.*

J: *So, ghosts ...* Joseph speaks for a while, more questions are asked of him, and he answers each one with great oratory skill and complexity. His authority is unmistakable to us all. The talk continues in this way until lunchtime, but the children's level of sustained attention indicates that it could have continued for quite a bit longer.

For Sarafina, this was the moment that made the struggles to sustain the playworld activity “all worthwhile”. She called it a “transformation from start to end”. She later said of the class during this event and of Joseph: “So amazing. How they articulated themselves and spoke to each other with such inference and depth. Unbelievable, incredible, magical. The miracle of Joseph” (1 February 2019, playworld meeting). Sarafina attributed this “miracle” in part to chaos. She said she could see the interweaving of fantasy and reality by the children in her class when she was in the role. The children were mischievous, but she could not leave her place to do anything when she was stuck in her role. She said that she always says: “Chaos is learning”, quoting Mahatma Gandhi, when people visit her class, but now she had to remind herself of this very truth: “They needed the chaos to learn. Being in character made me say it to myself. I could not come out of character, but it was OK” (February 1, 2019, playworld meeting). For Sarafina, Joseph's voice was raised and heard by his classmates due (in great part) to an interweaving of fantasy and reality in chaos.

This event is first analyzed in Ferholt, 2019 and is also discussed in Lecusay et al., 2022. In all of these papers the analysis is primarily shaped by the first discussion (at least the first discussion by IPWNW members) of playworlds as inclusive, in which Ferholt and Rainio discuss “radical inclusion” in playworlds (Ferholt & Rainio, 2016). This 2016 discussion of inclusivity and playworlds, in turn, is generated using data collected and initially analysed in US playworlds (Ferholt, 2009, 2019), but is based in Rainio’s work on agency, ambivalence, and engagement (see for example Rainio's book on playworlds from 2010 and Rainio et al., 2013, 2017, 2021).

CHAT and Romantic Science in Support of Inclusive Classrooms

By juxtaposing our studies, we identified perspectives, tools, and insights that might have been overlooked without this co-authorship opportunity. Each CHR approach – CHAT and romantic science – uses distinct units of analysis, principles, characteristics, and elements to study the complexities of social interactions. However, we have found that when these approaches are discussed in dialogue (see Table 1), they can contribute to a better understanding and, hopefully, the promotion of inclusive classrooms in at least three ways.

Table 1.
CHAT and Romantic Science in Support of Inclusive Classrooms

	CHAT CLASSROOM ACTIVITY	Shared Object Fostering Inclusive Classrooms	Romantic Science PLAYWORLDS
<i>Unit of analysis</i>	Subject, rules, community, object, outcome, mediating artifacts, division of labor.	❖ Studying complexities of social interactions.	The unit of analysis is unique to each unique playworld.
<i>Key principles, characteristics, and elements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Activity is culturally and historically mediated. ● Contradictions are driving forces for change. 	❖ Understanding classrooms as cultural communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● RS is biographic not analytic. ● Elaborate case-histories used. ● Goal: to view an event from multiple perspectives. ● Everything real and concrete has a history and a life.
<i>Complexities</i>	1. Map out and examine classroom activities in a broader cultural	❖ Conduct cultural-historical activity analysis to reveal its structures, relations,	1. RS is the integral combination of science and art. 2. RS avoids abstract

	<p>and historical context.</p> <p>2. Identify activity mediating artifacts.</p> <p>3. Uncover contradictions to understand classroom inequities.</p>	and processes.	models that lose the properties of the phenomena themselves.
<i>Dismantling inequities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do activity participants respond to cultural conflicts? ● How do teachers conceptualize their roles and what tools do they use to foster inclusivity? ● How is attention given to cultural patterns over time? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Challenge implicit beliefs. ❖ Collaboratively construct inclusive meanings. ❖ Reexamine cultural practices and roles to foster inclusive changes in the classroom. 	Romantic science can either challenge or fortify inequities, aiming for either change or stability. It's emphasis on considering multiple perspectives, theoretically, in the long run, it might support distribution of power in science activities.

First, romantic science and CHAT employ distinct units of analysis and principles to examine the intricacies of social interactions. In Casey's classrooms, the focal point of analysis was a classroom that was viewed as an activity arena, whereas in Trolls' Playworld, the emphasis was on the uniqueness of the playworld and the relationships that the playworld fosters.

Second, each CHR approach offers different foci and tools to reveal structures and processes that often remain invisible and might mask inequities in cultural settings such as classrooms. For example, CHAT helps to map out the classroom activity arena and examine its elements within a broader cultural and historical context in which they operate. In Daisy school, the concept of what it meant to be a "good student" was ableist. Students were expected to adhere to specific behavioral norms, and penalties were imposed for non-compliance. A carpet served as an instrument to organize and manage students' bodies and behavior. Students were expected to sit in a particular way – "crisscrossed" (Excerpt 1, Turn 5), "scoot" [their] feet in (Excerpt 1, Turn 3) – within their seat (a colored square) and be attentive. Those who failed to conform were asked "to sit in the peace corner" (Excerpt 1, Turn 3).

Moreover, the carpet was used to establish boundaries between children and adults, reinforcing the teacher's role and power in the classroom. Students were asked to sit on the carpet, while teachers were seated in chairs raised above them. Sitting on the carpet also implied being quiet and listening to the teacher, shaping a restrictive sense of belonging and behavior management in a classroom. The carpet symbolized instructional time rather than a time for students to play (see Image 1). For Jabari, who identified as having dis/abilities, these expectations marginalized his body and ways of being. This deficit-oriented, ableist understanding of student participation compromised the intent to teach inclusively, perpetuating the standardization and homogenization of students' needs.

