

24 Theorizing Disability

Implications and Applications for Social Justice in Education

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From Hope to Criticism

Any reference to disability in education in the United States immediately draws associations with special education. Perhaps this makes some sense given special education's historical claim on disabled young people. In fact, special education in the United States once offered hope to so many families whose disabled children remained at home or languished in institutions because until 1975 the public schools were not required or expected to educate them (Safford & Safford, 1996). Yet now special education is implicated in resegregating schools (Losen & Orfield, 2002), watering down curriculum (Brantlinger, 2006), and stigmatizing difference (Reid & Valle, 2004). In the United States, we find ourselves in an era different from the one in which Public Law 94-142, now the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act [IDEIA] (NICHCY, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 2005), first became federal law—an era of new technologies; values and beliefs about difference and diversity; notions about what counts as “an education,” who “gets an education,” or who gets a rigorous academic curriculum; and, finally, ideas about the possibilities and promises of an inclusive society.

Today, many critical scholars question the very foundations of the field of special education (and by extension general education when it comes to educating disabled students), including its basis in positivism (Danforth, 1999, 2004; Gallagher, 2001); its dehumanization of people with significant cognitive impairments (Erevelles, 2000; Taylor & Bogdan, 1989) or autism (Biklen, 1992), as well as its widespread low expectations of them; and the professionalization of failure or what Phil Ferguson (2002) refers to as the impetus to blame disabled people for the failure of expert intervention. Commonplace policies and practices that have been taken for granted are now in contention or disrepute, including segregated special education classrooms (Allan, 1999a, 1999b), overreliance on intervention aimed at specific deficits (Hehir, 2005), developmental curriculum (Brantlinger, 2005), intelligence testing (see classic critique by Gould, 1981), and the medicalization of disabled people (Abberley, 1987; Barton, 1996; Donoghue, 2003). These critiques resonate with those of the past, including Lous Heshusius's (1989, 1995), Iano's (1986, 1990), and Skrtic's (1995) criticisms of positivism and its influences on pedagogy in special education; Skrtic's (1991) deconstruction of professionalization in special education, and Robert Bogdan and Steve Taylor's (1989) description of the dehumanization of people who have significant cognitive impairments.

The bottom line for many teachers, critical special educators, and scholars has become the question of how to avoid stigmatizing difference and how to combat ableism in schools while simultaneously creating access to equal educational opportunity. This bottom line focuses attention on a systemic unit of analysis in contrast with special education's traditional focus on the individual student. Yet situating disability within a broader

sociological context and implicating society in the disablement of people proves to be provocative and radical, particularly where special education is concerned. An exploration of the traditional special education literature in which these sociological critiques are decried demonstrates just how disruptive they are (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005, Kauffman & Sasso, 2006a, 2006b; Sasso, 2001). For example, James Kauffman and Gary Sasso refer to such critiques as “foppery” (Kauffman & Sasso, 2006b, p. 109) that “give license to demagogues of the extreme left and the extreme right, to fundamentalists and oppressors who define the truth according to their particular orthodoxy” (p. 111). While such tensions between critical and traditional standpoints exist and have been heatedly debated (Brantlinger, 1997; Danforth, 1997, 2004; Gallagher, 1998, 2001, 2006; Gallagher, Heshusius, Iano, Skrtic, 2004; Heshusius, 1994; Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005; Kauffman & Sasso, 2006a, 2006b; Rice, 2005), we urge that they be nurtured and seen as a site of productive dialogue (Andrews et. al., 2000; Gallagher, 2006) rather than claiming an impasse between paradigms (Kauffman & Sasso, 2006a, 2006b).

One field that has emerged as a result of criticisms of special education is disability studies in education (DSE). Many educators view disability studies as offering theoretical frameworks, ideas, and values that respond to the criticisms described previously and that speak to their discomfort with the dominant paradigm in education. In the next three sections of this chapter we describe some of the fundamental ideas of disability studies in education. Later we discuss the ways in which disability studies in education intersect with other educational fields and we conclude with ideas for incorporating disability studies into teaching, curriculum and educational policy.

