Claudia Matus   *Editor*

Ethnography and Education Policy

A Critical Analysis of Normalcy and Difference in Schools

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Editor

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Editor
Claudia Matus
Center for Educational Justice
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile
Macul, Santiago (RM), Chile

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Introduction: Schools Are Being Produced Right *Now*

Claudia Matus

Abstract This chapter introduces the major theoretical frames that delineate the object of study for researching the production of normalcy in school contexts. The major intellectual exercise in this work is to trouble the discursive, material, and affective paths that define how and why we should study the intertwined relation between policy, research practice, and inequality. In this introduction, major theoretical concepts and articulations will be laid out. It will also provide a critical contextualization of where this research is developed, with a specific focus on how neoliberal economic cultures and liberal ways of understanding policy reproduce inequality. The introduction also offers a description of the coming chapters, their foci, and articulations.

1.1 Introduction

Ethnography and Education Policy—A Critical Analysis of Normalcy and Difference in Schools is a book addressing the relationship between the production of social problems in educational policy, those research practices required to inform policy, and the daily production of normalcies and differences in school contexts. Considering the ways inequalities and their productions are still a problem to be addressed, I firmly believe in the critical moment this represents for research on social sciences (World Social Sciences Report 2016). The current scenario of increasing inequalities demands that we deepen our knowledge and understanding of inequalities to document why and how inequalities persist. Therefore, social sciences research studies are asked to question how they are implicated in the very production of research questions and objects of study that perpetuate power asymmetries, stabilize identities, and give causal explanations on how inequalities are produced.

Along with this, the prevalence of education policies understood as directed to specific identities; therefore, as partial and segmented (e.g., policies for women, policies for migrant populations, policies for the disadvantaged communities, policies

C. Matus (✉)
Center for Educational Justice, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile
e-mail: cmatusc@uc.cl

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for disabled people, etc.), and the dominant colonialist understanding of difference as deficit or problems to be solved in school contexts, it is critical to question the ways policies produce social problems and the kinds of research we are using to transform the unescapable circuit of inequality. The research and data that inform policies need to be critically analyzed and understood as important factors in reproducing inequalities, segregation, and enduring systems of differentiation (Dixon-Román 2017; Weheliye 2014). This book intends to advance a critical questioning of policy and the research that informs policy decisions particularly on issues of diversity and inclusion.

We are in urgent need of new research practices to document practices, discourses, materialities, and their relations to question the production of inequalities. This is a claim for those possibilities we as researchers have to open up new methodological horizons when imagining different objects of study. I believe we are facing a major moment for research in social sciences to rethink inequalities because social sciences research has proven not to have solved these issues. Moreover, inequalities have come to be more pressing to contemporary research and policies in which a shift is being asked for (World Social Sciences Report 2016). For instance, one way to approach this contemporary concern might be to ask what inequality is today and in what ways it relates to imaginaries of equality. One way to start questioning the very production of inequalities in our own research might take the shape of asking the nature of those categories we use to identify specific identities and communities as well as to ask ourselves "how this classification [of populations or groups] was achieved" (Roberts 2011, p. 72). To continue studying social class, ethnic groups, sexual minorities, women, and children as disadvantaged communities with no reference to how and why they have been constructed this way is a manner to persist in the production of a normative order to identify, differentiate, and hierarchize different identities. Therefore, the only possibilities we have to advance transformation and change for these communities get framed under the concept of compensation, which has not been proven to be enough.

Ethnography and Education Policy—A Critical Analysis of Normalcy and Difference in Schools achieves five main purposes. First, it presents theoretical frames for the study of the production of normalcy and difference in school settings. Second, it theorizes and documents ethnographic practices used that produce insights into the discursive and material entanglements of normalcy and difference. Third, it reports contradictions and silences in education policy design and content. Fourth, it provides examples of ethnographic fieldwork and intervention work with in-service teachers. Finally, it rehearses ways of presenting ethnographic knowledge, including the compositions of texts produced through the ethnographic work. In short, this book reports the possibilities and consequences for policy, research, and practice when normalcy (whiteness, western, male, heteronormative practices, common sense femininities and masculinities, adult, abled bodies) is stigmatized at the same level as difference (black, poor, disabled, child, woman, girl, homo). When normalcy is stigmatized and put into question, new possibilities to rethink issues of inequality and justice become visible (Davis 2013; O'Connell 2015). It is this focus this book intends to address. *Ethnography and Education Policy—A Critical Analysis of*

Normalcy and Difference in Schools offers a critical analysis using queer, feminist, and post-representational theories to understand the implications of dominant ways of understanding the division between normal and different subjectivities and how they reiterate structures of inequality in schools.

