

FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT: A CALL FOR THE RADICALIZATION OF PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS

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Abstract

The paper provides a critical analysis of the Inclusive Community Project Geldermalsen, in central Netherlands through the lens of Freirean theory and the concepts of dialogue, praxis, and conscientization, thereby establishing an interesting dialogue between critical disability studies and critical pedagogy. On a practical level, the applied participatory methodology of the project and the shaping of new identities on an individual and community level are discussed. On a theoretical level, the research tries to show how critical disability studies can help to refine critical pedagogy through the integration of ability diversity, and in return how Freire's rootedness in materialism allows for the reconsideration of the definition of disability and the agency of people with disabilities.

Keywords: community development, inclusion, critical pedagogy, dis/ability

FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT: A CALL FOR THE RADICALIZATION OF PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS

Research suggests that modern day Europe is facing numerous serious challenges including migration and political reforms that are changing the face of the community and community living (Smets, 2011). Processes such as the strong decentralization of the health care system in the Netherlands in recent years have led to a reinterpretation of the notion of community, as well as empowerment, participation, and active citizenship in the interest of the state, shifting collective responsibilities to the individual, the family, and the community as moral responsibilities (Ledwith, 2001; Brants et al., 2018). In many cases communities are unable to respond efficiently to these swift changes in the system, leaving the public suffering from increasingly insufficient care services. Already marginalized groups in society such as people with disabilities account hereby to the most vulnerable recipients of the reforms (Emerson, 2007; WHO, 2011). In light of these misalignments between system, policies, and practices as Schippers et al. (2015) would characterize it, community development and the question of how it is to be implemented are of increasing importance to European societies. In many countries, such as the UK, community development is constituted as a depoliticized activity of the state failing to challenge oppression and to promote social justice (Purcell, 2011). Purcell (2011) therefore emphasizes the need to take a more radical approach and develop a more critical praxis. In cases where community developers adapt a more radical take on community development, they often draw inspiration from Paulo Freire's (1998, 2005) works on critical pedagogy and critical core concepts such as dialogue, praxis and conscientization. This paper attempts to follow Goodley's (2011) call for a dialogue between critical pedagogy and disability politics by performing an analysis of a community project in the Netherlands that focused on the inclusion of people with disabilities.

The Inclusive Community project Geldermalsen, funded by the province of Geldermalsen, is part of a series of community-based participatory projects initiated by the organization Disability Studies in Nederland (DSiN) that attempt to set an example of how com-

munity development in support of the disability movement can be put in practice. Since its year of inception in 2014, the project tried to foster social inclusion of people with disabilities in the community by stimulating participation and accessibility (DSiN, 2016). Following the notion of “Nothing about us without us,” residents with disabilities were actively involved in the form- and goal shaping of the project as well as the actual organization and implementation of activities (DSiN, 2016). Consequently, this paper will explore the following questions:

- What aspects of the project in Geldermalsen can be improved from the perspective of critical pedagogy (with focus on Freire’s theories) and literature on participatory research?
- How can critical pedagogy be informed through critical disability studies?

By moving these questions to the forefront, this paper seeks to address the critique (Beckett, 2015) against Freire’s (2005) pedagogy as being incapable of providing viable solutions for people with disabilities in practice. This information aims to indicate how critical disability studies can contribute to overcoming certain limitations in the pedagogy of Freire and how Freire’s theoretical grounding in materialism can help to resolve and advance critical thinking on the definition and liberation of the disabled body.

METHOD

STUDY DESIGN

A qualitative case study of participants in the community project Geldermalsen was undertaken to gain in-depth knowledge of the experiences and needs for the community living in Geldermalsen. The study adapted a natural case study design thus aiming to interact with participants in their natural environment without creating an extraordinary setting in the context of the research project (Abma & Stake, 2014). It is a good strategy to gain in-depth knowledge in real-life contexts (Abma & Stake, 2014).

DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative data was obtained in the Netherlands from 15 semi-structured interviews with seven community residents with intellectual

and/or developmental disabilities, two of whom were actively involved in the planning of the community project; four with the project coordinators from DSiN; and four with other residents of the community.