Disability Studies in Education

The interdisciplinary field of disability studies has steadily flourished for over three decades within the social sciences, arts, and humanities, but education is a relative late-comer. The establishment of the DSE special interest group (SIG) of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) a full two decades after the founding of the Society for Disability Studies (SDS, n.d.) in the United States reflects this time lag. DSE’s earliest documents define and outline what its founders consider to be the application of disability studies to educational theory, research, and practice as follows:

Disability studies is an emerging and interdisciplinary field of scholarship that critically examines issues related to the dynamic interplays between disability and various aspects of culture and society. [It] unites critical inquiry and political advocacy by utilizing scholarly approaches from the humanities, humanistic/post-humanistic social sciences, and the arts. [A]ppplied to educational issues, it promotes the importance of infusing analyses and interpretations of disability throughout all forms of educational research, teacher education, and graduate studies in education (DSE, ¶1).

Our chapter offers an admittedly contemporary American account of the emergence of a distinct field called disability studies in education, yet U.S. and UK educational researchers have been engaged with disability studies for years prior to the founding of the SIG and the institution of a name for the field. For example: Len Barton (1996), Dan Goodley and Lawthom (2005), in England; Julie Allan (1996, 1999a, 1999b) in Scotland; and Roger Slee (1996, 1997) in Australia and now Canada; and Phil Ferguson (1994), Steve Taylor and Robert Bogdan (1989), Doug Biklen (1992), and Susan Peters, (1996) in the United States. Furthermore, prior to the founding of the SIG, North American special

educators were producing work quite consistent with disability studies in education and some of them later became founding members of the SIG: Lous Heshusius (1989, 1994, 1996), Ellen Brantlinger (1997), Scot Danforth (1997, 1999), and Deborah Gallagher (1998).

Given its emergence in the disability studies arena, we are often asked how disability studies in education should best be characterized. Answering this question promises to be contentious, but in brief, disability studies seeks to challenge limited understandings that often view disability as a medical or clinical condition characterized by individual deficiency, dysfunction, or disorder, and sometimes even portray it as a tragedy awaiting a “fix,” a cure, treatment, or remediation (Brantlinger, 2004; Danforth & Smith, 2005; Garland-Thomson, 1997; Shakespeare, 1994). Simi Linton confronts this problem in *Claiming Disability* (1998) when she writes that,

[s]ociety, in agreeing to assign medical meaning to disability, colludes to keep the issue within the purview of the medical establishment, to keep it a personal matter and “treat” the condition and the person with the condition rather than “treating” the social processes and policies that constrict disabled people’s lives. (p. 11)

Instead of casting disability as an individual deficit, disability studies recognizes it as a natural form of human variation—one difference among many human differences—and better understood as the results of an interplay between the individual and society and through analyzing social, political, cultural, and historical frameworks (Allan, 1996; Corker & Shakespeare, 2002; Ferri & Connor, 2006; Oliver, 1996; Russell, 1998). Most importantly, DSE is critical of beliefs and practices that produce inequalities in the social conditions of schooling. These beliefs and practices constitute ableism, a phenomenon Laurel Rauscher and Michael McClintock (1996) define 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. (1996, p. 198)

To be sure, we are making a clear case for disability studies in education as a definitive field of study that is both distinct from and intersecting with special education and other fields. In later sections we demonstrate some of these connections with other fields yet it must be recognized that DSE seems to be of great interest to those whose work is defined in relation to disability—special educators. Many of the founding and current members of the DSE SIG are special educators. To date, all of the awards granted by the SIG have gone to people who identify as special educators and who represent the majority membership of the SIG. There is a desire for expanding the SIG membership to include anyone who shares the SIG’s concerns, and, of course, there are those who identify with or are identified with disability studies in education who can be found in curriculum studies (Baker, 2002; Selden, 2000), educational foundations (Erevelles, 2000), educational sociology (Michalko, 2002; Titchkosky, 2001) and many other subfields. In addition, one certainly can find special educators who do not identify with disability studies but who share many of the goals of those of us in disability studies. For example, Thomas Hehir (2002) has consistently focused attention on ableism in schools.

Many educators who do not identify with disability studies share similar concerns. Using the SIG's founding description of disability studies in education as an example, there are traditional special educators who are concerned about "the dynamic interplay between disability and various aspects of culture and society," particularly those ways in which racism disables students and produces overrepresentation of African-American and Hispanic youth in special education (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Losen & Orfield, 2002). Some of the finest socially conscious work has come from those who have demonstrated that the promise of special education has been turned on its head by using it to further racial segregation (Blanchett, 2006; Harry & Klingner, 2006; McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Reid & Knight, 2006). Nevertheless, it remains important to emphasize that disability studies in education is not the same field as special education, although its differences and similarities have yet to be mapped in a way that brings any kind of consensus.

