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Toward a Cultural Perspective and Understanding of the Disability and Deaf Experience in Special and Multicultural Education

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This position paper provides a rationale for infusing cultural perspectives and understandings of the Disability and Deaf experiences into special and multicultural education teacher preparation programs. Substantial evidence of well-established features of the Disability community and Deaf community that meet definitional criteria for culture as conveyed in the multicultural education literature is presented. The extent that Disability and Deaf cultures have been reflected in special and multicultural education textbooks is addressed to validate the need for the incorporation of cultural perspectives of Disability and Deaf experiences into teacher preparation programs. A conspicuous absence of discussion about the culture of Disability and Deafness from the perspectives of members of these communities is reported. Implications of these findings for teacher preparation programs and for educational policy, practice, and research are discussed. Recommendations for the acknowledgement and support of cultural perspectives and understandings related to the Disability and Deaf experiences are offered.

Keywords: *culture; Deaf culture; Disability culture; diversity; identity; multicultural*

Education systems recognize the responsibility for preparing teachers who value diversity, cultural pluralism, cultural competence, and proficiency to accommodate the substantial variance in students' experiences, backgrounds, languages, abilities, and belief systems (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989; Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991; Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003; Rueda & Prieto, 1979). The profound influence of culture on the learning and education of all students and the need for teachers to demonstrate cultural competency and proficiency has been well established in the literature (Banks & Banks, 2005; Edgar, Patton, & Day-Vines, 2002; Gay, 2003; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lynch & Hanson, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 2006).

Multicultural education began in the United States during the 1960s in an effort to promote social justice and cultural pluralism for marginalized groups and emerged in response to prevailing pedagogy focused on cultural assimilation (Banks & Banks, 2005; Davidman & Davidman, 1997; Gorski, 1999). According to Kitano (1991), cultural *assimilation* moves students away from their original culture so they may acquire the skills needed to compete in the macroculture. In contrast, she described cultural *pluralism* as an approach that encourages students to retain their original culture to support educational success and make accommodations based upon students' experience and backgrounds. Kitano suggested that cultural pluralism was more consistent with the values of a democratic society and education. Banks and Banks (2005) described multicultural education as a process intended "to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school" (p. 1). They argued that school should be a culturally affirming environment in which acculturation takes place and where cultural pluralism is valued yet students assimilate some of the views, perspectives, and ethos of each other as they interact.

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Numerous authors have called for expanded efforts to address cultural competency and proficiency in teacher education (Edgar et al., 2002; Foster & Iannaccone, 1994; Sorrells, Webb-Johnson, & Townsend, 2004) and advocated on behalf of approaches supporting cultural pluralism for ethnically and linguistically diverse youth with disabilities founded in theory and research on family sociology, therapy, and family systems (A. P. Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990, 1996; Broderick & Smith, 1979; Groce, 1999; Groce & Zola, 1993; O'Shea, O'Shea, Algozzine, & Hammitte, 2001). Edgar et al. (2002) called for an increased emphasis on democratic dispositions and cultural competency in an era of standards-based reform, arguing that "the extent to which educators, students, and the total educational environment reflect cultural competence significantly affects the nature and type of schooling, conditions for learning, and learning outcomes" (p. 235). Edgar et al. concluded that the knowledge, values, attitudes, and awareness required for cultural competence cannot be imposed but must be experienced, developed, and owned. Lynch and Hanson (2004) suggested that the ultimate goal of cultural competence is to "recognize and rectify political and societal barriers that separate us" (p. xv). To accomplish this, Lynch and Hanson argued that service providers have a responsibility to develop and include services and interventions that are culturally competent and help families interpret and effectively navigate mainstream cultures. Educators have identified elements of assessment, curriculum, instruction, and service delivery where attention to cultural variables, or lack thereof, can either impede or enhance the learning and educational achievement of youth with disabilities (e.g., Ford, Obiakor, & Patton, 1995; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lynch & Hanson, 2004) and without disabilities (e.g., Bigelow, 2001; Nieto, 2004; Pang, 2005).

As cultural competence and cultural proficiency have taken on increasingly greater importance in education and human service professions (e.g., Banks & Banks, 2005; Cross et al., 1989; Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lindsey et al., 2003; Lynch & Hanson, 2004; Nieto, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 2006), leading professional organizations have established cultural competence as an essential professional ethic, skill, or standard (e.g., American Medical Student Association, 2006; Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, 2001; Chang, 2001; National Center for Cultural Competence, 2004). For example, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC; 2003) developed performance-based standards for the preparation and licensure of special educators that address the need for special educators to be culturally competent and proficient. The National Association of School Psychologists (1999) has a Web site devoted to the practice of cultural competence. The American Psychological Association (2003) includes in its code of ethics expectations that practitioners will be aware of and respect cultural, individual, and role differences, including those based on a number of societal factors, including disability, and engage in efforts to eliminate biases and prejudices based on these factors. The antidiscrimination policy of the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) indicates a proactive commitment to cultural diversity identifying a number of factors that reflect cultural diversity, including disability (NAME, 2006). It is important to note that these organizations include disability in their statements of commitment to cultural diversity.

In addition to efforts supporting professional development leading to cultural proficiency, a number of authors have called for an examination of the underlying assumptions and epistemological elements that frame the construct and discourse surrounding disability and diversity. In a review and analysis of special and multicultural education texts and interviews with teacher education leaders, Sapon-Shevin and Zollers (1999) reported minimal attention paid to disability in most multicultural education texts and in chapters authored by leaders in special education. They also found that categorical views of disability were typically presented without critical examination of the assumptions underlying these perspectives or the impact of such perspectives on service delivery. Pugach and Seidl (1996, 1998) called for a sociocultural understanding of disability, suggesting that assumptions underlying disability are dramatically different from those that support an orientation of diversity.

The relationship between diversity and disability has emerged as a topic of interest in the field of Disability Studies over the past three decades and involves the reconstruction and understanding of "Disability" within a sociopolitical context (Linton, 1998, 2006). A number of models and perspectives of Disability have appeared in the Disability and the Deaf studies literature. Finkelstein (1980), Zola (1982), and Oliver (1983, 1996) were among the first to propose a social model of disability. The study and characterization of this social model has been well represented in the disability studies literature (see Thomas, 2004; Tregaskis, 2002). Other perspectives of disability, including medical, political, affirmation, and resistance models, have been proposed and discussed in the Disability Studies literature (e.g., Gabel & Peters, 2004; Gilson & Depoy, 2000; Swain & French, 2000). However, these models have received limited attention in the special and multicultural education literature.