Before each interview, participants were asked to indicate their preferences for the interview setting. Except for one case where the researcher spoke to the participants via Skype, the interviews were held in person at the interviewees' homes. Participants were contacted via email and the interviews conducted by the lead researcher. All participants signed an informed consent form, and responses have been anonymized. The length of each interview was between 40—90 minutes and the language of the interviews Dutch. The interviews covered a wide variety of topics including aspects of inclusion, participation, empowerment, and sustainability.

The 15 interviews were transcribed and translated, and the transcripts served as the basic data set for the data analysis.

Moreover, the data set was complemented with information from participant observations. During the research phase the lead author attended numerous events that were organized in the context of the “Inclusive Gemeente Geldermalsen,” such as the obstacle tour and creative brainstorm evenings on the meaning of belonging. Taking part in these community events was considered helpful in several ways: first, it enabled the lead researcher to gain a more holistic understanding of the dynamics present in the community of Geldermalsen. Second, having the opportunity to engage with people from the community in less formal settings helped to overcome to some extent the perceived distance between researcher and participants.

DATA ANALYSIS

Ultimately, the collection of the qualitative data gathered from the interviews and participant observations was followed by an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and inductive category development (Mayring, 2000). From each interview main topics were extracted and relevant data and quotes clustered under these core themes. The data was further contextualized and analyzed through an in-depth literature review. Vaismoradi and Turunen (2013) argue that the better the researcher's understanding of the context that influence the stories

of research participants, the greater is his or her understanding of what is going on. Therefore, in the process of data analysis, the impressions gathered during participant observation were of key importance as they formed the basis for the context within which the available literature and interview transcripts were examined. A quality check and—to improve the validity of the data analysis—a member check were sent to the interviewees, and peer briefing was done (Barbour, 2001). The member check served to make sure that participants in the research felt that their stories were not misrepresented with interviewees only suggesting minor or no adjustments. The peer briefing was performed to detect potential incoherencies in the data analysis.

FINDINGS

The findings will be presented under the three overarching themes that emerged from the analysis: inclusion, participation, and empowerment.

INCLUSION

In the outset of the project, DSiN defined an inclusive community as a place where all its members have equal access and possibilities in the domains of living, work, education, and political participation (DSiN, 2016). Data from the interviews suggests that residents experience different levels and challenges to inclusion in the community depending on their disability.

As such the greatest concern in terms of inclusion for respondents who are wheelchair users is linked to the low accessibility of public places in their environment such as supermarkets and roads, which are partially built too narrow or are blocked. Contrarily, interviewees with intellectual disabilities seem to struggle more with social barriers: It was remarkable that they mostly socialized with colleagues at their activity center and their housemates with disabilities in the supported living schemes where they lived. The only social contact with non-disabled people appeared to be with the care staff and family members.

To the question of how inclusion of people with disabilities could be improved, one interviewee pointed at the necessity of making disability visible again. As outlined by Brants et al. (2018), people with

disabilities in the Netherlands suffered from strong segregation during the 1970s and 1980s as they were institutionalized in separated homes. Even though policy changes stimulated a reallocation of people with disabilities into mainstream communities, integration on a social level remains a challenge. The following statement by a participant reflects this observation:

I remember the time when there were not many services—such as activity centers—offered for people with disabilities. Back then, for instance, people with intellectual disabilities lived with their parents for a very long time. But you could see them walking on the streets and everybody knew them. When you passed them on the street you greeted them and maybe had a quick chat. But in the 1970s things changed when specialized schools and centers were introduced, and all people with disabilities suddenly disappeared. As a result, you didn't see disability anymore and you also didn't get to know people with disabilities. In this context it makes sense that when you now meet a person with a disability it suddenly becomes uncomfortable.

She concludes, “It is a case of unknown makes unloved” and argues that this can only be changed if encounters between abled and disabled people are stimulated. Furthermore, it is important that these encounters come about as naturally as possible.

Considering the public's general attitude towards inclusion in Geldermalsen, interviewees stated that the relatively low educational level for Dutch standards as well as moderate income levels among community members had a negative impact on people's receptiveness for community projects such as the DSiN project.