What Is Disability?

One basic feature that distinguishes disability studies from other fields that engage in the study of disability is its critical stance toward the master narrative of disability. This radical departure is represented by two fluid strands of thought—one originating in the United States (minority group model of disability) and one from the UK (social model of disability). In reality, scholars on both sides of the Atlantic and around the world have eclectic ways of understanding and representing disability.

The minority group model of disability emerged in the late 1970s as an offshoot of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. In 1977 Robert Bogdan and Doug Biklen also borrowed from the Civil Rights Movement to coin the term *handicapism* (consistent with the popular use of "handicap" at that time) to refer to "a set of assumptions and practices that promote the differential and unequal treatment of people because of apparent or assumed... differences" (p. 15). The minority group model holds that "the problems faced by disabled citizens are essentially similar to the difficulties encountered by other minorities" (Hahn, 2002, p. 171). Harlan Hahn observes that, like other minorities, disabled people

have been plagued by...high rates of unemployment, poverty, and welfare dependency; school segregation; inadequate housing and transportation; and exclusion from many public facilities that appear to be reserved exclusively for the non-disabled majority. (pp. 171–172)

While Hahn references the social conditions facing disabled Americans in the 1970s and 80s, his claim remains valid even as we near the end of the first decade of the 21st century.

The origin of the social model of disability often is traced back to the *Fundamental Principles of Disability* (Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation [UPIAS], 1975), a document published by the UK Disability Rights Movement, then composed primarily of people with physical impairments. The Principles state:

In our view, it is society which disabled physically impaired people. Disability is something that is imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society. (p.3)

This emphasis on the distinction between impairments (functional limitations) and disability (social oppression) is the hallmark of the strong social model of disability (Abberley, 1987; Humphrey, 2000; Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare & Watson, 1997, 2001).

Today, the social model is recognized globally as a way to understand disability within its historical, material, and social contexts. It is referred to in government documents in Great Britain (e.g., Birmingham City Council, 2006; Manchester City Council, 2005), Canada (e.g., Government of Canada, 2004; Provincial Health Ethics Network, 2001), and the United States (National Institute of Disability Research and Rehabilitation [NIDRR], 1999). Although it has wide recognition in the international Disability Rights Movement and among disability studies researchers, it has had little influence over U.S. legislation, educational policy, or the general public, a situation Donoghue (2003) describes in his analysis of the Americans with Disabilities Act (U.S. Congress, 1990). He argues that while the ADA attempts to alter social barriers to inclusion (something the social model would applaud), it adheres to a medical model definition of disability—a definition that aims its lens at individual pathology and interventions that cure or remediate individual difference. In contrast, the social model focuses on the disabling consequences of social exclusion and isolation and interventions that attempt to restructure society so that disabled people are fully included in all aspects of social life.

The strong social model that draws a clear distinction between disability and impairment recently is under debate. Some have argued that the full diversity of individual experience needs to be recognized and understood (Corker & Shakespeare, 2002; Shakespeare & Watson, 2001) within social interpretations of disability while Vic Finkelstein (2003) has argued that it is not a model after all and that it has been appropriated away from the Disability Rights Movement by academicians who use it for elitist purposes, thereby rendering it impotent as a tool for activism. Thus, a model of disability that has produced many successful legislative outcomes has become a contentious and amorphous idea that may have outlived its time (Gabel & Peters, 2004; Shakespeare & Watson, 2001; Thomas & Corker, 2002; Tremain, 2002).

In addition to the epistemological debate surrounding the social model, its meaning and application seems to be in flux. Susan Gabel and Susan Peters' (2004) examination of a decade of disability studies literature reveals that although the strong social model falls within a historical-materialist epistemology, scholars across paradigms (e.g., interpretivism, postmodernism, poststructuralism) reference the social model but are not necessarily assigning it the same meaning. In fact, the only thing these authors appear to have in common is the study of disability within its social contexts and resistance to the medical model of disability's functionalist paradigm. These more amorphous standpoints are often referred to as social interpretations of disability (Finkelstein, 2003; Gabel, 2005). With time, the use, misuse, or demise of a social model of disability will become clear, but until then, we are cautioned to search for clarity when reading or writing "from a social model perspective" or, for that matter, "from a disability studies perspective."