The major intellectual exercise in this work has been to trouble the discursive, material, and affective paths that define how and why we should study the intertwined relation between policy, research practice, and inequality. It is our belief that they do not proceed on their own path. They exist in a very complex and intertwined relation. In this introduction, major theoretical concepts and articulations will be laid out. It will also provide a critical contextualization of where this research reported in this book is developed, with a specific focus on how neoliberal economic cultures and liberal ways of understanding policy reproduce inequality. The introduction also offers a description of the coming chapters, their foci, and articulations.

1.2 The Evolving Research Project

Ethnography and Education Policy—A Critical Analysis of Normalcy and Difference in Schools is the result of a major research project in Chile, funded by Conicyt, National Commission for Scientific and Technological Research (SOC1103). The research team worked for 3 years (2013–2015) in five different Chilean schools producing ethnographic information on the ways normalcy (whiteness, western culture, male, heteronormative practices, common sense femininities and masculinities, adulthood, abled bodies); or "male/white/heterosexual/owning wives and children/urbanized/speaking a standard language" (Braidotti 2018, p. 6) are produced in school settings. Our main objective was to challenge the idea of social and cultural differences as something we *need to know more about*. Instead, we focused on observing, documenting, and describing the active production of dominant values regarding issues of normative understandings of gender, race, sexuality, age, ability, class, ethnicity, and nationality. As a result, our very ethnographic processes challenged traditional ideas on how to think of subjects, fields, notes, reports, the researcher, and the researched. Along with the production of ethnographies, we produced a professional development model for in-service teachers as well as for state professionals who are designing policies in regard to diversity and inclusion in Chile.

A book to report 3 years of producing non-normative research questions, constantly questioning the meanings of working at five schools at the same time, attention to the articulation among senior and junior researchers coming from different disciplines, academic trajectories, and particular ways to understand and live *normalcy* is an intense practice, indeed. As I will show, this book presents different layers of the process of producing a way to research on issues of normalcy and difference in educational institutions in Chile. This project started as an idea that became more complex as the research team became involved and affected by the topic and the ways we were producing the research practice.

Some of the more rewarding qualities of this research process were the creative disposition toward thinking differently about every aspect of the study. The project in itself starts as a major national grant, blindly evaluated by international reviewers. I mention this because, 1 year previous to this call, I presented the same idea, in a shorter version, to a funding call with national evaluators. My proposal was rejected. I always understood that this proposal was problematic in some ways since it was defying the conservative way of understanding and researching issues of difference in Chile. Therefore, the possibility to present the same research idea, to expand its scope, and be read and evaluated blindly was a political chance for this project.

From March 2013 to December 2015, members of the Normalcy, Difference, and Education interdisciplinary research team explored ways in which different power regimes operate to maintain the idea that there is a body, a behavior, an attitude, an emotion that is normal. We decided to stop researching on those who have been labeled as different, marginal or minority subjects and communities, assuming that we know enough about them. We wanted to expand our research interests on the articulations of what is called *normal* and *different*, stating that it is only in this relationship that power and commonsense operate. In order to do this, we had to create a new problem, something that usually is not seen as such. What we deem as normal had to be put into question and imagined in a way so that it could be researched. The most suitable research practice to accomplish these purposes was ethnography. Thus, ethnography could not be understood in the traditional fashion; therefore, the research team was pushed to think of new ways to name the field, name what we observe, train other professionals working in schools, and the like. By traditional ethnography, I mean the usual idea that persistent time and presence in the field will accomplish a detailed description to get the ethnographer closer to the lived experience of participants in school settings. In other words, "time in the field is needed to discern both the depth and complexity of social structures and relations" (Jeffrey and Troman 2004, p. 535). In this project, we stated that a post-representational ethnography was critical to research on those dominant values that produce the idea of normalcy as something obvious and intelligible (Matus and Haye 2015; Matus and Rojas 2015). (I will discuss this issue in detail in chapter three.) As the project started growing and evolving, we became a research team of 40 people assigned to different roles: senior researchers, junior researchers, ethnographers in the field, monitors working with teachers in service, scientific journalists, and research assistants, among others.