However, as an aside one of the project coordinators commented that the inclusion of people with disabilities is a far less controversial topic in the community than the integration of the refugees, who only recently had been placed into the local community:

The residents are more sympathetic and more inclined to help people with disabilities because it is about “their own” residents. I have experienced that people feel attacked and react aggressively when you tell them that you are in favour of the provision of benefits for refugees.

I was never confronted with negative experiences or received comments, such as “We don’t want that here,” when I was advocating for the “Inclusive community” project. For me it was an eye opener to realize that if in this moment I would emphasize that an inclusive community in essence means that everybody should be part of it I would get a lot of problems.

From a Freirean perspective dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person depositing ideas in another (his “Banking Pedagogy”) nor can it be interpreted as a simple exchange of ideas. True dialogued only exists when partners engage, when there is a positive connection between people but also a constant drive to transform themselves and their reality (Freire, 2005).

PARTICIPATION: MOVING TOWARDS DIALOGUE AND PRAXIS

To create an inclusive community, the project leaders believe that people with and without disabilities need to be involved in the process. The two main project coordinators were non-disabled citizens and both lived in the community. Their methodological approach was to reach out to residents with disabilities to actively involve them in the identification of issues, the subsequent organization of activities, and the stimulation of leadership (DSiN, 2016; De Vos, 2015). A main goal was to facilitate encounters between people to promote a movement that would be upheld by the community itself and would continue even after the official end of the project.

All community members—disabled or not—were invited to each organized event. Accessibility was a key factor in the shaping of the event, and various techniques were applied to create participatory arenas, e.g., drawing, alongside verbal communication, was chosen as a method to facilitate the dialogue between the participants. In this way citizens with speech impairment could contribute more easily to the discussion.

According to the data, guests generally responded positively to the different methods deployed by the project organizers and considered them to be helpful. However, one interviewee states that despite these efforts some of his housemates with severe intellectual disabilities still

did not feel comfortable joining the gatherings. He explains, “Here at home (you know) the caregivers usually show them pictures to explain things. They don’t expect them to be able to follow a presentation.” Moreover, he mentions crowdedness as a crucial factor that might prevent residents with disabilities from attending gatherings.

Generally, interviewees agreed with the premise of the project that participation of people with disabilities is necessary in the struggle for social change in the community. They brought forward the argument that they are the only ones who truly know the lived experience of disability and are thus also the best suited to help others to understand this lived experience. Observations made by the researcher during events such as the obstacle tour, where residents who used a wheelchair guided the participants through one of the villages to raise awareness on the mobility and accessibility restrictions, reinforced the impression that their participation made a crucial contribution. However, research participants with disabilities also pointed to the limitations of their participation based on willingness or their disability. First of all, the expectation that every person with a disability would suddenly want to become a self-advocate for their rights once there is a project on inclusion in their neighborhood was deemed as unrealistic and unjustified. One participant remarked, for instance, that “everybody should decide themselves whether they want to participate. If they (people with disabilities) are comfortable spending their time on their own (at home) it is their own right to make that decision.”

Secondly, the bodily experience of disability could hamper the actual taking of action. Participants confessed that limited energy resources made them think twice about whether they want to be (further) involved in the project or not. For example, in one instance the project coordinator offered one participant the position of coordinator of a follow-up project in the community. She declined the proposition, explaining that she could not sacrifice the spare time she has left next to her job, which she needs for rest.

EMPOWERMENT AND CONSCIENTIZATION

Overall, the personal experiences of the participants with disabilities in the project varied; some indicated that they remained unin-

spired by the project and doubted its long-term impact. Participants with disabilities who were most involved described their participation as a very empowering and inspiring process. One of them noted that the project had encouraged her to speak more openly about her own disability to others and to engage in critical discussions. During the interview she recalls one event during the project where she met one of the aldermen of the local municipality. He approached her personally to ask her what difficulties she is currently facing in the community, and at the end of the talk gave her his private contact details with the remark that she should feel free to contact him in case she should need help. It was an eye-opening experience, as she never would have expected that such a—in her perception—prominent member of the community would offer his personal help to her. Participants with disabilities also seemed very appreciative of the new contacts they had made with other residents with disabilities through the event.