Regardless of (1) the stance taken on the idea of disability, and (2) whether one claims to adhere to the minority group model or the social model or some other social interpretation of disability, those who identify with disability studies in education remain concerned with inequities in society that exist for disabled people. What is troubling in particular are the ways in which cultural values, assumptions, and ideas about difference, and the practical consequences of these, can be disabling. This concern results in a preference for and encouragement of dialogue and debate about many complex issues and problems related to disability. By calling attention to ableist beliefs and practices in the educational system and the world in which it exists, a goal of disability studies in

education is to ensure that people with disabilities have *access* to the same opportunities afforded to nondisabled citizens including education, community living, recreational possibilities, family life, freedom of expression (including sexual expression), and employment options. Finally, DSE holds close a mantra of the Disability Rights Movement: “Nothing About Us Without Us” (Charlton, 1998/2002), signifying a commitment to engage in research and publication side-by-side with people with disabilities and the allies who work *with* them in forging social change.

The importance of scholarly and political leadership by people with disabilities is, in fact, one of the basic tenets of disability studies, as defined by the U.S. Society for Disability Studies. Other tenets hold that disability studies: (1) is inter-/multidisciplinary; (2) should challenge the notion that disability is an individual deficit that can be remediated by experts; (3) studies disability across the broadest contexts possible (e.g., historical periods, national and international contexts), and (4); “actively encourage participation by disabled students and faculty” and assure access (SDS, n.d., section 5).

Intersections with Other Fields of Study

Because disability studies is both eclectic and interdisciplinary, there are many potential intersections with other fields of inquiry that are founded upon the quest for equity and social justice, including multicultural studies, critical race studies, and queer studies (as well as feminist studies, class studies, etc.). Like disability studies, all of these fields challenge the dominant paradigm of mainstream thinking and seek to expand restrictive notions of normalcy by centering a difference that is usually placed in the margins. While many other intersections exist and could be explored, we limit ourselves to examining three areas of overlap with disability studies.

Multicultural studies

The concept of multicultural education is that of “...a broad interdisciplinary field that focuses on a range of racial, ethnic, and cultural groups as well as both genders” (Banks, 1992, p. 274). Like disability studies in education, multiculturalism is concerned with issues of equity and social justice, aiming to transform mainstream curriculum into one that truly embraces a plurality of perspectives. James Banks (1994) has suggested five dimensions of multicultural education: (1) diversity must be integrated into the content, and not an additive approach; (2) the origins and construction of knowledge is openly addressed, including the influence on scholars; (3) a proactive approach is used to reduce prejudice and helps students develop positive attitudes to different groups; (4) equitable pedagogy is employed, encouraging diverse forms of interaction such as cooperative learning; (5) and an empowering school culture and social structure is consciously cultivated. Used together, these dimensions support a transformative approach to education, encouraging plurality in perspective, and acknowledge the epistemological contributions of formerly marginalized groups. Calling upon Robert Merton’s (1972) idea that all groups have insiders and outsiders, Banks (1994) notes that, “...insiders and outsiders often have different perspectives on the same events, and both perspectives are needed to give the total picture of social and historical reality” (p. 8). It is clear that as a group, disabled people are often positioned at the margins or even outside of the social realm and are thus able to contribute knowledge that marginal/outsider status brings—knowledge that often contradicts traditional or mainstream understandings of phenomena. When incorporating the voices and perspectives of disabled people in their teaching, educators use them as tools to critique widespread misunderstandings of disability prevalent throughout all

aspects of society (history, culture, structures, the media, everyday interactions, etc.). By interrogating “commonplace” and accepted notions of disability, educators actively teach *against* widespread misinformation. Instead, the “problem” of disability is significantly recast, sharply illustrating examples of social injustice by focusing on ways in which practices, regulations, representations, and attitudes contribute toward limiting access to all spheres of society.