Deaf culture has been acknowledged and researched in the professional literature, with attention to the social, educational, and personal experiences of Deaf individuals (Hahn, 1997; Jones, 2002; Lane, 2005; Padden & Humphries, 1988, 2005). Burch (2001, 2002) documented the origins of Deaf culture in America from the late 19th century to the Second World War. Padden and Humphries (1988, 2005) also provided a comprehensive description of the emergence and characteristics of Deaf culture, providing an emic view of the educational and social experiences of Deaf individuals. Since the 1980s, there has been an accumulation of literature validating and affirming Disability and Deaf experiences as cultural phenomena (Brown, 2002; Charlton, 1998; Groce & Zola, 1993; Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994; Ingstad & Whyte, 1995; Jones, 2002; Lane, 1995; Linton, 1998; Longmore, 2003; Van Cleve & Crouch, 1989).

This article extends the work of Sapon-Shevin and Zollers (1999) with a review of the literature and discussion of the extent to which Disability culture and Deaf culture have been addressed in teacher preparation programs as determined by their representation in special and multicultural education textbooks. Furthermore, the resulting implications for service delivery to youth with disabilities or who are deaf are presented. It is argued that the linkage between multicultural education and special education has insufficiently examined and inadequately addressed core elements of Disability culture and Deaf culture and may be operating under the questionable assumption that current teacher training models adequately prepare preservice teachers to be competent and proficient with respect to Disability or Deaf culture.

This article presents the position that (a) there is sufficient evidence of the existence of both Disability culture and Deaf culture; (b) minimal attention has been paid to developing or understanding Disability culture or Deaf culture in special education and multicultural education teacher training programs, with the possible exception of deaf education programs; (c) there is a need to review, investigate, and advance cultural understandings and theories of disability consistent with multicultural education perspectives of culture and their implications for educational policy, procedure, and practice; and (d) there is a critical need to expand and strengthen teacher preparation and multicultural education programs to improve preservice teachers' cultural competence with respect to Disability culture and Deaf culture. Suggestions are made that support the adoption of cultural perspectives and understandings of Disability and Deafness in teacher preparation programs and in educational policy, practice, and research.

Defining Culture, Cultural Competence/Proficiency, Disability Culture, and Deaf Culture

Definitions of culture. Early definitions of culture were limited to descriptions of the characteristics and customs of groups, such as language or communication, diet and food preparation, dress and appearance, interrelationships among group members, and a common set of values, beliefs, or ethics (Aragon, 1973). More recently, definitions of culture have emerged in response to the social and political implications for valuing diversity. Nieto (2004) defined culture as consisting "of the values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social class, religion, or other shared identity" (p. 146). Pang (2001) noted that culture "is always changing because people change . . . [it] shapes the way you see and interpret the world. It is almost like a pair of glasses through which you see the world" (p. 4). Lindsey et al. (2003) noted that early anthropologists thought of culture as a complex whole that included knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a member of society. Lindsey et al. argued that "culture involves far more than ethnic or racial differences" (p. 14) and defined culture as

> everything you believe and everything you do that enables you to identify with people like you and that distinguishes you from people who differ from you. Culture is about groupness. *A culture is a group of people identified by their shared history, values, and patterns of behavior* [italics added]. (p. 41)

A person's particular and individual culture is the unique synthesis of all the characteristics and experiences that shape how one views the world and how the world views and interacts with the individual. Thus, the cultural aspects of Disability and Deafness are undeniable; they shape how individuals experience the world and how the world responds to and shapes the individual.

Cultural competence and cultural proficiency. Hanley (1999) defined cultural competence as the ability to work effectively across cultures that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person or organization being served. Lindsey et al. (2003) conceptualized cultural proficiency as a way of being that enables one to effectively respond in a variety of cultural settings to the issues of diversity. Cross et al. (1989) and Isaacs and Benjamin

(1991) proposed a continuum of five levels of culture competence. Cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, and cultural blindness depicted the lowest levels of cultural competence, followed by cultural precompetence and cultural competence at the highest levels. Lindsey et al. proposed a sixth level referred to as cultural proficiency and identified five competencies required to develop cultural proficiency, including (a) assessing culture, (b) valuing diversity, (c) managing the dynamics of difference, (d) adapting to diversity, and (e) institutionalizing cultural knowledge.

These definitions implicitly assume the value of diversity and assert the value of cultural competence and cultural proficiency in understanding, relating to, and serving the needs of individuals within specific cultural groups. Most important, culture is viewed as the collective and shared experiences of a community that authenticate and narrate a shared identity.

Definitions of Disability and Deaf culture. A number of authors have presented multiple perspectives and definitions of Disability and Deaf culture. Pfeiffer (2004) argued, "There is no single definition of Disability culture, but rather there are definitions. These definitions, while being distinct, have overlapping concepts" (p. 14). However, scholars in the field of Disability and Deaf studies have proposed particular definitions of Disability and Deaf culture that retain consistent and uniform criteria. Linton (1998), a noted Disability Studies scholar who has identified herself as a Disabled woman, defined Disability culture as a "critical conceptual framework in disability studies scholarship for discussing the shared aspects of our experience, and the language, customs, and artistic products that emerge from it" (p. 102). Barnes and Mercer (2001) noted that "Disability culture presumes a sense of common identity and interests that unite disabled people and separate them from their nondisabled counterparts" (p. 522). Similarly, Brown (2002) made the following observation about Disability culture and the contributions of disability:

> People with disabilities have forged a group identity. We share a common history of oppression and a common bond of resilience. We generate art, music, literature, and other expressions of our lives, our culture, infused from our experience of disability. Most importantly, we are proud of ourselves as people with disabilities. We claim our disabilities with pride as part of our identity. We are who we are: we are people with disabilities. (p. 52)

Peters (2000) argued that Disability culture is alive and vibrant, characterized by a shared identity and voice and collective values of radical democracy and self-empowerment, justice, and equality. Peters presented a syncretic view of Disability Culture that included historical/linguistic, social/political, and personal aesthetics, explaining "descriptions of culture must be cast in terms of constructions and interpretations to which people subject their experience" (p. 587). She also argued that,

> The roots of disability cultural identity are the elements of culture contained in the historical/linguistic world-view where we have collectively produced our own cultural meanings, subjectivities, and images; e.g., a common language/lexicon that connotes pride and self-love, cohesive social communities. These roots refigure disability as Subject and are enacted through notions of self as aesthetic and performative that are inherent in the Aesthetic/Personal world-view of disability culture. (p. 598)