Among research interviewees without disabilities one described that the project raised her awareness of disability issues and the need for conscious political actions. She explained that for years she has been employing people with disabilities in her primary school. Her motivation was simply based on her personal perception that disability is part of diversity. However, after a talk with the project coordinators she suddenly became aware of the political dimension and symbolic power of her decision and that this should not only be a casual act. At the end of the interview she states that if ever the current employees with disabilities were to resign from their position she would now consciously try to fill the position again by someone with a disability, knowing that this would send out a signal to the students and parents of the school.

A point of critique during the interviews was the lack of transparency inherent in the methodology the project coordinators employed. One participant who had collaborated with them noted that for a long time he did not know who the stakeholders behind the project were and what ends the project was aimed towards.

There was a common agreement between interviewees that long-term empowerment of people with disability could only be reached through representation on a governmental level. It was one of the goals

of the Inclusive Community project Geldermalsen to create a board of advisors in the community that would advocate for disability rights and cooperate with the local government. Unfortunately, this did not succeed. Partially for this reason, research participants doubted the long-term impact of the project.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of the findings will be presented in two parts: The first section will reflect on the general situation of people with disabilities in Geldermalsen and the Inclusive Community project through the lenses of Freirean theory and more contemporary literature on community and identity politics. Specifically, the applicability of the concepts dialogue, praxis, and conscientization will be discussed and in what way they can help to advance the methodology of the Inclusive Community project.

The second section will consider criticism about both critical pedagogy and disability theory and consequently investigate how both fields could complement each other to bring light to contemporary queries concerning disabled identity politics.

INCLUSION AND THE REIMAGINATION OF OPPRESSIVE STRUCTURES

Overall, the observations from the research suggest that the Inclusive Community project in Geldermalsen embodied several of Freire's core principles in its methodologies. Freire (2005) argues: The truth is that the oppressed are not "marginals," are not people living "outside" society. They have always been "inside," inside the structure, which made them "beings for others." The solution is not to "integrate" them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become "beings for themselves" (p. 74).

Here, Freire points out two things: firstly, community development should not be reactionary but revolutionary and, secondly, the problem is not the marginalized individual but the system. The latter idea constitutes the grounding argument of the "social model" that locates the main origin of disability in society and not primarily in the individual (Oliver, 1990), an idea that was also incorporated in the

project in Geldermalsen. The project tried to raise awareness, e.g., of the obstacles the current local infrastructure in the community poses to the mobility and accessibility of community members with disabilities. Furthermore, it aimed to advocate for structural changes as well as the removal of these physical obstacles, thereby locating the cause for the lack of integration and the responsibility for social change in the society and not in the individual.

Moreover, the DSiN project actively tried to stimulate processes of reimagining the community instead of just adapting it. Observations by the participants on the seeming invisibility of people with disabilities in the community feed into the conceptualization of people with disabilities as liminal persons in a process of losing or being without a social status in society. By defying all social categories or conventions they are stuck in a liminal space that other members of society find difficult to interact with, their structural invisibility is maintained, and they are ultimately rendered to non-persons (Willet & Deegan, 2001). Many of the inclusive community project events could be considered to have tried to address this state of liminality in Geldermalsen and to stimulate a critical discourse about belonging. Belonging, as defined by DSiN (2013) “is a state of mind, achieved through ongoing activity where shared spaces of interest and excitement are not only accessed, but also negotiated and ultimately occupied. It is a topic that is open to individual perspectives as well as to the exchange between personal and public perspectives” (p. 2). However, a critical analysis of the Inclusive Community project also gives ground for suggestions of improvement, which will be elaborated in the upcoming paragraph.

DIALOGUE

A problematic aspect about the methodological approach of the project is that contrary to its original objective and slogan, “Nothing about us, without us,” DSiN did not always succeed in engaging and incorporating local opinions, and, for instance, largely pre-defined the concept of an inclusive city in the outset of the project. This raises the question of whether a predetermined vision of liberation introduced from the outside is ultimately paternalistic and thus prone to reproducing the dominant culture instead of empowering the marginalized population, presupposing that the oppressed are incapable of produc-

ing their own vision of liberation (Blackburn, 2000; Gibson, 2006). Empowerment is a complex concept, and scholars have claimed that its meaning and application in our modern day liberalist society is frequently abused; far too often “empowerment” today suggests passivity on the part of the participant—it is something that happens to him/her/ them (Cahill, 2007). Even more problematic is when the discourse of empowerment is mobilized in connection with specifically determined goals or ideals, bringing to mind reform or assimilationist models that hold up ideals which reproduce social hierarchies (Cahill, 2007).