When applying the tenets of multiculturalism to disability studies, existing curricula designed to facilitate the teaching of disability is scrutinized, including the use of disability simulations. While these are some of the most commonplace methods of teaching about disability—for example, blindfolding students and making them walk around the building to experience the world of Helen Keller—such simulations are misleading in that nondisabled people are “playing” with disability, experiencing a loss of function for a short period of time and reinforcing commonplace notions that disability is a difference to be avoided at nearly all cost. Disability activists have suggested that refusing to enter inaccessible buildings, always sitting in designated and often less desirable areas marked for “handicapped” or “disabled,” and discussing why some people believe there are many positive aspects to the experience of being disabled, exemplify more accurate understandings of how individuals with a disability function in society (Blaser, 2003).

Furthermore, when scholars theorize toward a different society, one in which diversity is valued instead of devalued, ignored, or feared, it must be a world welcoming and supportive of disability. Bearing this in mind, the world of multiculturalism allows the possibility of integrating disability culture. Disability culture has been described by a variety of scholars and activists (Davis, 1995; Fleischer & Zames, 2001; Linton, 2006; Peters, 2000), and can be used to inform a curriculum negligent of disability-related issues by promoting teaching practices that bring these issues into the classroom (Linton, 1998) and infuse them throughout the curriculum in relevant, meaningful ways. A documentary useful for educating teachers about disability culture is David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder’s (1997) *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back*.

Finally, as Bank notes (1995), by recognizing and critically analyzing the other (be it disability, race, ethnicity, etc.), it becomes apparent that “...the Other often becomes essential for the in-group to create its own identity” (p. 22). Thus, transformative teaching and learning can occur as students come to recognize that “[r]ace [like disability] is a human invention constructed by groups to differentiate themselves from other groups, to create ideas about the ‘other,’ to formulate their identities, and to defend the disproportionate distribution of rewards and opportunities within society” (p. 22). Once disability and race are realized as inventions rather than scientific facts—inventions that became collective, deeply ingrained, enduring historical beliefs—the damage that such concepts have wreaked can begin to be undone.

Critical Race Studies

Like multiculturalism, critical race studies emerged from Black scholarship, specifically “the development of African-American thought in the post-civil rights era: the 1970s to the present” (Tate, 1997, p. 206). Just as multiculturalism expanded to become multi-voiced, incorporating increasingly diverse perspectives, critical race studies grew from the original grounding in the African-American experience to incorporate critical perspectives on race from Latinos (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001), Asian Americans (Teranishi, 2002), Native Americans (Snipp, 1998), and European Americans (Marx, 2004).

Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw’s (1993) acknowledgment that race and racism are organizing principles of society highlights how ability and ableism operate in

a similar manner. Their six tenets of critical race theory hold that: (1) racism is endemic to American life; (2) dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness (sic), and meritocracy must be openly challenged; (3) contextual/historical analysis of the law is needed to demonstrate that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of groups advantage and disadvantage along racial lines; (4) the experiential knowledge of people of color and their communities of origin must be recognized in analyzing law and society; (5) the field is interdisciplinary; and (6) it works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression. Comparing this list to the Society for Disability Studies guidelines for disability studies, one can see many similarities on points 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 above. On point 1, we might add that disability studies would claim that ableism is endemic to American life.

Critical race studies and disability studies appear to have even more commonalities. As disciplines, their evolution has occurred over the same period of time. William Tate (1997) has described critical race studies as being “interdisciplinary and eclectic by nature” (198) and having “academic and activist goals” (p. 198). The same can be said for disability studies (Corker & Shakespeare, 2002; Linton, 1998). Both seek to challenge existing practices in society that devalue and marginalize people based on socially constructed characteristics. Furthermore, both foreground the voices of disenfranchised groups, insist that they be heard from historically subjugated positions, and explicitly challenge dominant practices that have positioned them as inferior.