In the first year of the project (2013), we organized the research team to produce post-representational ethnographic accounts about the production of normalcy and its articulations with ideas and discourses of difference. We worked collaboratively with five schools in Santiago (Chile) for 2 years. These schools were eager to participate and their only incentive was to learn and help us complicate what usually is seen as natural within school spaces. These five schools represented a whole variety of types of schools in terms of money resources, composition of the population (only girls, only boys, co-ed), confessional and non-confessional, public and private schools, etc. One important note on how we recruited these schools was the fact that those participating schools had to make this decision with no incentive in advance.

The premise was we had to be sufficiently attractive to them to capture their attention because the topic in itself was critical, important, and useful enough to them. After we concluded the visits to recruit schools and finally got our five schools, we communicated to them that we had arranged an official participation certificate (by the Ministry of Education) for participating teachers. As their participation in this project involved using a significant portion of their time to work with us, we strongly believed that this recognition was important for the purposes of our work with them. Therefore, the commitment to this project was more than relevant to our purposes.

As part of the ethnographic planning, we decided to work in pairs in each school. This meant that we had to train 10 professionals from different disciplinary backgrounds, who have had experience in producing school ethnographies before, on the ideas on how to research and produce field notes on the production of normalcy. The decision to have two trained people working at each school came from the idea that to research on the production of normalcy and its articulation of normative notions of difference, we needed more than one eye to register and produce the field. The training period lasted 2 months where we read, analyzed, and exercised ways of registering the production of normalcy. The ethnographic production itself lasted 8 months in each school. The most pressing and challenging question of this process was how to train other professionals to research on those commonsense values and make them problematic enough to become part of an observation, a field note, etc. The process of producing the field was accompanied by the second process in which we gathered together every other week to discuss and reorient questions and problems encountered in the fields. Five senior researchers, four junior researchers, and the ten ethnographers participated in these meetings. During these meetings, we shared field notes, and we discussed particular issues from each school and reoriented questions to go back to the field. Thus, it became the second level of ethnography.

During the second year (2014), we continued working with the same five schools through something we called "accompanying process." As part of the ethnographic process, we designed this moment to work with participating teachers in which we challenged ourselves to work with those more salient issues we had produced in the field. Therefore, our effort during the second year was to understand or produce something we named as a "cultural profile" of each school which contained those more relevant issues in relation to the production of normalcy through processes of racialization, sexualization, genderization, classing, among others.

During the third year (2015), we dedicated ourselves to look back at those processes involved in the research and the accompanying process, as a way to be critical about our own potentialities and to give us time to theorize on those *failures* while we were immersed in this process as an important part of the research study. Most of the complicated issues we had to deal with were related to the changes participating teachers were experimenting because of the work and conversations they had with the research team. Particularly relevant was the experience we went through at one particular school, a girls-only school, where the issues we worked around were focused on gender. Teachers were affected by *knowing* gender other than the normative understanding of the binary between men/women. At some point, we had to make arrangements to have a specialist (member of the research team) in charge in

case any conflicting situation may arise. For instance, one of the participating teachers of this school realized her own gendered position in her marriage and decided to get divorced. These were part of the unexpected situations working around issues of the production of normalcy of gender we had to face. As these processes were evolving, our project became nationally well known and we started being asked by the Ministry of Education to support the implementation of the education reform particularly on issues of inclusion and diversity. We started a series of workshops with different professionals of the Ministry of Education focusing on the production of normalcies in schools, presenting the information we had produced in the previous 2 years of ethnographic work, and questioning the very social problems they proposed for their policies. This was a rewarding and exhausting process. I have to say that we only encounter good disposition of our work.