Gilson and Depoy (2000) briefly reviewed the medical, social, and political models of disability and noted that:

> Defining disability as culture transcends internal determinants of disability, subsumes social and political definitions, and creates a cultural discourse that characterizes the collective of disabled persons. Cultural views of disability suggest that all individuals who define themselves as disabled belong to a unique group which shares experiences, tacit rules, language and discourse. (p. 209)

Padden and Humphries (1988) defined Deaf culture in terms of shared behaviors of a group of people with their own language, values, rules, and traditions. They presented the following criteria for defining Deaf culture:

> 1. a particular group of Deaf people who share a language—America Sign Language (ASL) . . . use it as a primary means of communication among themselves, and hold a set of beliefs about themselves and their connection to the larger society. (p. 2)
>
> 2. Deaf people have accumulated a set of knowledge about themselves . . . have found ways to define and express themselves through rituals, tales, performances, and everyday social encounters. The richness of their sign language affords them the possibilities of insight, invention and irony . . . what sorts of symbols they surround themselves with, and how they think about their lives. (p. 11)

Longmore (2003) argued that the younger generation of persons with disabilities has spurned institutionalized definitions of disability, noting that "At its core, the new consciousness has repudiated the reigning medical model that defines 'disability' as physiological pathologies within individuals" (p. 217). Longmore suggested that a core element

of Disability culture is a redefining of Disability by persons with disabilities in response to a need for self-definition and in response to social invalidation.

These definitions suggest that while Disability and Deaf cultures must be understood as unique and distinct experiences, each experience is individually characterized by a common history, collective identity, and shared values and experiences of group members that are frequently expressed in art, music, literature, sports, and more recently through scholarship and Internet technologies. Although Barnes and Mercer (2001) argued that "the exact bases for group cohesion and consciousness will vary, as will the level and form of any engagement in social and political action" (p. 522), it is clear that Disability and Deaf cultures have emerged as Deaf and Disabled persons narrate and share their individual and collective experiences.

Evidence Supporting the Existence of Disability and Deaf Cultures

The shared and collective experiences of group members represent important criteria for defining a culture. Substantial empirical data indicate that within the group of individuals with disabilities and those who are deaf, a number of conditions and experiences are shared, including high rates of unemployment (Houtenville & Adler, 2001; Stapleton & Burkhauser, 2003), poverty (Fujiura & Yamaki, 2000; Houtenville & Adler, 2001; Stoddard, Jans, Ripple, & Kraus, 1998), poor educational outcomes (National Council on Disability, 2000; Wagner, Cameto, & Newman, 2003), segregated educational (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) and work placements (Dreilinger, Gilmore, & Butterworth, 2001), overrepresentation in special education (Losen & Orfield, 2002; Reschly, 1997), and high rates of violence (Nosek & Howland, 1998; Sullivan & Knutson, 2000). When studies consistently report that significant proportions (e.g., 30% to 85%) of a population experience specific social, economic, employment, and/or educational outcomes of interest, it may be concluded that such outcomes are indicators of a "shared" or "collective" group experience that contribute to an emergent or established culture.

Narrative characterizations and models of Disability and Deaf culture. Linton (1998) argued that the cultural narrative of the Disability community is an account of the world negotiated from the vantage point of the atypical. Furthermore, she noted that "Disability culture is a critical conceptual framework in disability studies scholarship for discussing the shared aspects of our experience, and the language, customs, and artistic products that emerge from that experience" (p. 102). In her autobiography, Linton (2006) addressed the issue of identity and membership within the Disability community, noting

> It was around this time, somewhere in the early '90s, that I also began to use the term "disabled woman" to identify myself. I no longer said, "I am a woman with a disability"; instead I was likely to describe myself by *forefronting* [italics added] disability. "I am a disabled woman" I would say, and then might explain to my students, "That means that I identify as a member of the minority group—disabled people—and that is a strong influence on my cultural make-up, who I am and the way that I think." (p. 118).[1]

Linton (1998) also argued that "although the dominant culture describes the atypical experience as deficit and loss, the disability community's narrative recounts it in more complex ways" (p. 5). She noted that the disability rights movement's position is critical of the domination of the medical definition, views it as a major stumbling block to the reinterpretation of Disability, and sees Disability as an identity marker. In an extensive analysis of the emergence of Disability identity, Gill (2001) concluded that "a core element of the experience of disability is being seen as something you are not, joined with the realization that what you are remains invisible" (p. 365).

Padden and Humphries (1988) reframed the experiences, ideas, language, and lives of Deaf persons as a "Deaf culture." More recently these authors chronicled what they referred to as "cultural moments" in the history of the Deaf community in the United States, noting that what Deaf people want is "a preservation of their sign language and their ways of being" (Padden & Humphries, 2005, p. 179). They noted that Deaf culture is no longer an odd phrase. Rather, it is so deeply entrenched in Deaf life that job advertisements for professional positions often require applicants to possess knowledge of Deaf culture. The emergence of Deaf culture became highly visible during the emergence of the Deaf President Now movement that resulted in the appointment of I. King Jordan as president of Gallaudet University in 1988 and through the present. Scholars from within and outside of the Deaf community have argued that people who are Deaf comprise a linguistic minority and that Deafness should not be defined or viewed as a disability (Butler, Skelton, & Valentine, 2001; Hahn, 1997; Jones, 2002; Lane, 2005). However, introductory special education textbooks typically focus on a description of the physiological characteristics and

perceived deficits attributed to deafness, defining it as a disability or exceptionality with very limited discussion attending to an understanding of the potential educational and instructional implications of deafness as a unique and collective cultural experience and identity.

Self-affirmation of differences in the human condition. The self-affirmation of Disability as a valued human experience has emerged under the umbrella of Disability studies focused on disability as a shared cultural, social, and political phenomenon (Albrecht, Seelman, & Bury, 2001; Linton, 1998; Longmore, 2003). The repudiation of the deficit perspective by many members of both the Disability and Deaf communities has been central to a redefinition of the Disability and Deaf experiences and the emergence of unique and distinct cultural identities specific to each community. A cultural understanding of Disability and Deaf experiences cannot be separated from the shared personal and collective experiences from which multiple identities emerge. A major element of this collective and shared experience is the epistemological framing of the phenomena of Disability and Deafness as undesirable defects and deficiencies.