The tenets of critical race theory, like those of disability studies, can be incorporated into school curricula and classroom pedagogy. In terms of curricula, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) have urged critical race theory be used to: reinterpret ineffective civil rights law, understand ways in which racism is endemic and deeply ingrained in American life, and challenge claims of neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness [sic] and meritocracy. In addition, Ladson-Billings’ calls for “culturally relevant pedagogy” (1995, p. 465) in which history, race, ethnicity, and class are factored into important teaching decisions made about content, methods, and expected outcomes. Other scholars have encouraged the exploration of student knowledge, history, and experience in the world as a foundation for meaningful, respectful, teaching and learning, oftentimes cultivating student knowledge and experiences as “counterstories” to contrast with mainstream knowledge (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

On another note, while only recently has disability studies begun to seriously contemplate racism from within (Bell, 2006), critical race studies has yet to fully acknowledge the political aspect of disability. In contrast, scholars in disability studies in education have been more inclined to use critical race theory in intersectional scholarship, looking at the intersection of disability and race in legislation (Beratan, 2006), overrepresentation of students of color in special education (Ferri & Connor, 2006), school violence (Watts & Erevelles, 2004), living at the intersections of being Black and disabled (Mitchell, 2006), as well as being Black, disabled, and working class (Connor, 2006), and the history of race and disability in schooling (Erevelles, 2006). To a large degree their work foregrounds an intersectional approach in which human existence is seen as multidimensional, with each aspect of identity potentially informing the other(s).

Queer Studies

The term *queer* has been used as an inclusive sociopolitical umbrella, a subversive worldview of sorts, outside the heteronormative mainstream. As such, the word has been reclaimed, by many members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, transgender, and heterosexual communities—shifting significantly from insult to moniker of pride. This

appropriation can be seen on many fronts, from the growth of queer studies recognized within the academy (formerly gay and lesbian studies) to its presence within popular culture as evident, for example, in the television show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, in which five queer men solve fashion, design, and relationship dilemmas for straight men who have requested their help. The disability community, too, has embraced terms once used to denigrate its members—crip, gimp, disabled—and has incorporated them into its identity lexicon (Mitchell & Snyder, 1997).

Like multiculturalism and critical race studies, queer studies seeks to trouble the status quo in society, specifically by calling attention to endemic heterosexism experienced by gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, transgender, and heterosexual people. Michael Warner (1993) reminds us that:

Every person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that her stigmatization is connected with gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fancy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body. Being queer means fighting about these issues all the time, locally and piecemeal but always with consequences. (p. xiii)

Stigmatization and general mistrust of queers remains entrenched at every level of society from national debates about antigay marriage amendments to the U.S. Constitution, to state constitutional amendments and Supreme Court rulings against gay marriage, to local gay bashing, and, even worse, hate crimes (e.g., Matthew Shepherd; see Gabay & Kaufman, *The Laramie Project*, 2002). In a survey of almost 1,000 college students who were asked which group would have the hardest time “fitting in” to a campus school, gays and lesbians were identified as the number one group (80%), followed by international students (57%), students with disabilities (43%), and finally African Americans (30%) (Globetti, Globetti, Brown, & Smith, 1993).

Queer studies—like disability studies and critical race studies—challenges stereotypic, negative notions of homosexuality or queerness. In doing so, it critiques the naturalized discourse of majority-enforced heterosexuality by calling upon “the necessarily and desirably queer nature of the world” (Warner, 1993, p. xxi). That queerness has been pervasively repressed in blatant and subtle ways—elimination by death, imprisonment, subjugation and silencing via humor and ridicule, discrimination against gay families, deprivation of civil and human rights—testifies to the “danger” it poses, including the recognition and acceptance of different ways of knowing, understanding, loving, living, and being—thereby challenging many existing assumptions.

One such assumption is the commonplace notion of binary thinking. As Diana Fuss (1991) describes, “Queer, as a term, signals not only the disruption of the binary of heterosexual normalcy on one hand and homosexual defiance on the other, but desires to bring the hetero/homo opposition to the point of collapse” (cited in Luhman, 1998, p. 145). However, in demythologizing “normal” homo/hetero oppositions, the precedent is set for actively questioning the predictability and stability of *all* categories. Susanne Luhmann (1998) sees this as opening the door for “...the refusal of any normalization, be it racist, sexist, or whatever, necessarily has to be part of the queer agenda” (p. 151).