Over the 3-year lifespan of the project, beginning with contacting potential schools at the beginning of 2013 through the school-based post-representational inquiry ethnographies, the articulations with the Ministry of Education to change policies to the final editing of this book, the idea of the project has grown, shifted, and complexified in ways we could not have imagined when I wrote the initial funding bid. Now, we continue our work in one of the research lines at the Center for Educational Justice at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile under the name of BioSocioCultural Inclusion: challenging homogeneity in contemporary schools in Chile. The purpose of this continuation line is to advance a field of discussion that problematizes and updates the complex relationships between the biological, social, and cultural dimensions that define who we are or might be and the effects their relations have for the production of subjects, objects, and effects. One of the main focuses of our interdisciplinary research group is to problematize the ways in which humanist assumptions (e.g., causality, linearity, and representation) embedded in the naturalized separation among biological, social, and cultural domains actively operate in daily life decisions. Our research orientations are mostly located in contemporary theoretical perspectives that seek to rethink not only objects of research and methodological practices but also their relationships, thus allowing the production of new problems and the exploration of their potential for change. Posthumanist and post-representational approaches provide us with a political frame to question the natural separation of the subject who knows from what she knows as a problematic *habit* for the production of what we have come to believe as bits of truths. We continue to ask the question and rehearse news ways to research-oriented toward change.

Drawing upon a methodological framework of post-representational perspectives, we insisted from the beginning that our research on the production of normalcy and difference has to be developed based on the research team's own going back and forth about the topic. In so many ways, we had to expose ourselves to the possibilities of being more traditional and conservative than we would have expected and the challenge was to expand our own ways of pushing ourselves to the production of a different type of knowledge. For instance, some of the assumptions we had to face as a research group were (1) to accept that we were all implicated in the production of normalcy through dominant understandings of sexuality, gender, race, etc.; (2) that given the hierarchical biological, cultural, and social orders, we have been socialized

to produce subjects and reproduce specific, always evolving racist, homophobic, sexist discourses, and materialities; (3) that when all these processes are naturalized, commonsense operates to makes us believe we have something in common to agree on. With all these assumptions in mind, we had to communicate what we were doing to different audiences and make them understand why it is relevant to question these frames, to undo unequal practices. We had to stop (for a moment) to believe in concepts such as compensation, inclusion, exclusion, and minorities to start thinking about the very production of these concepts either as solutions or ways of framing research questions. If we would have framed our research within these concepts, we would have chosen to approach the problem of difference as isolated from the concept of normalcy and, as a consequence, we would have continued repeating the explanation of discrimination as a product of individual biases or as a consequence of unequal biological, social, and cultural dispositions of subjects.

All these thoughts led us to create a community of reflexive (in the posthuman fashion) (Barad 2003, 2007; Koro-Ljungberg 2016) and critical practice where change was conceptualized as complex and possible. Change, for us, had to be built on a strong political stand to critically examine any biological, social, and cultural order to sustain whatever linear, causal, and stable relation between people and places, people and behaviors, people, and objects. Change was a political and intellectual exercise that happens in individual bodies.

The way in which Parker et al. (2017) have proposed inequalities, or new inequalities take unpredictable shapes. Under the commonsense language we have available, such as *gaps* and *biases* we strongly believe that we perpetuate the production of marginalized and privileged groups but with little chance to advance justice. When this is the only available language we have to talk about these productions, I believe we are facing the result of a problematic assemblage that allows us to continue talking and thinking in such a way that inequality itself becomes inescapable. To achieve our purpose, we had to start against the idea that there is a normal experience for those defined as minorities, which usually involves pain, suffering, shame, and pity. We had to stop thinking this way and search for those discourses, objects, and effects that allow the reproduction of this thinking as the only way to provide other answers to the problems of inequalities.

Therefore, we were oriented to produce information on how inequalities are embodied and expressed in the articulation of normalcy and difference. Our way to enter into the conversation on how to fight against inequality is based on the political project to maintain normalcy as an untouched category that organizes and gives life to racism, genderism, and sexualization processes. We sustain that it is only through the maintenance of ideas of normal behavior, normal attitudes, and normal emotions that inequalities come to life. Inequalities are not outside of the systems that reproduce racist, gendered, and sexual orders.

To study and report the production of normalcy, we had to play with the ambiguity involved in the production of the normal. This means that, as a special category, normalcy shapes itself in different ways, to appear as something desirable and expected. The language of the desirable, aspirational normalcy silences the active production of inequalities.