Central to Freire’s idea of empowerment is that it cannot be delivered to the oppressed; outsiders can only facilitate insiders’ struggle to “take” or “achieve” it for themselves (Freire, 2005; Kesby, 2005). Informed by the concept of dialogue, he argues that any implementation of an idea in practice without the teacher and the student maintaining a dialogical relationship is considered an imposition. This, however, does not mean that the teacher is not allowed to have an opinion and should merely function as a facilitator. Freire points out that there is often confusion of authoritarianism with authority (Freire, 2005; Kesby, 2005). He argues that teaching is and should be directive and in this sense it might not be problematic that DSiN presents a pre-defined conceptualization of a model for an inclusive city to the residents of the community—it is clear from the research findings that the project coordinators generally welcomed input from local residents not only in order to envision the new community but also during the organization of events. However, considering the comment of one of the project participants who did not know for a very long time who the stakeholders behind the project were and to what end the project should lead indicates a lack of transparency that is crucial for full ownership and for the sustainability of a participatory community project. Freire emphasizes that in a dialogical relationship both the teacher and the student learn, thereby blurring the line between their two roles. Teachers may in fact “know” about an object of study, but are able to re-know the object through the student’s different knowledge of it as well (Au, 2007; Shor & Freire, 1987). In this case, DSiN’s in-depth research and engagement with the topic of disability studies allows them to have theoretical knowledge about disability studies; however, disabled people’s lived experience as marginalized individuals in the commu-

nity can inform DSiN's project to contest and further shape notions of inclusion and accessibility. This process requires a transparent set up in a project, where knowledge is openly presented and exchanged—it appears these conditions could have been enforced more radically in Geldermalsen.

CONSCIENTIZATION AS A MOVE TOWARDS EMPOWERMENT

Closely linked to dialogue is the process of conscientization, which Freire defines as an awakening of the critical consciousness, as a “coming to terms with the roots of your oppression as you come into your subjecthood,” as well as the awareness of one's own context and condition as a subject and agent (Au, 2007; Freire, 1970; Shor & Freire, 1987). Conscientization happens in the form of a collective experience (Freire, 1998) and results into two inseparable mutually enriching and authentically human capabilities—action and reflection—which Freire terms as praxis (Blackburn, 2000; Freire, 1970). From the research findings it appears that several participants, disabled and able-bodied, in the project started to discover their subjecthood through the participatory approach, dialogue and the inclusive events, as it helped them realize what powers they have as well as identify their role in the movement. Observations show that able-bodied participants in the Geldermalsen project firstly learned from people with disabilities about the meaning of disability—for instance during the obstacle tour of some of the villages—and thus gained a better understanding of the socio-political reality in their community. Moreover, such as in the case of the primary teacher who employed people with disabilities, some people gained an understanding of the political meaning of their actions. However, it must be noted that the observations do suggest that the process of gaining this new knowledge and incorporating a newly awakened consciousness into action is a gradual one. Thus, it seems more appropriate to think of object- and subjecthood as fluid concepts rather than fixed binaries.

PRAXIS IN THE CONTEXT OF CRITICAL DISABILITY STUDIES

Two situations and constraints could specifically be identified during the research that challenge the notion of coming into subjecthood as it is laid out by Freire (2005) and his vision of praxis. Firstly,

observations showed that many people with disabilities are in fact not interested in participating in the project in this study or particular setting. These refusals can pose a dilemma for community projects that eagerly try to mobilize participants for social change. The question arises: What if the oppressed do not want the world you have in mind for them? (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Project coordinators in Geldermalsen brought forward the argument that in these situations no one can force people to participate, which is in line with Freire's opinion on the culture of silence. He explains: "What I do in my pedagogical proposal is to present them [the marginalized people] with possibilities to opt for an alternative. Should they reject the choice to opt for an alternative, then there is little that I can do as an educator. Imposition is when one willfully refuses to present alternatives and multiple points of reference." And: "What educators must do is to never fail to debate various positions, without imposing any. Then, any pedagogical proposal is to challenge students around various hypotheses" (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 390).