Thus, queer studies and disability studies share an interest in resisting “normalcy,” by destabilizing the solidity of its foundations. Intersectional work in disability studies and queer studies has been manifest in several ways, including: the First International Queerness and Disability conference held in San Francisco in 2002; a special edition of

Gay and Lesbian Quarterly edited by Robert McRuer and Abby Wilkerson (2003); autobiographical accounts (Clare, 1999; Fries, 1998), refereed articles (Solis, 2007); and a volume on crip theory that explores “cultural signs of queerness and disability” (McRuer, 2006). Just as queer theory desires a queerer world in which pleasurable and gratifying aspects of queerness are acknowledged, disability studies seeks a world in which the knowledge that living with disability brings can be seen as an asset (Mooney & Cole, 2000; O’Connor, 2001). Finally, queer and disabled students face similar dilemmas in schools: both groups are more likely to be victimized and bullied; both often do not see themselves realistically portrayed in the curriculum; issues around queerness and disability are often seen as “private” matters rather than “public” issues (Sedgwick, 1990); and both groups may in fact be subject to a barrage of negative associations reflected in the language of the school playground; for example, “Gay,” “Fag,” “Dyke,” “Retard,” “Spastic,” “Nut Case,” that adults often do not act upon.

Applications for Social Justice Education

Earlier we demonstrated that the project of DSE is a radical one that irritates tradition through its critiques of educational inequity and questioning of the commonplace. We have offered examples of the intersections of disability studies in education with other fields of inquiry including multicultural studies, critical race studies, and queer studies. There are, of course, other intersections. We have provided examples of how disability studies could be incorporated into the thought and research of intersecting fields, and now we urge colleagues in intersecting fields to incorporate disability into their theorizing and ideas about practice and policy in order to engage in dialogue and debate with disability studies in education so that we learn from one another. In this section we illustrate some ways in which educational practice and policy can be transformed by disability studies in education by focusing on three areas: curriculum, teaching, and educational policy.

Curriculum Content

Banks (1999) claims that “[m]ulticultural education is trying to help unify a deeply divided nation, not to divide one that is united” (p.8). With this in mind, we offer ways in which the study of disability can help unify through illuminating the ways in which: disability discrimination is related to other forms of discrimination; the social construction of disability is related to and serves some of the same social purposes as does the social construction of other marginalities; and like other marginalized groups, in spite of their status, disabled people have contributed to our cultural and political landscape. This follows the SDS guideline that disability should be studied in the broadest contexts possible and across all disciplines.

When thinking about curriculum, two major issues are present: the content of the curriculum and access to that content. Consistent with multicultural studies, disability studies compels us to analyze whether or not and how disabled people are represented in the curriculum. In doing so, teachers can consider which representations accurately portray disabled people’s lives, which reinforce stereotypes, and which are available at each grade (Ayala, 1999; Blaska & Lynch, 1998; Connor & Bejoian, 2006).

Art educators will find many opportunities to incorporate disability representations and disability culture into the curriculum. For example, two statues of people with disabilities placed in general prominence—one in the United States one in Britain—have provoked dynamic debates about recognition, understanding, and acceptance of disability within a national context. In Washington, DC, arguments have raged about whether

or not to depict former president Franklin D. Roosevelt in a wheelchair, even though he carefully maintained a public image that hid his disability. In the UK, a large statue of a heavily pregnant woman born with shortened arms due to the drug Thalidomide was temporarily installed in Trafalgar Square amid much controversy and discussions of taste. She juxtaposes interestingly with Lord Nelson's in the same public space, a depiction calling attention to his arm lost in battle and giving rise to conversations about disability in relation to gender, sexuality, reproduction, and war. In addition to sculpture, disability is present—although not necessarily acknowledged—in iconic paintings such as Andrew Wyeth's *Christina's World*—the young woman who twists her body to gaze into the distance was his neighbor who does not walk.

The stunning autobiographical works of Frida Kahlo explicitly chronicle life with physical disabilities, and beg the important question: In what ways does disability inform an artist's work? Kahlo is arguably the world's most famous female painter, and clearly much of her work exists *because of* her disability—from sketches of the initial accident to bold canvases in which she openly shares her bodily experience, physical and psychological. In other examples—without wanting to sound clichéd—artists who have lived with what have been termed “depression” and “schizophrenia,” such as Vincent Van Gogh and Beauford Delaney, have produced pioneering original works. Indeed, disability has allowed many artists to create in innovative ways, including Manet's abstract-like *Water Lilies*, and Matisse's colorful boldly shaped collages, creations by individuals actively functioning with visual impairments. Disability confronts the viewer head on in Riva Lehrer's *Circle Stories* (Lehrer, n.d.) which are richly symbolic and vivid portraits of disabled people, including Riva herself, a woman with spina bifida who paints her own portrait in two parts—a top third and bottom third without a midsection, where she positions her spina bifida.

