

Social Justice in Education for Students with Disabilities

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Interest in the application of Social Justice (SJ) theories to education has grown exponentially in the United States since the mid-1980s, multiplying almost 20-fold (Connor, 2012). The ‘currency’ of SJ is reflected in edited books (Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998), professional journals (e.g., *Education, Citizenship, and Social Justice*), conferences (e.g., Conference on Equity and Social Justice, 2012) and mission statements on university webpages (e.g., Brooklyn College). However, the phenomenon of SJ in education gives rise to many questions, including: Where did it originate? How did it grow? What and who does it encompass? And, perhaps most importantly for readers of this book: What does it actually mean for students with disabilities (SWD) and the educators who work with them?

In this chapter, I endeavor to answer these questions by addressing three interconnected areas outlined as follows. First, I link the inception of SJ to contemporary times and related issues in special education as both a field of study and a structural system for SWD. Second, I describe as a matter of SJ, the need for reframing disability *beyond* restrictive notions foundational to the field of special education. Third, I explore examples of proactive pedagogy to educate about disability throughout the curriculum in order to challenge widespread ableist beliefs and practices.

LINKING THE ORIGINS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE TO HUMAN RIGHTS

The term ‘social justice’ was first used in the mid-19th century by Luigi Taparelli d’Azeglio, a Sicilian priest in response to changes wrought upon society by the

industrial revolution, and the Church's position on these changes (Zajda, Majhanovich, & Rust, 2006). In a tumultuous era of unfettered capitalism that gave birth to socialist movements in opposition to dehumanizing conditions, Taparelli denounced the separation of morality from 'positive law', a man made legal system that bestowed or removed privileges from a particular group of people in society. In contrast, it was generally believed that 'natural law' upheld universal, inherent rights bestowed by nature or God. By viewing society as a multi-leveled system comprised of many sub-societies – and not as a monolithic entity composed of individuals – Taparelli asserted that all people at every layer had rights and responsibilities. Furthermore, he believed that for the benefit of all people, these rights and responsibilities should be respected by everybody. In sum, Taparelli advocated that people from all levels of society should work together toward meeting everyone's needs without resorting to competition, conflict, or violence. From these origins, we can begin to see the premise of SJ as promoting and upholding equality among people – for the greater good of all.

Of course this simple notion – for the greater good of all – often clashes with structures, systems and governmental policies in societies around the world. This chapter is admittedly contextualized within the US where the traditional dominant ideology is to 'make it on your own', mythologized through tales of rugged individualism and self-sufficiency within a competitive free-market that exists through minimal governmental involvement. However, a byproduct of *laissez faire* capitalism has always been massive discrepancies among salaries that results in a sizable portion of the population existing as an underclass with few resources and little economic opportunities (Sleeter, 2007).

In a comment laced with sarcasm, Nieto (2010) states that some people '... liken social justice to socialism and the end of the civilized world as we know it' (p. ix), referring to a curious phenomenon within the US of equating socialism with communism, and the related fear of some people losing their liberties when equality is being advocated for others. Scholars working within SJ recognize that effective fear-mongering results in large groups of people remaining disenfranchised within the systems that constitute our society. Predictably, marginalization is frequently based upon one or more markers of identity such as race, class, gender, immigration status, disability, sexual orientation, and so on. In response, members of these groups and their allies seek to change conditions that disadvantage them in comparison to other citizens, enabling all access to a larger world enjoyed by the majority of people.

Taparelli's original thoughts have stretched throughout a century and a half, taking root across the world, influencing the conceptualization of human rights. Once introduced to the world at large, the discourse of human rights became integrated into existing social movements. For example, African-Americans within the US were keenly aware of how their community sacrificed their own lives to protect the rights of European citizens, while the same rights were denied them on returning home (Wynn, 1993). In sum, the Civil Rights movements of the US, originated by African-Americans, soon grew to include other

‘second class’ citizens without recognition from and freedoms within the larger community. These groups included: women (Steinem, 1969); gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer-identified people (GLBTQ) (Alsenas, 2008); and people with disabilities (Fleisher & Zames, 2001). Through their struggles, all of these groups made progress and gained greater access to all aspects of society, including education within schools and universities.