Secondly, experiencing disability and bodily constraints make the step of taking action challenging in reality. Many disability scholars have accused Freire (2005) and other critical pedagogy academics as having failed to account for the disability experience in theories on education (Gabel, 2002; Erevelles, 2005) and to either avoid discussion of the topic/subject/matter altogether or to add disability arbitrarily to the expanded sociological trinity of race, class, and gender (Erevelles, 2005).

The arguments translate into a critique specifically against Freire's concept of praxis and the assumptions he makes about the "oppressed," which leads scholars like Gabel (2002) to question the applicability and ability of critical pedagogy to make a real difference in the lives of people with disabilities. As Goodley & Runswick-Cole (2014) put it, disability has the radical potential to trouble the normative, rational, independent, autonomous subject that is so often imagined when ideas of the ideal person are evoked and forms of activism are enacted. Not every person with a disability can or wants to participate in the way that would perhaps be most ideal; the aforementioned case of the participant who was not willing to become the project coordina-

tor of a follow up project because she did not have the energy or time to combine it with her regular job is one example of this. In a different instance, another participant did not attend a few lectures organized by DSiN because he did not have the energy to drive his car one hour to and from the location of the presentation.

In consideration of these observations, we propose Goodley & Runswick-Cole's (2014) definition of disability to advance Freire's pedagogy. As part of the field of critical disability studies (CDS), that aims to deconstruct dominant approaches and ideologies to disability, Goodley & Runswick-Cole challenge the notion in which disability is only perceived as the antithesis of ability. Inspired by queer studies, he outlines a new notion of disability as "Dis/ability."

Dis/ability acknowledges the theoretical, practical, and political work that takes place on either side of the binary, a binary denoted by the presence of " / " (the slash). Dis/ability studies ask us to consider how we value the human and what kind of society is worth fighting for. One might suggest that many disabled people have been denied the opportunity to occupy the position of the modernist humanistic subject: bounded, rational, capable, responsible and competent (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2014, p. 3).

This conceptualization of the human subject disrupts the classic notion of human agency and power relations and can be used to tackle the criticism against Freire's pedagogy that presumably outlines a world that is divided into binary oppositions where people either fall into the category of the oppressed or the oppressor (Beckett, 2015). Beckett (2015) claims that in every situation a different discourse is recreated, making oppression complex and situated. Goodley & Runswick-Cole (2014) make a clear statement that classic characteristics of the oppressed as the dependent and silent agent are disrupted and can be reinterpreted through the lens of Dis/ability.

FREIRE'S CONTRIBUTION TO DISABILITY STUDIES

This approach towards deconstructing the dualism inherent in contemporary understandings of disability has not been without critique. Vehmas and Watson (2014) argued that while being successful in providing a framework to overcome cultural hierarchies, CDS fails to

account for the material basis of disability. Erevelles (2005) contends that the dominant interpretation of disability within critical disability studies has led to the neglect of need and pain as potential parts of the lived experience with a disability and poses great challenges to the successful implementation and envisioning of inclusion and the alleviation of extreme poverty and involuntary social and economic segregation by many people with disabilities. Most people with a disability understand that physical pain is an enemy, whether the disability is painful in itself or a trigger for pain due to the difficulty of navigating one's environment (Sieber, 2001).

As such, Vehmas and Watson (2014) emphasize that both social and physical mechanisms have real impacts on human diversity and that current critical disability models—such as Goodley & Runswick-Cole's (2014) concept of Dis/ability—do not allow for the development of any practical tools to account for the differences they create. Instead they argue that recognizing the diverse and sometimes dualistic realities of people with disabilities is crucial in making explicit the particular disadvantages under which they become a marginalized group in society and, moreover, help to form a disability movement that takes action on their own account (Vehmas & Watson, 2014).