1.3 How Normalcy Became a Research Problem

Over the last decades, a significant emphasis on cultural politics of difference in educational institutions in Chile has been posited. The active production of diversity and inclusion discourses in Chile since 2012 represents an effort to undo the effects of privatization practices of schooling driven by the neoliberal agenda. Since educational privatization is related to broader neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies, policies, and political projects, there are opportunities to discuss the possibilities and challenges new reforms offer for public education (Gillborn 2006, 2008, 2010, 2016). We question the economic, cultural, and political practices ingrained in the privatized model in Chile and question: how *public* can the Chilean educational system be after a long and tenacious story of privatization? How might a deeply segregated school system need to be transformed to produce public education? Chile as a successful and well-recognized experimental site and testing ground for neoliberal policies in education provides a rich context to explore the possibilities and challenges for the reinstallation of the notion of public education. For instance, the ongoing implementation of the Law for School Inclusion (Mineduc 2016), explicitly aims at achieving two main goals: (1) free access to school (no payment) and (2) no discrimination. As expected, the passing of this law has brought different reactions into view. On one hand, this law promises an advancement in the ideal of public education through the mixing of students (this is facilitated through universal access to free education). On the other hand, this law regulates discriminatory practices in school contexts. Expected reactions particularly from parents when asked about the benefits of public education for their children were mostly oriented toward being worried for their kids being mixed with "other kids in schools." This might be understood as to how neoliberal and neoconservative agendas have engrained the idea of high- and low-status cultures that now come to be mixed in school contexts (Matus 2015). In other words, this law is being implemented in a highly segregated context that needs to be problematized.

Having said this, I have to recognize that it is true that we have moved from meanings of difference or diversity in schools only related to categories of disabilities and special learning needs (Infante and Matus 2009; Matus and Infante 2011). Nonetheless, this way of associating diversity with disabilities has left an important imprint on the way we reason diversity as the grouping of all those people and communities that are *different* for some reason (social class, gender, sexuality, nation, race, etc.). Popular knowledge replicates practices, representations, and valuations of difference as something real independent from ideas of normalcy. In other words, the weight given to disability and special learning needs, as the obvious way to frame diversity in educational policies has caused an important common sense idea about normalcy. This has had important consequences for the ways we intend to approach issues of inequalities and injustices in schools. It has secured a limited idea for how to imagine and organize difference in educational spaces. For instance, a usual practice in those institutional imaginations to address issues of diversity in schools is through the design and implementation of methodologies to either better organize the class-

room, evaluate students paying special attention to their particular differences, or being more sensitive to those students who are defined for any reason as different. This is relevant because people have come to understand and act on diversity as a deficit, and as such, those labeled groups are in need of compensatory practices for the problem to be *solved*. This way of reasoning diversity in research creates the idea that policy initiatives are possible through a compensatory approach, which is not sufficient for the promotion of changes in cultural, social, and educational processes and practices.

It is important to highlight that an inclusive education approach is part of a global strategy to promote equality in society. Without a doubt, efforts to infuse educational policies with inclusive approaches are a way to advance ideas of equity and democracy in Chilean school systems. Although these initiatives are valued, educational policies and the Chilean educational discourse continues to neutralize the idea of normalcy with corresponding consequences in the ways students, teachers, and administrative staff imagine difference. When we speak of normalcy, we are talking about particular ways to position people in institutions (Matus and Haye 2015; Matus and Rojas 2015, 2018). This is why we contend that we should not only question how normalcy is rationed, policed, limited, and reproduced, but also how it organizes and assigns values to bodies. In other words, a commitment to question the production of normalcy transforms the ways in which knowledge is sought and transmitted. This might help us to trouble the dominant way to understand the constitution of differences as genetic, biological, social, or cultural. Normalcy should not be a comfortable site, because it stigmatizes ideas of *differences* as something to be identifiable, measured, and in need to be repaired. We believe that the insistence on neutralizing knowledge about normalcy threatens the development of an education that equalizes just futures for everyone.