In response to many of these experiences, Disability and Deaf cultures and identities have emerged predicated on values that accept, valorize, and celebrate disability as a natural human condition and a source of pride. Brown (2002) argued that Disability culture involves an understanding and celebration of the condition of disability and provided evidence of this recurring theme from advocates from a number of countries. Many in the Disability community have redefined the experience as an accepted and welcome experience if not because of, in spite of the struggles that characterize individual experiences.

In summary, there is substantial evidence that people with Disabilities and people who are Deaf may lay a valid claim to a parallel history unique to their communities (Burch, 2001, 2002; Longmore & Umansky, 2001; Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, 1998; National Organization on Disability, 2001; Scheerenberger, 1983, 1987) as well as shared values, experiences, patterns of behavior, and common identities (e.g., Barnes & Mercer, 2001; Braddock & Parish, 2001; Brown, 2002; Davis, 2001; Hahn, 1997; Linton, 1998; Longmore, 2003; Ravaud & Stiker, 2001).

Disability and Deaf Culture in Special Education and Multicultural Education

Foster and Iannaccone (1994) conducted a comprehensive content analysis of 16 introductory special education textbooks to assess the amount of multicultural content included, how the content might be characterized, and the extent that the content complied with standards for multicultural content as developed by the Council for Exceptional Children and adopted by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). They identified a need for added breadth and depth of empirically derived multicultural information in the literature on special education and human exceptionality. In addition, they suggested that special education faculty of preservice teacher preparation programs need to translate and generalize multicultural information into functional understandings that may be applied in both classroom and community settings. Foster and Iannaccone also indicated that preservice special education teachers need to acquire reflective skills that allow them to address the cultural and linguistic diversity of their students. As suggested by Lynch and Hanson (2004), a prerequisite to any successful intervention involving families of youth with disabilities requires an understanding of one's own cultural, ethnic, and language background and the values and beliefs that we hold of others different from ourselves.

Voltz, Dooley, and Jefferies (1999) reported a review of the special education literature from 1989 through 1998 to assess the status of the preparation of special educators for cultural and linguistic diversity. Although the number of articles addressing cultural and linguistic diversity had increased during the review period, they concluded that a need to increase the volume of articles addressing cultural and linguistic diversity remained. Voltz et al. also examined the Common Core of Knowledge and Skills Essential for All Beginning Special Education Teachers established by the Council for Exceptional Children and suggested that although substantial progress had been achieved by establishing teacher competencies specific to ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity, concerns remained about whether the standards provided a framework for the development of cultural competence and addressed action-oriented, social reconstructivist aspects of multicultural education. Voltz et al. concluded, "The issue then becomes whose voices contribute to shaping the knowledge construction process." This question is central to the discussion of disability and diversity. It is notable that although the CEC standards identify competencies required for ethnolinguistic cultural competence, there is no reference to Disability or Deaf culture.

Sapon-Shevin and Zollers (1999) examined how multicultural and disability issues were addressed in an analysis of multicultural and introductory special education texts. They observed that both special education and multicultural education teacher preparation programs are based on a deficit model that uses discrete approaches by disability type and characteristics. The assumption is that the education of individuals with disabilities is and

should be a separate educational system. The authors identified four approaches to addressing disability issues in multicultural education textbooks, including (a) a failure to address disability issues or minimally addressing disability; (b) the presentation of global, theoretical statements about the interface between disability and cultural issues but little focus on implementation information; (c) a focus on traditional approaches with an emphasis on sorting and placement; and (d) an integration of disability issues throughout the text.

Sapon-Shevin and Zollers (1999) also reviewed introductory textbooks to special education focusing on the extent that special education was presented as a separate system, how disability was viewed as an individual problem, and how topics addressing race, class, and gender were integrated in the texts. The authors concluded that "pre-service students' exposure to disability issues in textbooks may leave them with a deficit-model perspective of disability without an understanding of disability as largely socially constructed" (p. 176). Sapon-Shevin and Zollers offered suggestions as to how multicultural education might be expanded to address a conception of disability and difference with broader issues of equity and social justice and identified a number of barriers, challenges, and recommendations to promote a stronger multicultural focus on disability issues.

Pugach and Seidl (1996, 1998) examined four aspects of what they referred to as the disability-diversity connection to challenge the conclusion by Artiles and Trent (1994) that disability is not fundamentally a cultural issue. Artiles and Trent suggested disability was unquestioningly defined in terms of normative standards and parameters that validated judgments for what may be defined and characterized as typical. However, Pugach and Seidl claimed that the social construction of and parameters that define "typicality" and normative-based criteria were not critically evaluated. They claimed that traditional deficit-based normative assumptions underlying disability were very different from diversity perspectives. They further noted that special education and multicultural education appear to converge on issues of test bias that results in the disproportionate overrepresentation of students of color in special education. Pugach and Seidl addressed how perspectives of intensive instruction have been traditionally conceptualized within a deficit-based orientation toward disability and might be reframed from a sociocultural viewpoint. In addition, they addressed issues of culture and class with respect to disability and called for a broader sociocultural framework for educating youth with disabilities.

Despite the significant contributions to the discussion of disability and diversity, none of the aforementioned authors explicitly addressed the existence of a Disability culture or a Deaf culture or included the voices and perspectives of members of the Disability or Deaf communities within the narrative and discourse about the Disability and Deaf experiences that is present in multicultural and special education literature or in teacher preparation programs. Although the Disability Studies literature is replete with discussions, perspectives, and alternative models to the deficit-based perspectives dominant in special education, perspectives from this literature were not discussed. In short, although disability and diversity are topics of discussion in special and multicultural education, Disability and Deaf cultures are conspicuously absent within those discussions. It appears that the discussion of diversity is narrowly defined within the boundaries of ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, and other societal structures to the exclusion of disability.

In search of Disability and Deaf cultures. Johnson (2006) and Johnson and Nieto (2007a, 2007b) investigated and reported the extent that introductory textbooks to special education and multicultural education addressed Disability or Deaf cultures and included the perspectives of members of these communities. The rationale for a focus on introductory textbooks in special education was based on the argument by Kuhn (1996), who observed that textbooks present elementary and advanced concepts, accepted theory, achievements, applications, principles, methodologies, and ideologies typically regarded as the foundation for the study of virtually any discipline including education. Many, if not most, introductory textbooks to special education and exceptionality now include chapters devoted exclusively to a discussion of issues of ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity but fail to adequately represent the perspectives of Disability and Deaf cultures. Although textbooks are not assumed to reflect the entire scope or content of a course or program, it is reasonable to view discipline-specific textbooks as, at a minimum, representative of current thinking and perspectives of most professionals within the discipline.