DEFINING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

While much has been said and written about the need for, and value of, a SJ perspective in understanding the world, there have also been concerns about who is defining SJ and how. For example, Novak (2000) notes that, ‘Whole books and treatises have been written about social justice without ever offering a definition of it. It is allowed to float in the air as if everyone will recognize an instance of it when it appears’ (p. 11). Multicultural education scholar Nieto asserts that

... a close look at U.S. educational history makes it obvious that few controversies have been unrelated to social justice in education, whether these have focused on segregated schools, bilingual education, education for youngsters with special needs, or gender-fair education, among others. (2010, p. x)

It is clear that the overarching concept of SJ encompassing these and other issues is so broad that it can appear, for some, too widespread and therefore problematic. Chapman and Hobbel express concern that, ‘The increased use of the term “social justice” has led to a diffusion of meaning that threatens to make the concept of social justice ineffective and difficult to document through empirical research’ (2010, p. 3). This diffusion provokes scholars such as North (2008) to dismiss the concept of SJ as ‘education’s latest catchphrase’, charging that individuals using the label ‘often fail to elaborate the substantive meaning of social justice and the implications of its use’ (p. 1182). The seeming paradox of omnipresence without clear definition, and unclear consequences of its use, has thankfully prompted several SJ scholars to articulate what SJ means to them.

For instance, Nieto and Bode (2007) describe social justice education as ‘a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity’ (cited in Chapman & Hobbel, 2010a, p. 1). The crucial element within their definition is *actions*; actions based upon a philosophy that guides a specific approach to teaching and learning. This expectation of taking action is echoed by other SJ scholars such as Steinberg (2009) who states, ‘... We – teachers and instructors – are the agent of social and cultural change’ (p. xiii). Likewise, Ayres, Quinn, and Stovall (2009b), note that SJ embraces ‘three Rs: Relevant, Rigorous, and Revolutionary. We change our lives, we change the world’ (p. xiv). At the same time, Ayers et al. acknowledge that SJ in education is still very much a work in progress, and perhaps, by its very nature, may always be this way, stating, ‘... in this dynamic,

forward-charging, imperfect human endeavor, there is always more to know, more to uncover, more to expand and embrace' (2009a, p. 725), conveying its unfinalizability.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The previous sections serve as a context to the central question of this chapter: What does SJ actually mean for students with disabilities (SWD) and the educators who work with them? Some readers may argue that the very structure of special education is a form of social justice. After all, since 1975, the passage of major U.S. law P.L. 94–142 (*The Education of All Handicapped Children Act*) and its subsequent reauthorizations as *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (1990, 1997) and *Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Education Act* (2004) guarantee a free and appropriate public education for all SWD. Indeed, there are traditional scholars working within the field of special education who argue that this trajectory does constitute social justice (see, for example, Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2011). However, the same field has also been consistently critiqued *because of* the educational structures that materialized in which to educate students with disabilities (Skrtic, 1991). In brief, despite good intentions embedded within protective law, the experiences of and outcomes for students with disabilities signal a need for change.

For example, in comparison to their nondisabled peers, students in the special education system are likely to have: high drop-out rates (Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002), low graduation rates (Advocates for Children, 2005), a lengthier time completing school (US Department of Education, 2005), less likelihood of entering college and more likelihood of leaving without graduating (Gregg, 2007), unemployment or underemployment (Moxley & Finch, 2003), and higher rates of incarceration (Children's Defense Fund, 2007). Within the special education system, students continue to experience segregation according to disability, with students of color and/or from linguistic minorities still being placed in more restrictive settings (Losen & Orfield, 2002). As has been argued elsewhere (Ferri & Connor, 2005), when it became illegal to separate schools by race, segregation according to disability materialized as a loophole that permitted ongoing racial divisions. Indeed, for many scholars interested in education *and* disability, the very concept of 'Special Education' is problematic because it signifies a monopoly of thought about these related concepts, and represents a variety of meanings to different people – from a benevolent, enabling system of protections and services (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995) to an oppressive, disabling structure, functioning as a precursor to unemployment, low-level jobs, and jail (Karagiannis, 2000; Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). These troubling outcomes follow the same patterns around the world, as has been seen in recent research from Austria, the UK, Germany, Sweden, South Africa, India, Kenya and Argentina (Artiles, Kozleski, & Waitoller, 2011). Their findings serve to

remind us of Slee's (2001) charge for educational research to be more explicit in its connections to socially justice.