By emphasizing adherence to the “sitting on the carpet success criteria”, educators encouraged a “one size fits all approach”, a long-standing issue in education (Artiles & Kozleski, 2016; Baglieri et al., 2011; Skrtic, 1995).

Additionally, by utilizing CHAT’s principle of contradiction, it becomes possible to critically examine the often-overlooked classroom roles and practices, revealing barriers to inclusivity and providing opportunities for equitable changes. Casey’s classroom serves as illustration that re-examining teachers’ understanding of inclusive practice and re-envisioning their roles are crucial for Daisy school to recognize both barriers and possibilities in achieving genuine inclusivity. A division of labor between general and special educators contradicted the inclusive goal in Casey’s classroom. Margaret was designated as an “aid” with a specific focus on managing “at risk” and “behavior” students. Her role during a read-aloud involved adhering to Casey’s behavior protocol, reinforcing the perceptions of “special educators being in charge of special kids”. This perpetuated hierarchies among educators and students.

While radical inclusive education challenges such professional arrangements, advocating for an equitable distribution of roles and responsibilities in a classroom (Kozleski, 2020), playworlds emerge as a means of including both young children and their teachers in designing a portion of their classroom’s time and space, including the distribution of roles and responsibilities in this time and space. In the case of the Trolls’ Playworld, a child, following their own and fellow students’ design of a playworld discussion, took over the teaching of the class. Romantic science allowed the researchers who were studying the Trolls’ Playworld to promote this shift in the moment, to come to better understand how this shift came about, and to promote such shifts in the future.

Romantic science allowed the researchers who were studying the Trolls playworld to understand an instance of an inclusive classroom from within the trajectory of one year of one child’s, Joseph’s, school life; and through analysis that was led by one teacher, Sarafina in her own classroom. After choosing a unit of, and instance for, analysis, using the teachers and researchers’ collaborative intuition; the researchers were then able to support Sarafina in continuing analysis with her students, playworld artist collaborators, co-teachers, and even her principal (at one point in the study). Sarafina came to understand Joseph’s voice to have been raised and heard by his classmates due to an interweaving of fantasy and reality in chaos. In subsequent playworld studies in this school, it appears that, when teachers are teaching with other teachers whom (they say) they love and trust, they are less afraid to allow the children in their classes to stop separating fantasy and reality in the ways the teachers do not usually do – but which the adult artists in playworlds do more often. And this does, indeed, appear to lead to students who are excluded, albeit unintentionally, usually; being included during playworlds (see Ferholt, 2019 and Ferholt et al., in press).

Thus, the above discussed CHR approaches – CHAT and romantic science – can each be valuable tools in pursuing truly inclusive classroom communities. However, as indicated by the table, it is challenging to discern how the two approaches can be brought into dialogue. Questions like “Where is the overlap?” and “How can this process of trying to create a dialogue / “inclusive coauthoring” be of use?” confronted us repeatedly. Nevertheless, we persevered in answering each other’s questions about our studies and

explaining the studies to each other in more detail. One concise example can demonstrate the type of generative insight that emerged from the dialogue we created with this paper.

In response to Beth's study, Inna questioned whether the aid's assignment was due to the student's difficulties in meeting classroom expectations. Beth, in being cautious not to criticize teachers in her research, had avoided an "expert" role but, in doing so, had inadvertently overlooked a crucial detail, i.e. the paraprofessional's absence during the event that she was studying. Inna's comment prompted Beth to realize this oversight.

Despite their different approaches preventing a joint study, Beth and Inna's collaboration in publishing proved essential for generating this insight. If she had not been experiencing the proximity of her own study to Inna's related study, or if the comment had been made by a less-immersed interlocutor, Beth would have likely dismissed the comment and, thus, missed the opportunity to allow the comment to impact her thinking. Further, the ongoing process of "inclusive coauthoring" with Inna eventually led Beth to an even more groundbreaking realization concerning Joseph's participation.

Inna, supported by CHAT, saw the paraprofessional assigned to Joseph as, in part, a restriction lifted on the day described. Meanwhile, Beth's focus on supporting the teachers and respecting Joseph for his leadership initially blinded her to this contradiction in the class. When prompted by CHAT-supported questions, Beth reflected on her role in the inclusive activity and realized she had overlooked the extent of Joseph's competence. Through the dialogue with Inna's study and Inna's coauthor question, Beth developed the ability to recognize that she had not fully appreciated Joseph's contributions, particularly how he worked with the trolls and ghosts in the playworld after the discussion, how his expertise guided the playworld later in the year. Motivated by this realization, Beth revisited her data to explore where Joseph had led the class in this playworld after the discussion transcribed above.

Concluding Thoughts

Through our collaboration, we have deepened our understanding of ways that CHR research can contribute to the study of inclusive classrooms. Engaging in constructive dialogue, we challenged each other's ideas while respecting each other's methods. By juxtaposing segments of our studies, both aimed at supporting inclusive classrooms within the CHR framework, we sought to integrate the typically often separate endeavors of romantic science and CHAT studies.

Motivated by our shared desire for change, we embarked on this co-authorship despite our distinct approaches to our respective fields of study. This "inclusive coauthoring" represents a departure from our past experiences. As advocates for addressing inequities through CHR, we hold that creating solidarity across differences is necessary in academia as well as outside of academia and suggest that writing papers with unexpected coauthors can be a powerful tool for those of us striving to leverage CHR's potential to promote inclusivity in schools.

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