We argue that in this context, Freire's (1982) theoretical grounding in materialism helps to reinforce the importance to (re)turn to the historical materialism and political economy in which disability is created and at the same time gives an opening to envisioning people with disability as autonomous agents (Erevelles, 2005). Freire (1982a) argues that human consciousness is distinct because humans, "are not only in the world, but with the world" (p. 3) and have "the capacity to adapt . . . to reality plus the critical capacity to make choices and transform that reality" (Au, 2007, p. 4). The fact that someone perceives themselves to be in the world, with the world, and with others, brings a sense of "being-with" that is constitutive of who they are. In other words, someone's presence in the world is not so much of someone who is merely adapting to something "external," but of someone who is inserted as if belonging essentially to it. It is the position of one who struggles to become the subject and maker of history and not simply a passive, disconnected object (Freire, 1998). This vision of the human condition enables an understanding of the disability experience as

being rooted and influenced by the material world and yet allows for the creation of agency that is capable of disrupting, renegotiating, and changing its meaning in the social world. Consequently, it also accommodates for people with impairments to reject the disability label as they are in negotiation with their environment.

Lastly, we believe that also Goodley & Runswick-Cole (2014) succeed in adapting the concept of dis/ability and the use of the slash to accommodate for these critiques. As such, they note that self-advocacy and autonomy is commonly associated with the familiar discourse of giving one's voice: "speaking up," "telling others how you feel," "having the same rights as..." "having a home, a job, a family just like everybody else"—just like other human beings, having a voice and others recognizing this. In the case of severe speech, or other bodily or cognitive impairments, these characteristics of autonomy and self-advocacy are challenged. Consequently, Goodley (2013) points at the interactional encounter among people with disabilities that displays the playing out of autonomy in a distributed, relational, and extended manner: a form of distributed competence made so by the presence of disability—dis /autonomy—that stands in contrast to the narrow notions of neoliberal citizenship as well as the binary perception of ability and disability. Dis/autonomy recognizes the relational, rather than the individual, nature of autonomy in the lives of disabled and non-disabled people (Goodley, 2013). As such, we argue that the concept can account for real life experiences of people with disabilities shaped by material and physical differences. An example for this could be observed at one of the evenings organized by the Inclusive Community project Geldermalsen during which drawing as a method of communication was used during the group discussion on belonging in the community. A carer assisted one female participant with a physical impairment in this process by stabilizing and partially leading her hand in order to draw her desired shape. This process represents an act of collaboration that is suggestive of Mackenzie's (2014) concept of relational autonomy in which autonomy is played out in a relational manner and autonomy and vulnerability are not understood as binary opposites.

CONCLUSION

This paper has established a dialogue between Freire's critical pedagogy and disability theory. On a theoretical level, the research project provides evidence on how Freire's theory can help to advance disability theory in its struggle to define the role and agency of disabled bodies in the particular setting of the case study. In return, critical disability studies can help to develop a more sophisticated and inclusive definition of praxis and conscientization that accounts for ability diversity.

On a practical level, the analysis showed how despite disability scholars' critiques, Freire's theory is applicable and capable of informing liberatory practices for people with disabilities on an individual and community level. While incorporating many of the core principles of Freire's pedagogy it becomes clear that Geldermalsen should have been more radical in its attempt to implement a co-intentional or participatory approach to community development. Moreover, the research shed light on the misalignments between the organizational and individual level and underlines Schippers et al.'s (2015) proposition that effective assessment models for the quality of life of people with disabilities need to include the individual or even family level next to the organizational and systematic level to be able to inform policies and practices.

Lastly, there are several observations from the research project that remain undiscussed. For instance, the fieldwork provides evidence that calls for a better understanding and consideration of disability as only one dimension of humanness that forcibly intersects with other characteristics. Consequently, projects for inclusion of people with disabilities—and essentially community development at large—cannot succeed by only focusing on one dimension in their praxis, but in its most radical form need to engage with all attributes of the human, whether that is origin, religion, gender, class, or sexuality. Moreover, an observed lack in capacity building in Geldermalsen undermines the necessity for further refinements of the participatory methodologies. In an attempt to follow up on these observations, this research paper will be complemented by a comparative case study between the Inclusive

Community project in Geldermalsen and four Inclusive community projects in Indonesia.

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