Although divisions within the field of special education have existed since its inception (see, for example, Danforth, 2009; Dunn, 1968; Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1986), the field has been hostile to critiques, frequently silencing potentially productive discussions, limiting a plurality of perspectives and imposing an ideological 'orthodoxy' (Gallagher, Heshusius, Iano, & Skrtic, 2004). At the turn of the 21st century, a gathering of prominent special education scholars met to debate 'the divide' in special education between subgroups of traditionalists and reconceptualists. These subgroups illustrated the depth of this schism: the former desirous of staying the course, while the latter invoked SJ in their wish to reimagine and redevelop special education along different lines (Andrews et al., 2000).

Around the same time, a core group of critical special educators united in their rejection of self-imposed limitations within the field of special education, motivated by a desire to develop alternative ways of theorizing and researching disability that would, in turn, impact practice and policy. Influenced by the multi-disciplinary field of Disability Studies (DS), these scholars began the sub-discipline of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) (Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011). Initially, in large part, a critique of special education's knowledge base that served as the bedrock undergirding claims and practices (see chapters by Gallagher and Biklen in this volume), DSE has grown to assert its own identity, claiming disability is a form of human diversity, and openly aligning itself with issues of SJ, including inclusive education (Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008).

People with disabilities have long critiqued the disposition, conceptualizations, and motivation of disability-focused researchers, calling attention to the minimal impact of their work on the material lives of people with disabilities. Oliver (1996) has characterized most disability-related research as, '... at best irrelevant, and at worst, oppressive' (p. 129). This situation provoked the grass-roots mantra for knowledge claims about disability research, 'Nothing about us without us' (Charlton, 2000, p. 3). Prominent scholars of disability who have disabilities frequently make explicit links to their lives and professions with issues of SJ, activism, access, and inclusion (see, for example: Asch, 2001; Fine & Asch, 2003; Gabel & Peters, 2004; Linton, 2006; Wendell, 2000).

REFRAMING DISABILITY AS HUMAN DIVERSITY: A SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE

In general, DS are interested in understanding, differentiating among, and critiquing, all models of disability. The most prevalent models addressed within DS are the medical, social and personal (individualized/hermeneutic) models. Although each will be briefly discussed in this section, each merits

more attention than space permits. Other models of disability include lenses constituted by a variety of factors such as economic, religious, cultural, expert, moral, market, spectrum, etc. (see www.disabled-world.com/definitions/disability-models.php). The three main models – medical, social, personal (and others) – are neither singular nor free-floating, but rather intersectional phenomena that co-exist in time and place. By reframing disability and viewing it through different and/or multiple lenses allows educators, scholars, people deemed disabled and able-bodied, to contemplate disability in more rich and nuanced ways, serving to expand our understanding of bodily differences. The very notion of ‘disability’ becomes interrogated as a marker of identity that we take for granted, offering us new ways of looking at familiar things.

The medical model

The major critique of special education by DSE scholars has been its dogged adherence to conceptualizations of disability primarily grounded in science, medicine and psychology, all of which frame disability as deficit, disorder, and dysfunction (Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2011). In brief, special education locates the problem of disability within the individual as an intrinsic state of being, something in need of a cure. The language of special education is rife with medical terminology that subsequently imbues its practices with the authority of pseudo-science. Valle and Connor (2010) describe assessment, eligibility, and special placement procedures delineated under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act:

The ‘patient’ (student) presents with ‘symptoms’ (educational problems). The ‘scientific expert’ (school psychologist) performs an ‘examination’ (psycho-educational assessment) in order to confirm or rule out a ‘diagnosis’ (disability). Once a ‘diagnosis’ (disability) is identified, a ‘prescription’ (Individualized Education Plan, or IEP) is written with recommendations for a ‘course of treatment’ (special education placement and individual instruction) intended to ‘cure’ (remediate) the ‘patient’ (student). A ‘follow-up appointment,’ (annual IEP review) is scheduled to evaluate the effectiveness of the ‘treatment plan’ (special education services). (2004, p. 40–41)

In pathologizing human difference as disability, the field of special education (and the foundational knowledge it is built upon) has historically offered a very narrow lens for teachers to view this classification.