For the purpose of this article and the studies conducted by Johnson and colleagues summarized in the following, Deaf culture was included as a specific area of interest based on the fact that hearing impairments and deafness are among 13 categories included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 and subsequent reauthorizations of this legislation in 1997 and 2004 that includes the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA, 2004) defining a "Child with a Disability." Although a number

of Deaf studies scholars have taken issue with conceptualizing Deafness as a disability (e.g., Hahn, 1997; Lane, 2005) and despite the authors' opinions about this perspective, hearing impairments and deafness are without question treated as disabilities in the fields of education and special education, particularly in the special education literature and introductory textbooks to special education and exceptionality. The authors would fully agree that the perspective of authentic members of the "Deaf-World" (cf. Lane, 2005) must be addressed in the narrative and definitions of who they are. However, this debate is well beyond the purview of this article. This article includes deafness, hearing impairments, and Deaf culture in the discussion because all of the introductory special education textbooks included in a review and analysis by Johnson and Nieto (2007a, 2007b) summarized in the section that follows included a chapter devoted to a discussion of the characteristics and education of youth with hearing impairments and who are deaf. In addition, most states offer special education teaching credentials with specializations in deaf and hard of hearing. In deference to scholars of the Deaf community, Deafness is discussed and treated as unique and separate from the other 12 categories of disability defined by IDEIA 2004, allowing for the possibility of alternative understandings of Deafness as a cultural and linguistic minority rather than as a disability. In short, the authors make no assumptions or draw any conclusions about whether Deafness should or should not be treated as a disability. In addition, the terms *community* and *experience* are pluralized when referring to the Disability and Deaf communities or experiences to acknowledge that they are distinct and unique and may share commonalities but also have substantial differences.

Johnson and Nieto (2007a) conducted a content review and analysis of 10 widely used introductory to special education and exceptionality textbooks to identify the number of pages of text allocated to addressing Disability or Deaf cultures or related topics. Particular attention was given to chapters specifically devoted to the education of youth with disabilities from ethno-linguistically and culturally diverse communities. A total of 5,481 pages of text were reviewed and analyzed. Although a number of the texts acknowledged Disabled and Deaf persons as members of a subculture, neither Disability nor Deaf culture was discussed within a chapter devoted to a discussion of the education of youth from ethno-linguistically and culturally diverse communities. Johnson and Nieto also reported that of the 5,481 pages of text reviewed and analyzed, the discussion specifically addressing Disability culture was limited to 3 pages, whereas text addressing Deaf culture was found on 78 pages.

The described study was replicated with 11 introductory textbooks to multicultural education (Johnson & Nieto, 2007b). Not surprisingly, the results indicated that less than 1% of the total pages of text reviewed addressed or mentioned Disability or Deaf culture. Within the pages of text that were specifically devoted to issues involving Disabled or Deaf individuals, only about 6% of the pages discussed Disability or Deaf culture. Some of the information provided was inaccurate, there was a heavy reliance on information about persons with disabilities by special education professionals, and the perspectives of members of the Disability and Deaf communities were conspicuously absent.

The findings of both aforementioned studies suggest minimal representation of the perspectives and views of Disabled and Deaf persons in the special education and multicultural education textbooks reviewed. Furthermore, although discourse about disability and special education was present, the perspectives, culture, lives, and experiences of Disabled and Deaf persons as a community were largely omitted. Although the literature on Disability culture has emerged over the past two decades, information addressing the construction, history, development, and representation of Deaf culture in the literature has been available for years. Unfortunately, Deaf culture was rarely addressed. Although most if not all Deaf education teacher preparation programs address Deaf culture in a substantive manner, the question remains as to whether Deaf culture is addressed in any meaningful way in other teacher preparation programs.

Johnson (2006) raised concerns about the cultural competence of introductory textbooks in special education and multicultural education with respect to the Disability and Deaf experiences and the potential implications of the cultural competence of professionals in the field of special education and multicultural education with respect to the Disability and Deaf experiences. Although there is substantial evidence that the voices of Deaf and Disabled persons are represented in the Disability Studies, Deaf Education, and Deaf Studies literature, the voices of Deaf and Disabled persons appear to be significantly underrepresented in the special education and multicultural education literature (e.g., Biklen, 1997; Danforth, 1997; Dybwad & Bersani, 1996) and particularly in textbooks commonly used in teacher preparation programs. The authors of this article argue that insufficient attention has been directed toward promoting and supporting understandings about Disability and Deaf cultures and toward expanding the discourse

regarding Disability and Deaf cultures, from both within and outside of each group. This omission has led to a lack of awareness of the implications created by this void for the education of youth with disabilities or youth who are deaf. This may suggest the erroneous assumption that mere representation of the voices of some Deaf and Disabled persons about selected issues in the special and multicultural education literature is sufficient representation of the cumulative cultural experiences of deaf and disabled people. It would be equally as erroneous to assume that the experiences of scholars from a particular ethnic background served as adequate representation of the collective experiences and perspectives of that ethnic group.

The exception to these findings and conclusions may be the professional literature in Deaf education and Deaf studies, where Deaf culture has been acknowledged as an important and valued factor worthy of consideration in the education of Deaf children and the Disability Studies literature. Perspectives that have emerged in the Disability Studies literature have only recently emerged in the special education literature. These authors would echo the conclusion by Danforth (1997) that the special education literature is written almost exclusively by nondisabled professionals who "serve as the arbiters of the chasm, holding the power to include, exclude, edit, and characterize the words and knowledges of served populations" (p. 396).

Resistance to Cultural Understandings of the Disability and Deaf Experience

One possible explanation for the lack of attention to a cultural model and understanding of Disability and Deaf experiences may be a resistance by special education researchers, policy makers, and leaders to shifts from a deficit-normative orientation predicated on assumptions about the desirability and undesirability of biological, anatomical, intellectual, physiological, psychological, and sociological traits. As indicated earlier, Artiles and Trent (1994) argued in opposition to an understanding of Disability as a cultural phenomenon or Disabled and Deaf persons as members of a cultural community. These authors argued that whereas disability was based on judgments about a person's anatomical, physiological, intellectual, and/or psychosocial functioning, culture was based on socially constructed notions such as race, ethnicity, gender, language and social class, values, cultural identity, and shared history.