In Matus and Infante (2011), for instance, issues of diversity are revealed to be strictly connected to special educational needs, where the tendency is to medicalize students' learning differences. How discourses of the normal take different shapes today include the proliferation of diagnoses in schools where teachers play an important role in defining what behaviors, attitudes, and emotions are deemed to be at risk and in need of the initiation of the circle of treatment with specialists (psychologist, psychiatry, neurologist). For instance, among those problems teachers consider worth a diagnosis today, we find that if a student is not being attentive in a class, if the student does not follow instructions, if the student gets easily frustrated, or if the student is restless, the initial thought at that moment is to initiate the medicalization path (Baker 2002; Harwood and Allan 2014). To make this issue more problematic, it is important to ask: how did it happen that these social ways of expressing something in a classroom became a problem?

For instance, the naturalization of the ways a teacher interprets her/his students' capacities is presented in the following ethnographic scene:

This situation happened when the ethnographer was observing a language class in first grade. It was the beginning of April 2018 (and the beginning of the school year), which is the time of year when those school professionals in charge of the Integration Educational Program start their processes of evaluation and re-evaluation of students:

Carolina, the person in charge of the Integration Project, gives some notices to the teacher and asks her if she has identified any students with learning difficulties and whom she thinks should be evaluated. The teacher nods and silently observes the students. She then approaches the teaching assistant and asks which students could be referred to the Integration School Project. The teaching assistant stands next to the board and observes the students.

The teacher walks around the room, touches a student on the shoulder and looks at the teaching assistant, [but] does not say a word; however, the assistant says aloud: "Yes, she could possibly [be referred to the program], since she struggles at times. Then the teacher continues walking and approaches another student and looks at the teaching assistant again. She asks her: "How about her?" The assistant responds aloud: "No, not her. She can stay because she does well." Finally, the teacher indicates another student with her hand and the assistant says: "Yes, there is a deficit problem there, because she gets easily distracted.

While the teachers were identifying which student had learning problems, the students talked and did the class activity.

Teachers making diagnoses based on the observation of externally visible traits takes us back to ideas of old eugenics where the idea of quality control of the population appears as an everyday activity in schools today. The common experience of identifying, sorting, tracking, and classifying students' practices performed by teachers, as presented in the excerpt above, reconfigures a complex rationality of identification and differentiation. It becomes more complex when diagnosed at schools in Chile have become a way to obtain financial resources for schools under the new prescriptions of the Law for School Inclusion, gradually implemented since 2016. As this law states: schools, as they have to be free of payment for every student, they do not receive money from the State anymore. Nonetheless, every diagnosed child allows the school to receive a certain amount of money (Matus et al. 2018), which relates to the increase of hiring of psychology specialists in schools. As Gulson and Webb (2017, p. 25) note: "… education has long been associated with various forms of biological rationality, notably forms of eugenics," and this law is an example of how policies are bringing these practices to schools.

These processes of defining students to undergo medicalization have at least two problematic assumptions. First, the notion of essentialism reinforces the imagination of correspondences between identities and meanings, practices, and experiences lived by people. Second, by insisting on differences among groups, and not problematizing the idea of *normalcy* against how these differences are constructed, the notion of *normal* is naturalized. Repetition and the circulation of discourses of essential differences under the rhetoric of medicalization preserve an unproblematized regulatory order and hierarchical organization of normalcies and differences that need to be analyzed within the context of schools responding to the requirements for equity and democracy proposed by international institutions.

This is why our orientation to train in-service teachers about racism, sexism, classism, etc. was important to our project. To talk about processes of genderization, sexualization, and racialization with in-service teachers meant to transform practices at school because our intention was to move beyond the explanation that discriminatory practices are mainly biased individual actions. Actually, in order for teachers to make sense of and to escape the psychological frame of stereotypes and prejudices,

we instead referred to ways of knowing about gender, class, sexuality, race, etc., we have learnt, and they can be problematic particularly when making pedagogical decisions. With this framing, we had the chance to prevent the conversation on values to produce change on gender, race, and social class issues. For instance, several studies in the U.S. have shown the problems that occur when in-service teachers sustain a perspective of color-blindness when referring to issues of race (Sleeter 2001). For these teachers, "students are students." These ways of approaching issues of racism in school contexts critically reproduce liberal discourses of equality but with no recognition of how differences and inequality are created, expressed, and sustain. When teachers profess to be color-blind or gender neutral when trying to suppress negative images they attach to students, this has important consequences for students and how they interpret discriminatory practices and how these practices might be addressed. In this project, we worked on the assumption that social categories of difference, namely, race, gender, social class, and sexuality matter because teachers bring ways of knowing about these categories that require the identification, differentiation, and placement of students in relation to other categories. These interpretations that teachers bring to the classroom are heavily informed by normative understandings of race, gender, social class, sexuality, etc. We believe that not interrupting those ideas teachers bring to the classroom is a way to reproduce racism, sexism, classism, rather than reverse these practices at school.