The social model

As a field, DS largely self-defines as being under girded by the social model of disability. That said, in the US and the UK, the grounding of the social model of disability is quite different, prompting some scholars to argue that researchers should clearly identify which definition of the social model is being used and in what ways (Gabel & Peters, 2004). Others have said it is more accurate to describe ‘social interpretations’ of disability, allowing for greater understanding

of theories existing within DS (disability identity, disability discourse, embodiment, etc.) (Gabel, 2005).

Without wishing to oversimplify, the movement in the UK that gave rise to DS in the 1970s was arguably more grass roots than its US counterparts in its vehement rejection of imposed medical authority. Interestingly, the UK movement differentiated between impairment as a bodily function and disability as social oppression promulgated by widespread practices, structural barriers, and bureaucracies that actively disabled its impaired citizens. It urged for greater access to all aspects of society, including jobs, transportation, living conditions and education.

Within the US, in a roughly parallel timeframe, the civil rights movement gave rise to the rights of people with disabilities being conceived as a minority group. In comparison to the UK, the US movement was viewed as more eclectic in nature, and did not stress impairment vs. disability. According to Gabel, the US 'emphasized the social construction of disability rather than the sociopolitical processes of disablement' (2005, p. 5). Another interesting turn – and major difference – is that DS in the US has been dominated by the humanities (Snyder, Brueggemann, & Garland Thomson, 2002), whereas within the UK, DS has stayed true to its sociological roots (Barnes, Mercer, & Shakespeare, 1999).

Both versions of the social model have been widely used to promote much-needed changes in policy, especially in the UK (Lang, 2001). However, these models have also been critiqued as somewhat outdated, having served their original purpose of advancing, and complicating disability theory (Gabel & Peters, 1994). For example, once staunch advocates for the social model, Shakespeare and Watson consequently called attention to its limitations, including the need to retain a medical perspective, especially when it comes to disabilities that cause physical and mental pain. They write:

For us, disability is the quintessential post-modern concept, because it is so complex, so variable, so contingent, so situated. It sits at the intersection of biology and society and of agency and structure. Disability cannot be reduced to a singular identity: it is a multiplicity, a plurality. (2002, p. 18)

In addition, they critique the minority model of disability as presumptuous and limiting, claiming:

Many disabled people do not want to see themselves as disabled, either in terms of the medical model or the social model. They downplay the significance of their impairments, and seek access to a mainstream identity. They do not have a political identity, because they do not see themselves as part of the disability movement either . . . What is wrong with seeing yourself as a person with a disability, rather than a disabled person, or even identifying simply as a human being, or as a citizen, rather than as a member of a minority community. After all, identity politics can be a prison, as well as a haven. (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002, p. 19)

The comments of Shakespeare and Watson complicate any simple or universal interpretations of disability through *any* model. At the same time, while they do critique the social models, these frameworks still hold great sway by their primary location of disability within social contexts rather than individuals.

The individual or hermeneutic model

An individual model of disability privileges the lived experience of people with disabilities, upholding a core tenet of DS. Given that the majority of knowledge circulating about disability is generated by deficit-based discourses (science, medicine, psychology, education, etc.), a hermeneutic model provides counter-narratives to master-narratives or dominant scripts of disability. Hermeneutic sources can range from mainstream memoirs (Kleege, 1999; Knipfel, 1999; Mooney, 2008), to poetry (Clare, 1999; Ferris, 2009), to research which foregrounds the voices of individuals with disabilities (Rodis, Garrod, & Boscardin, 2000). It also includes children and youth in special education who offer astute insights into: the nature of disability (Connor, 2008), how our education systems often disadvantage many students with disabilities (Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2006), and life at the intersections of disability and race (Collins, 2003), class (Harry & Klingner, 2006), gender (Ferri & Connor, 2010) and sexual orientation (McRuer, 2006).