The primacy of professional control over the use of language and the use of categorical and deficit-based approaches to the portrayal of disability reported by a number of authors (e.g., Pugach & Seidl, 1996, 1998; Sapon-Shevin & Zollers, 1999) in special education textbooks is further evidence of resistance to a perspective of value related to Disability culture and Deaf culture. It appears that while the development of cultural competence with respect to cultural structures that include ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality, and religion are important components of teacher preparation, the development of cultural perspectives and understandings of Disability and Deaf experiences are only imperative concurrent with efforts to eliminate, prevent, and treat the characteristics that define disability.

A fundamental ideology of special education was concisely stated by Hallahan and Kauffman (2006), who wrote, "We must certainly learn to live with disabling exceptionalities, but we must *never accept* [italics added] them. We prefer to think there is hope for the eventual *eradication* [italics added] of many of the disabling forms of exceptionality" (p. 7). This presents a serious dilemma for the Disability and Deaf communities for whom Disability and Deafness are central to the construction of their cultural being, cultural identities, and cultural worlds. In addition, it suggests that as a discipline, special education may prefer a culturally assimilationist approach toward Deaf or Disabled persons. Such an educational approach serves to move individuals away from the value of the Disability or Deaf experience and toward individual and world views that conform to normality and typicality. This approach represents a direct contrast to a culturally pluralistic view that understands and accepts Disability and Deafness as a natural, valued, and shared cultural phenomena and experience.

Resistance to the validation of the social construction of Disability by special education leaders was also reported by Sapon-Shevin and Zollers (1999). As one example, Heward, Cavanaugh, and Ernsbarger (2005) introduced a chapter addressing youth with disabilities in a multicultural education textbook by stating, "While diversity in social class, race, culture, and language differences increasingly characterizes U.S. classrooms, every classroom can also be characterized by students' skill diversity" (p. 317). However, they voiced their skepticism of the social construction of disability, noting

> Deconstructing the traditional sociopolitical view of exceptionality, changing social group membership, or passing legislation will not, however, eliminate the real challenges students with disabilities experience in acquiring fundamental academic, self-help, personal-social, and vocational skills. While the criteria for determining the presence or absence of a disability may be

> hypothetical social constructions, the handicaps created by educational disabilities are not. (p. 320)

Current perspectives on the delivery of special education services focus on the assessment of functional competence and on curricular and instructional modifications that provide support and facilitate access to general education environments or specific components thereof. Although this represents an improvement over early models of special education service delivery, current approaches continue to fail to acknowledge the value of a cultural identity related to Disability or Deafness and therefore do not identify, address, or support those elements of the individuals' cultural framework that can be crucial to positive identity development and self-awareness. Even within so-called functional approaches, "normal behavior" is typically the "yardstick" against which performance is measured.

As long as the Deaf or Disability experience is neither accepted nor valued and there is a resistance to understanding, developing, and including a valued cultural perspective of the Disability and Deaf experiences within multicultural and special education, Deaf and Disabled youth will be metaphorically viewed as "starfish" that need to be saved (see Smith, 2004, p. xxix).

Implications for Teacher Preparation Programs

The analyses by Johnson (2006) and Johnson and Neito (2007a, 2007b) expanded the findings of Sapon-Shevin and Zollers (1999) by specifically investigating the extent that Disability and Deaf cultures were addressed by special and multicultural education textbooks. Of specific interest are the potential implications for preservice teacher preparation programs. Sapon-Shevin and Zollers noted that although textbooks are often supplemented by field experiences and other materials, they also often serve as the sole or major curriculum organizer. These authors also concluded:

> Pre-service students' exposure to disability issues in textbooks may leave them with a deficit-model perspective of disability and without an understanding of disability as largely socially constructed. Use of textbooks may fail to inform pre-service teachers on important issues before they enter the teaching profession, including the understanding that people with disabilities are minorities subject to bias, stereotyping and low expectations. The continuing use of categorical models (and textbooks organized in that way) is problematic because it may mask the multiple identities which students bring to school and neglect the ways in which societal values, assumptions and expectations are affected by real and assumed differences. (pp. 175-176)

The findings of Johnson (2006) and Johnson and Nieto (2007a, 2007b) suggest that as measured by the scope and breadth of discussions in introductory textbooks, the exposure of students enrolled in teacher preparation programs to Disability or Deaf culture is extremely limited. This may indicate that although preservice teachers are being prepared to work with culturally diverse students, their cultural competence or proficiency with respect to the Disability or Deaf community may be limited at best and potentially ableist at worst (Hehir, 2002).

Another issue is the extent to which preservice teachers are provided access to knowledge and experience derived directly from the Disability or Deaf experiences that may add to or improve effective instructional practice. Of particular importance is gaining knowledge and understanding that will enhance instructional practice based on "insider" perspectives of the Disability or Deaf experiences. Banks (1988, 1991) proposed four approaches for integrating ethnic content into curricula that focus on increasingly more culturally proficient strategies for acquiring and using knowledge of the cultural experiences and background of children. The approaches are fundamentally based on the assumption that certain types of knowledge and understanding can only be obtained through direct experience and not by external observation. This requires accepting a lived experience as valid and worthy of value. For example, one of the authors of the textbooks reviewed by Johnson (2006) described an experience involving a blind colleague who had requested an accessible hotel room. She indicated that this direct personal experience shifted her understanding of accessibility as it became apparent that the hotel was unable to accommodate her colleague's requests. Her new understanding was the result of her direct presence and an experience in her colleague's life space that led to a reframing and expansion of her understanding of access from an objectified construct to a personal experience. This example suggests that a failure to adopt cultural understandings and perspectives of life experiences of persons from diverse communities, including those from the Disability or Deaf community, may lead to the inability to develop critical theory, frame important research questions, or expand knowledge that may improve educational practice. As the multicultural education literature has provided evidence of how proficiency with respect to the cultural elements of various ethno-linguistic communities may facilitate the learning and education of youth who are members of these communities, so also it is argued that an understanding of

the shared and collective experiences and perspectives of the Disability community and the Deaf community may better inform educational policies, practices, and research that leads to improved educational outcomes for Disabled and Deaf youth.