1.4   Assemblages

To research on the production of normalcy in schools, we had to rethink schools as merely the context or the field where human actions occur. We had to redefine the field as the heterogenous and unpredictable encounter of bodies, objects, discourses, and effects within a broad network of enabling and constraining factors that had to put into question their relations. At the same time, we understood those five participating schools had a complex relation to each other. Those five schools acted as an assemblage in such a way that our mangling work with them helped us to enter the problem of thinking structure as well as multiplicity and indeterminacy as a critical moment of our production of meaning within social formations (Youdell and McGimpsey 2015). It was hard not to see those five schools operating under principles of multiplicity and indeterminacy. For instance, while one school was well known for its high number of disadvantaged students, the other one was recognized for its production of elite students. They both worked at the same time in the production of vulnerability and elite. While one school was only girls, where girls were educated under patriarchal practices (even though there were no men around), the only boys' school was reproducing the idea of women as objects. None of the five schools acted as isolated fields to produce normalcy. They intra-acted in unpredictable and in unnoticeable ways; they reciprocally worked on one another (Barad 2007; Frost 2016). This led us to understand that,

> A performative understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent preexisting things. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real. Hence, in ironic contrast to the monism that takes language to be the stuff of reality, performativity is actually a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve. (Barad 2003, p. 802)

Our humanist habits lead us to think of schools as clearly differentiated, one from another. They are not ontologically independent. Race, class, gender, and sexuality systems operate in dynamic ways. They take different shapes even when teachers think they have overcome these systems' harmful consequences. As Rosiek (2018, p. 415) states, "The material-semiotic assemblages that produce racialized social hierarchies and people as racialized subjects have proven resilient and have transformed over the last century in response to our inquiry and interventions." It also brings the impossibility for us to *represent* schools in a final and totalizing manner. As the ethnographic practices were taking shape, we had to start questioning the place given to the way language or discourse defined the possibilities of the ethnographer encountering the schools' world. "The world [school] plays a role in responding to the design of our inquiries and always retains latent potentialities that exceed our ability to capture it in a single representation or inquiry" (Rosiek 2018, p. 408).

The *normal*, as a material and discursive assemblage, manifests itself in multiple ways. As an active ordering activity, it cannot be defined by a single or specific mechanism, such as values or ethics, knowledge, or common sense. Instead, it involves several mechanisms to allow its appearance and seductive attribute. Our focus was to register the adaptability of this concept. This is why the ethnography plan had to be revisited constantly. As soon as we started our fieldwork, we understood that we could not have just one place to produce the ethnographic accounts. As a condition of the concept of normal, we considered that because of its evasive meaning, we had to extend the field. This is why I state that to research the production of normalcy we need to have at least two places from where to produce information. As normalcy is an ontological agent (Barad 2003, 2007), we had to find the way to follow the dynamic, complex, and moving attributes of it. In so many ways, we had to consider producing an ethnographic account of those producing the ethnographies in schools. We had to prevent the co-opting of ethnographers by the operations of the *normal*. We had to track the agency of the concept of normal. As Peirce (1992) notes: "ideas are not all mere creations of this or that mind, but on the contrary have a power of finding or creating their vehicles, and having found them, of conferring upon them the ability to transform the face of the earth" (cited in Rosiek 2018, p. 417).

When studying systems of oppression like genderism, racism, classing, the concept of normal (the normal body, normal femininity, the normal child, the normal brain, normal behavior) has proven its ability to co-opt researchers' progressive thinking. This is why we had to reorganize our ways to work and those interactions among researchers were critical to advance our research questions. Ethnographers as the "agencies of observation" (Barad 2007) could not be subtracted from the world