All of these individualized accounts contribute to understanding disability as unique, with knowledge claims not universalized or generalization in the scientific sense, but rather offering a deeper understanding of the contextual and the particular. At the same time as being predominantly anti-essentialist, such accounts do provide insights into the actual lives of people with disabilities to reveal the tangle of disability discourses that an individual must navigate to make sense of the world in general, and her place within it. In valuing the experiences and perceptions of students and adults with disabilities, educators can come to know the material implications of living with a disability.

THE VALUE OF A PLURALITY OF PERSPECTIVES ON DISABILITY

Because DS (and by extension DSE) is interdisciplinary, and deliberately eclectic, it can appear diffuse – even confusing to some educators. However, it also offers an open-ended view of disability that is a valid alternative to traditional special education discourse. Scholars who have helped to develop the subfield of DSE are motivated by a desire to change society in its broad understandings of disability, including how the institution of special education functions. By providing an alternative framework through which to view disability (instead of relegating anything to do with disability *and* education into the default box of special education), DSE has invoked social justice as foundational principle. Using a SJ-based DSE lens ultimately opens up increased possibilities in contemplating theory, research, policy, and practice in the education of SWD.

In brief, DSE urges disability to be included in contemporary notions of diversity promulgated within SJ texts (Ayres et al., 2009b; Chapman & Hobbel, 2010a) and multicultural anthologies (Steinberg, 2009). By unpacking what constitutes normalcy (and abnormalcy) in terms of students and research upon them, DSE troubles the fixity of dis/ability categorizations, the legitimacy of traditional research

methods and knowledge claims, and surety of existing educational structures and practices. It is worth noting that scholars within the field of special education (and other disciplines) who share a disposition toward SJ issues have made significant contributions. For example, Harry and Klingner (2006) focus on how children of color become overrepresented in special education categories and segregated placements; Hehir (2005) illustrates how ableism works within education; Baker (2002) reveals taken-for-granted disturbing practices within schools that 'hunt' for disability; Varenne and McDermott (1998) portray the varied social contexts in which disability alternately appears and disappears for students; and Blanchett (2006) reveals instances of institutional racism that combine with ableism to contain African-American students. In addition, the work of Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher and Ortiz (2010) calls attention to how research in traditional special education has been extremely narrow, to the point of ignoring many important issues:

It seems that when learning is conceptualized as an individual process, the task of documenting child factors is relatively straightforward; fairly clear answers can be obtained in such studies. However, when issues of context and institutional and interpersonal processes are included in research questions, it is not clear whether researchers used research methods and/or theoretical frameworks that would enable them to capture systematically the link between mind, history, and society. (p. 294)

The lack of cultural competency by many researchers in special education is evident in the inattention paid to issues such as race, class, and culture. As Arzubagi, Artiles, King, & Harris-Murri (2008) have noted:

Systematic analysis of empirical studies published over substantial periods of time in peer refereed journals in psychology, special education, and school psychology show that researchers have neglected to ask questions, or to document and/or analyze data that would shed light on the role of culture in human development and provide alternative explanations for student achievement and behavior other than student deficits, which are often assumed with minority group status. (p. 311)

Disability and race are intimately connected throughout U.S. educational history (Connor & Ferri, in press), a nexus that is alive and well as evidenced in the overrepresentation of students of color in disability categories.