Investigating a Cultural Perspective of Disability and Deafness in Education

Although a number of authors have described significant advantages and challenges to the framing of a cultural perspective and understanding of the Disability and Deaf experiences (e.g., Gilson & Depoy, 2000; Sapon-Shevin & Zollers, 1999), little discussion is focused on the potential implications for youth and adults with disabilities in school. One issue of interest is the variance in the means of cultural transmission. Typically, culture is transmitted intergenerationally among families of ethnically and religiously diverse populations. However, cultural identities involving gender, sexual orientation, disability, and deafness may be transmitted in other ways. Although many Deaf youth are members of families with parents who are themselves Deaf and members of the Deaf community, many more Disabled and Deaf youth live in families with parents and guardians who are not Disabled or Deaf. Typically, the transmission of Disability or Deaf culture and the emergence of an identity as a "Disabled woman" or "Deaf man" occurs after youth transition to adult life and begin to identify themselves as members of the Disability or Deaf communities and communicate with others who have Disabilities or who are Deaf.

Although additional research is needed to investigate ways in which Disability or Deaf cultures are transmitted, anthropological studies suggest that cultural identities develop through the narration of personal histories (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Holland et al. (1998) argued that self-consciousness, self-reflection, and self-identity emerge as products of a social history. In addition, they argued that people's identities and agency are formed dialectically and dialogically in what they referred to as "figured" worlds. They noted that behavior is mediated by senses of self and identity. In a cultural study of Alcoholics Anonymous, they observed that "one device in particular that helps one identify oneself in this world is the telling of a particular sort of personal story" (p. 66). Holland et al. described "authoring" and the power of discourse to define persons in a case study of a person diagnosed with mental illness. In short, these authors argued that the dialectic and discourse play essential roles in the development of culture and identity.

This raises important questions about the extent to which Deaf or Disabled youth may be systematically denied access to members of their communities and epistemic access to knowledge and understanding of their collective history, culture, and the shared experiences of the communities that they are or may choose to become members of. Although it is notable that one of the special education textbooks reviewed by Johnson (2006) acknowledged the need for youth with disabilities to be connected to successful adults with disabilities and suggested that adults with disabilities could be mentors (i.e., R. Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, Smith, & Leal, 2002), a serious question remains. How can youth with Disabilities or who are Deaf develop an identity and understanding of themselves in relation to their disability when educational approaches fail to accept Disability or Deafness as natural or desirable phenomena; limit access to knowledge and understanding of the historical, social, political, and cultural antecedents and determinants of disability; fail to value and facilitate discourse within and among members of Disabled and Deaf communities; and plan and deliver educational services from a deficit perspective? Questions may be raised as to how Deaf or Disabled youth can acquire an understanding of their Disability or Deafness as a cultural experience without contact or dialogue with adults with Disabilities or who are Deaf who have lived the experience. Youth with Disabilities or who are Deaf may learn that Disability or Deafness is undesirable through life experiences while being taught that functioning as well as persons without disabilities and assimilating into a "nondisabled" or "hearing" society is highly valued. In short, youth with disabilities are taught that others devalue characteristics and features that make them who they are and that adopting, assuming, and demonstrating the features, characteristics, and identity of a nondisabled person is a priority of many educational and service delivery practices. Over time, many Disabled or Deaf persons begin to realize that they have been taught to devalue and rid themselves of undesirable characteristics that are essential and integral elements of their life experiences and their identity. This raises serious questions about the types of conflicts that may emerge as Disabled or Deaf persons identify who they are.

Cultural pluralism . . . or cultural cleansing? One of the elephants in the room is the role and contribution Deaf and Disabled persons make to society, their community, and the world *by virtue of being Deaf or having a Disability*. Can Deafness and Disability be viewed and treated as not only a valued but also a desirable experience? Can Deafness and Disability present opportunities for learning, understanding, and experiences, both individually and collectively, that

otherwise cannot be achieved? Would society truly be better off without Deaf or Disabled persons? Failure to attend to the value and contributions of the Disability and Deaf experiences to society and emphasis on the cure, prevention, and elimination of disability by all means available can be characterized as an extension of the eugenics agenda to the cultural assimilation of youth with disabilities into a society where wealth, power, physical beauty, behavioral and social conformity, and intellectual competence serve as primary benchmarks for determining social success and the value of one's humanity. Eradicating differences that deviate from the norm becomes a focused means of cleansing a population of those differences and supporting intolerance and prejudice toward those characteristics. This intolerance of human characteristics may be institutionalized and communicated to Disabled or Deaf youth in our educational policy, procedure, and practices when a cultural perspective and understanding is denied.

Toward a Research Agenda

The investigation of cultural understandings and perspectives of Disability or Deaf cultures and identities may hold significant implications and promise in the area of self-determination. Self-determination has been defined as the abilities and attitudes required to set and achieve goals (Ward, 1988). Wehmeyer and Lawrence (1995) defined self-determination in terms of the causal agency involved in the exercise of choices and meaningful decisions. As the definition and understanding of self-determination has evolved, it has been widely acknowledged and recognized as an important educational outcome that must be directly addressed in the educational planning of youth with all disabilities (Powers, Singer, & Sowers, 1998; Sands & Wehmeyer, 1998; Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998). A number of component elements of self-determination have been identified that are important to promoting the self-determination of youth with disabilities (Wehmeyer, 1996). Some of these factors include but are not limited to choice making, decision making, problem solving, goal setting and attainment, self-observation skills, self-evaluation, self-reinforcement, self-advocacy, internal locus of control, self-awareness, self-knowledge, positive attributions of efficacy and outcome expectancy, and relationships with others.

Wehmeyer et al. (1998) described self-awareness and self-knowledge in terms of understanding one's strengths, weaknesses, abilities, and limitations. They also noted that self-awareness and -knowledge do not emerge solely from introspection or a focus on limitations and that youth with disabilities learn through their own interpretation of events and experiences. This aspect of self-determination is very much related to identity development. However, little information is available about how the constructs of self-awareness and self-knowledge themselves are measured or how self-awareness and self-knowledge may lead to a personal identity.

Identification as a person with a disability has been a factor of interest and study in special education. As argued in this article, the emergence of a Disability or Deaf identity and Disability and Deaf cultures are very closely related. However, being identified as a person with a disability or who is deaf and identifying oneself as a Disabled or Deaf person are very different experiences. Identifying oneself as a Disabled or Deaf person and as a member of the Disability or Deaf communities is a significant measure of self-determination that has not been addressed in special education.

Additional research is needed to investigate identity development among youth with disabilities. This may have significant implications for youth with disabilities with respect to identity development, self-determination, social skills development, accessing needed services, the ability to effectively self-advocate, and leadership development.

Holland et al. (1998) and others argued that the development of personal and cultural identities is strongly facilitated by the narration of personal history. However, the narration of personal and social history that supports the emergence of a personal identity requires substantial social skills, recall, memory, understanding of time, and communication skills. This raises questions about how persons with significant intellectual disabilities develop personal identity when they may have significant challenges acquiring these skills and may not engage in a historical or social narrative about themselves. Instructional strategies that situate persons with significant intellectual disabilities in a narrative recall of their personal history and social experiences may facilitate identity development, promote successful educational outcomes, increase the ability to anticipate future events such as the beginning and ending of a task, and reduce maladaptive behavioral responses that result from a failure of attributing meaning, consequence, context, or time to an event. However, this also presents ethical questions related to the level of authoring, intrusion, and control that may be exerted by teachers on the construction of the personal identity of a child with a disability. In short, much remains to be learned about the *value* of being Disabled or Deaf for both disabled and deaf youth and for teachers who work with youth with disabilities and those who are deaf. Additional research is clearly needed to investigate the potential contribution of cultural understandings and cultural proficiency with respect to the Disability and

Deaf experiences toward the improvement of educational services for youth with disabilities and those who are deaf, as well as the enrichment of teacher preparation programs.

Toward a Cultural Perspective and Understanding of the Disability and Deaf Experience

This article presented an argument in favor of supporting a cultural perspective and understanding of the Disability and Deaf experiences and addressed (a) the extent to which the views, perspectives, understandings, and knowledge of Deaf and Disabled persons of their shared, cultural, and lived experiences have been acknowledged in the special education and multicultural education literature; (b) the extent that cultural competence and proficiency with respect to Disability and Deaf culture have been addressed by special and multicultural education textbooks used in teacher preparation programs; (c) evidence of a resistance to a cultural perspective and understanding of the Disability and Deaf experience; (d) implications of a cultural perspective and understanding for youth with disabilities and who are Deaf; and (e) areas for future research that may support the self-determination of youth with disabilities.

Based on a review of the literature, it may be concluded that although there is extensive evidence of the existence of Disability and Deaf cultures, minimal attention has been paid to developing or understanding Disability or Deaf culture in teacher preparation programs. Furthermore, there appears to be significant resistance to developing or supporting cultural perspectives and understandings of these groups. There is a serious need to investigate the potential impact of cultural perspective and understandings of Disability and Deafness consistent with multicultural education perspectives of culture as defined by variables such as gender, race, language, or ethnicity and their implications for educational policy, practice, and research.

There is a need to expand and strengthen teacher preparation and multicultural education programs to improve preservice students' cultural competence with respect to Disability and Deaf culture. Following are some suggestions for consideration.

1. Special education teacher preparation programs may wish to examine the core beliefs, values, and assumptions about Disability and Deafness that are the foundation of the discipline of special education to address the question of the extent to which disability is perceived as a valued experience or an experience to be eradicated and the implications of this position for program and course development and teacher preparation.
2. Professionals who work with persons with disabilities, and particularly special educators, may wish to consider evaluating whether a single perspective of disability is logically and intellectually defensible, much less a coherent representation of a historically, socially, politically, and educationally complex phenomena. Professionals must accommodate conflicting viewpoints for the field to advance and progress, including "incommensurable ways of seeing the world and of practicing science in it" (Kuhn, 1996, p. 4). New theories and differences in interpretation of the human experience provide opportunities for improved understandings as a function of the effort to resolve and accommodate different perspectives and understandings.
3. Teacher education programs may wish to consider evaluating the extent that program participants are offered the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to become culturally competent and proficient with respect to Disability and Deaf culture.
4. Multicultural education programs may need to evaluate the extent to which representation of the Disability and Deaf experience, drawn almost exclusively from the perspective of nondisabled and non–Deaf persons, reflects an authentic multicultural perspective of the Disability or Deaf experience from the vantage point of the Disability and Deaf communities and are consistent with the purpose and mission of multicultural education.
5. Research efforts should consider an investigation of the potential implications of a cultural perspective and understanding of the Disability and Deaf experience on educational policy, practice, and research. Questions related to how youth acquire a positive understanding of disability, resolve conflicts with deficit-based perspectives of who they are, the impact of a historical and sociocultural view of disability on one's own self-identity, and the implications of connecting Deaf and Disabled youth to the adult Deaf and Disabled communities need to be addressed.
6. Research focused on improving the self-determination of youth with disabilities should be expanded to improve our understanding of identity development among youth with disabilities and the potential impact of cultural and personal identities on the self-determination and educational achievement of

Disabled and Deaf youth. Of specific interest are the implications of identifying oneself as a member of the Disability or Deaf community and as a Deaf or Disabled person on self-determination.

7. Persons who are Deaf or Disabled are experts in the lived experience of the Deaf and Disability experience. Perspectives and understandings of their experiences should be considered as a critical source of theory, knowledge, and understanding of the epistemology and ontology of the experience with significant implications for education policy, practice, and research. Professionals should examine whether they can accept that certain questions, knowledge, and understandings of the Disability and Deaf experience may only originate from individuals who are Disabled or Deaf and can only be answered by individuals within these groups. The implications of accepting or rejecting an understanding of the experience from the perspective of those who are Disabled or Deaf will impact educational policy, practice, and research.
8. Culture-related variables identified in the multicultural education literature as relevant to the successful education of individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse groups should be examined and articulated in terms of their applicability to the successful education of individuals with Disabilities and those who are Deaf as cultural groups.
9. Finally, a truly culturally pluralistic perspective and understanding of the Disability and Deaf experience should be seriously considered in order to increase the representation, voices, and perspectives of the Disability and Deaf communities in the design and implementation of teacher preparation programs, the professional literature, and the conduct of research.

In conclusion, we must begin to support a cultural perspective and understanding of Disability and Deaf experiences in educational policy, practice, and research if we wish to make legitimate and valid claims that we support democratic dispositions and cultural competence based on understandings of the implications for the "nature and type of schooling, conditions for learning, and learning outcomes" (Edgar et al., 2002, p. 235). We must understand that we may be denying ourselves insights, knowledge, and understanding that may improve educational practice and outcomes of youth with Disabilities and who are Deaf by failing to adopt a cultural understanding and perspective of the Disability and Deaf experience from those who live with, know, and truly understand the experience—Disabled and Deaf persons.

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