In order to come closer to understanding inequities around race and disability, it is necessary to trouble the limitations of existing educational research in favor of a more diverse, multi-layered approach that incorporates many factors ignored or unaddressed in traditional special education studies. As Artiles (2011) notes,

The interdisciplinary examination of the racialization of disability promises to transcend substantial limitations of previous equity research in terms of how difference is theorized; the unit of analysis used in this literature; the role of culture, power, and history in institutional practices; the systematic juxtaposition of culture, space, and time . . . [because such a framework] takes into account the dynamic, culturally situated, and historically produced nature of difference and its consequences. (p. 443)

It is clear then, that special education has neglected a plethora of important SJ-related issues including: disability as a highly contested category; the need to analyze disability in various contexts; schooling practices that actually disable

some of the most vulnerable children; the need to use multiple lenses to understand the lived experience of disability in and out of schools; ways in which disability always intersects with a variety of markers of identity; and how disability is inextricably woven with historical understandings of race (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2003; Erevellas, 2006).

In neglecting these ‘unpalatable’ issues, and uncritically asserting disability as a deficit, special education’s clinical disposition has sidestepped SJ issues. However, disability *is* an issue of SJ, prompting us to recognize, and challenge, ongoing beliefs and practices that diminish individuals with disabilities who often evaluate themselves as ‘less than’ human (Pelkey, 2001). This challenge can be done through theorizing with view to action, developing educational policies that include students with disabilities, researching with students identified as disabled, and personally practicing a pedagogy that challenges the current status quo understanding disability in very limited ways. In the following section, as part of a broad SJ framework, I explore different ways in which educators can use pro-active pedagogy to engage students in issues around disability and diversity.

TEACHING ABOUT DISABILITY: USING PROACTIVE PEDAGOGY

Understanding disability as part of the broad spectrum of SJ issues means that it can be integral to all aspects of teaching. In other words, there lies potential to incorporate disability throughout the entire curriculum. For many disability activists, this is *imperative*, given the need to counter pervasive master narratives of deficit, dysfunction, disorder, tragedy, charity, and so on (Charlton, 2000; Linton, 1998; Shapiro, 1993). By developing an SJ-based proactive pedagogy, educators can use DS to teach against limited and oppressive understandings of disability and toward human diversity, disrupt notions of normalcy, challenge pervasive stereotypes, and provide alternative renderings of dis/ability. Above all, a proactive pedagogy offers ways to confront the many forms of ableism, including manifestations within school practices, structures, and ironically – sometimes within special education itself.

CONFRONTING ABLEISM IN EDUCATION

Originally termed ‘handicapism’ (Bodgen & Biklen, 1977), the current term *ableism* denotes the different treatment of people with disabilities as inferior to people without disabilities. Akin to racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ageism, ableism signifies the belief that people lacking one or more characteristics do not qualify as fully human. Described by Rauscher and McClintock (1996) as

A pervasive system of discrimination and exclusion that oppresses people who have mental, emotional, and physical disabilities . . . Deeply rooted beliefs about health, productivity, beauty,

and the value of human life, perpetuated by the public and private media, combine to create an environment that is often hostile to those whose physical, mental, cognitive, and sensory abilities . . . fall out of the scope of what is currently defined as socially acceptable. (p. 198)

People with disabilities have long described their status as second-class citizens (Fleischer & Zames, 2001) without this being fully acknowledged by non-disabled people.

By using the voices, experiences, and perspectives of people with disabilities to guide the counter-narrative to the dominant discourse of deficit, educators can begin to re-value rather than devalue the concept of disability. After all, schools are a microcosm of a macro society, simultaneously reflecting and shaping cultural values and norms. Hehir (2005) calls attention to peoples' attitudes, that ' . . . uncritically assert that it is better for a child to walk than roll, speak than sign, read print than read Braille, spell independently than use a spell check, and hangout with nondisabled children rather than with other disabled children' (p. 15). His comments reveal ways in which the microcosm of schooling has traditionally been configured to shape the macrocosm society, and its focus on differentiating between able-bodied and disabled people. The result has been a historically inflexible system, largely intolerant of children who do not – or cannot – 'fit' into school cultures, who then become relegated to specially designated classrooms, schools and institutions.

Given the pervasive nature of ableism, manifest throughout all aspects of society, there are many opportunities for proactive pedagogy. In the following sections, I outline ways in which educators can participate in the 'cultural work' of teaching about disability as human variation. I begin by focusing on college curriculum in general and then teacher education programs specifically, before moving to include several ways in which disability can be incorporated within elementary, junior high, and high schools.

TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The place of disability within teacher education programs is constantly subject to the push-and-pull of numerous forces. On one hand, teachers are increasingly required by the educational establishments to: focus on high stakes testing; use a lock step curriculum; adhere to standardizing children (for example into 'performance' categories of 1, 2, 3, 4); push relentlessly toward this uniformity; and be fearful of penalties, punitive measures, and public humiliation via published ratings should their students not sufficiently measure up to standards. On the other hand, teachers are expected to: teach a population composed of children with a diverse range of abilities and disabilities; be cognizant of multiculturalism and student diversity in general, (including gender, social class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on); use differentiated instruction in order to meet various needs; and motivate all children to learn. It is safe to say that

multiple tensions exist within these expectations that pose what many perceive as conflicting demands (Cochran-Smith & Power, 2010).

Teacher education programs often contribute to this tangle of tensions as they rarely capture the current 'reality' faced by teachers, and even if they do urge teachers to be subversive, the teachers face real risks in maintaining their jobs and securing tenure (Santos, 2010). Governmental policies such as *No Child Left Behind* have created situations in which children identified as disabled are increasingly being held back (Davey, 2005), provided inappropriate alternative assessments (Kotrinsky, 2012, personal communication), encouraged to transfer schools (Oyler & Fuentes, 2012), and are not guaranteed admission to charter schools at the same rate as their non-disabled peers (Sweet, 2006). In addition, federal initiatives such as the reduction of racial minority students in special education are inherently flawed as each state is allowed to define its own index that constitutes overrepresentation, with the average state determining 300% – and others up to 500% (Artiles, 2011).

In general, despite movements triggered by IDEIA's push to connect special education teacher education programs to general education, curricula and classrooms are still largely separated within universities (Young, 2008). This continued separation of space, administration, qualifications and orientation to human difference continues to impact the grounding of special and general educators, creating two 'types' of educator, with the special educator likely to operate within a framework deeply rooted in deficit models (Brantlinger, 2006).

As teachers become enculturated within the professional field of education, rather than sidestepping these institutional practices and highly problematic developments, it is incumbent upon educational institutions take an honest look into what is occurring in contemporary school systems and the classrooms they support. Indeed, as the standards movement now also dominates teacher education programs, it is important for faculty to clarify the difference between technical expectations and the contextual work of culturally competent teachers (Le Roux, 2002). As critical educators attest, sites of dissention are opportunities for productive dialogue (Freire, 1970).

In terms of curriculum, teacher education programs afford many possibilities for undoing the accumulated negativity-without-possibility view that people have learned about disability, and reframe it through multiple lenses. For example, recognizing and challenging forms of ableism can be modeled and discussed as student teachers learn content, strategies and methods that will serve them throughout their careers. These include combating multiple forms of ableism at personal, institutional, and social/cultural levels. First and foremost, due to the pervasive nature of ableism, students enter teacher education programs with limited knowledge and oppressive conceptions of disability (Valle & Connor, 2010). By casting disability primarily within a sociological context, and focusing on how society actively disables people through a multitude of social practices based upon beliefs, attitudes and expectations (Shakespeare, 1994), that in turn, influence all of our actions, students can then 'unlearn' oppressive conceptualizations and come to reframe disability in

more socially aware ways. This work is actively linked to undoing longstanding stereotypes (including those, in part, forged through special education) that are limited, inaccurate, damaging, and unhelpful to teachers of SWD.

While space limitations prevent an expansive list of possibilities, I will mention five areas of curriculum that are worth considering and within reach of all teacher education programs.

- **Materials.** All materials should be viewed with a critical eye toward representations of disability. Articles such as *10 Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Ableism* describe how teachers can evaluate texts in a variety of ways including: Omitting characters with disabilities (CWD); analyzing images of CWD; reviewing the role(s) of CWD, including victims or heroes; the promotion of ableism as a plot device; negative or positive messages about CWD; the degree of three dimensionality when portraying CWD; and the motivation of the author (Myers & Bersani, 2010). This approach helps teachers to eliminate and/or challenge representations throughout children's literature.
- **Language.** People with disabilities have found much of the medical-based language typically used within special education (diagnosis, disorder, dysfunction, deficit, disturbed, retarded, comorbidity, symptoms, etc.) to be highly offensive (Mooney, 2008). Alternatives that do not 'reduce' people to a singular, deficit-based label are often preferred, such as 'a student with learning differences'. In addition, an analysis of the English language reveals almost every disability-based phrase to be associated with negativity, including: schitzo, retard, crazy, insane, nuts, 'crippled economy', 'lame excuse', 'the blind leading the blind', 'fallen on deaf ears', 'unable to see? (i.e., understand)', 'a limp response', 'stand up for your rights', etc. Educators can call attention to this and teach ways in that actively reduce using the language and reframe these connotations.
- **Disability simulations.** Many education programs include disability situations such as being blindfolded, using a wheelchair, writing with a non-dominant hand, or reading a jumbled text. However, Blaser (2003) has pointed out that these are misleading and dangerous. They are misleading because, at best, they only allow a non-disabled person to temporarily pretend they are disabled. They are dangerous, as they can confirm the fear of disability as a loss, rather than differently experienced integration of senses, and delude students into thinking that they actually know what it is like to be disabled. (It is worth bearing in mind how inappropriate this activity would also be if a white person donned blackface, or a male dressed as a female, and claimed this experience as authentic.) Instead of simulations, Blaser suggests more real and far less titillating experiences such as not entering all places that are inaccessible.
- **Crediting experts.** Educators can be proactive in selecting the source of knowledge about disability, making sure that those who have experienced the label are given primary place. Sources in which people with disabilities are recognized as experts allow them to 'talk back' to dominant discourses. Texts can be in the form of autobiographies (Mooney, 2008; Valente, 2011), autobiographical poetry (Clare, 2007; Ferris, 2004), and fictionalized accounts of life experiences (McBryde Johnson, 2006). Rich perspectives can also be found of edited books of autobiographical essays (Keefe et al., 2006; Rodis et al., 2001), and participatory research (Broderick & Ne'eman, 2008; Connor, 2008), as well as documentaries (Habib, 2008; Raymond & Raymond, 2011; Wurtzburg, 2011).
- **Universal design for learning and differentiated instruction.** Using the two compatible concepts of universal design for learning and differentiated instruction can be applied to all grade levels and content areas, helping teachers actualize the inclusion of diverse students. As previously described, UDL emphasizes pre-planning with all students in mind (Council for Exceptional Children, 2005). Differentiated instruction respects the notion that students can learn in various ways including the content selected, the process of engagement, and the demonstration of skills and knowledge (Tomlinson, 2001).

CONCLUSION

In DS parlance, ‘cripping the curriculum’ means problematizing existing curriculum with view to changing it to have a greater presence of accurate information and depictions of disability. Based in a cultural perspective, ‘cripping’ can best be understood as (1) bringing to bear an analytical lens of disability, largely composed of social models, to (2) deconstruct negative representations and meanings of disability, and (3) create new connections and meanings that claim disability as an integral part of human variation (see, for example, Ware, 2001). In sum, by challenging normalcy through valuing disability, DS creates opportunities for all of us to rethink how we interpret and place meaning on human differences, and the profound implications this has for students.

In revisiting the guiding question of this chapter – What does it (SJ) mean for students with disabilities (SWD) and the educators who work with them? – it is my hope that suggestions within this chapter may serve as a starting point to contemplate the important issue of how we understand human diversity. A major irony exists for many children in that special education has exacerbated the ‘problem’, rather than contributing to the solution, of understanding diversity (Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2006). The work of critical special educators and/or DSE scholars continuously calls attention to how special education is conceptualized, operationalized, and generalized, thereby hindering rather than helping how natural human difference is understood. As Sapon-Shevin (2000) writes, ‘[e]ducators need to transcend discussions of diversity as a classroom problem and regard it as [a] natural, desirable, and inevitable occurrence that enriches educational experiences for both teachers and students’ (p. 34). Until that occurs more frequently, SWD will remain an integral part of the SJ in education movement.

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