In terms of disability culture, the *values* within the traditional canon of Western art can be examined with view to social and cultural notions of physicality. Ancient Greek and Roman ideals still exert a powerful influence on what constitutes desirable images of perfect bodies. Yet, as Lennard Davis (1995) points out with great irony, we must question a world that will culturally enshrine and accord great beauty to *The Venus de Milo*, but will have the opposite reaction when faced with a real nude woman without arms. In another instance, the act of creating art with body parts considered nonconventional—such as sculpting with feet, painting with a brush in the mouth, can serve to rethink how often narrowly defined are the ways in which we use our bodies for *all* tasks. Finally, there has been a recent interest in Outsider Art as evidenced in annual national exhibitions such as that held at the Puck Building in New York City. Outsider Art values the creative work of people who have not been formally schooled in art techniques, but rather have developed their own distinctive style. Interestingly, many of the artists are disabled and have lived in institutions. As such, Outsider Art can be seen as art from the margins, symbolic of life at the margins, and of epistemological value.

Social studies teachers can use biographies of the artists listed above as well as other famous disabled people including Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, Muhammad Ali, Adrienne Rich, or Stevie Wonder. Social studies is also a good place to learn about the various ways in which disability is socially constructed—by inaccessible schools, social segregation, intolerance of difference, for example—and the ways in which students, themselves, can combat disability discrimination—by speaking out against taunts and hate speech, intentionally including disabled peers in social activities, joining a local disability rights organization, and participating in social action. Similar to critical race studies' call for acknowledging the endemic presence of racism and queer studies' argument for including studies of heterosexism and homophobia in the curriculum, disability

studies would urge the study of ableism in the curriculum. History teachers can incorporate disability history into the curriculum: as an offshoot of the Civil Rights Movement (Fleischer & Zames, 2001) and response to systemic ableism; as manifest in other times of history such as the Holocaust (Stiker, 1999); as an outcome of war, particularly any current war; and in national cultural debates as in the Terry Schiavo case (Stolz, 2006). One striking documentary about the Holocaust is Snyder and Mitchell's (2002) *A World without Bodies*, a film that describes the Nazi campaign to murder disabled people in addition to Jews and other social groups. Given its gruesome contents, the film should be used with older students. When studying culture and ethnicity, it is important to be sure to include disability culture as an example of culture, as well as the ways in which disability and ethnicity intersect (e.g., every ethnic group includes disabled members). These can be studied through art, literature, music, language, and behavior.

The English and language arts curriculum can include fiction or nonfiction reading and writing about disability. Linda Ware (2001) has explored the concept of disability in an English language arts classroom by having students consider people who are not fully included in society. This results in rich discussions among students, and acknowledgment by teaching staff of their own previously unexamined prejudices and areas of discomfort. The unit ends with students creating poetry and prose that foregrounds the theme of disability in relation to contemporary social practices and cultural values. In another example, students with learning disabilities in the self-contained class of Santiago Solis have created illustrated autobiographical portraits in story book form and shared them at interactive exhibitions (Solis & Connor, 2007). While these examples emphasize actual and perceived understandings of the disability experience(s), both the traditional and nontraditional canons of literature offer ample opportunities to analyze how disability is portrayed, largely in inauthentic and misleading ways (Mitchell & Snyder, 2001).

Given the influence of the media in the lives of today's youth, teachers across subject areas can use media studies to help students critically examine popular culture messages that perpetuate disability stereotypes, use media to understand disability, and construct their own media to confront ableism (e.g., making documentaries about disabled family members or classmates; creating music videos that explore disability themes, writing reviews of movies that deal with disability, sending letters to the editor related to current events). Films like the academy award nominees *Autism is a World* (Bedingfield & Wurzburg, 2004) and *King Gimp* (Hadary & Whiteford, 1999), and novels such as *Stuck in Neutral* (Trueman, 2001) and *Freak the Mighty* (Philbrick, 1995) can be used to debate and discuss relevant issues while also meeting state standards (Connor & Bejoian, 2006; Kates, 2006). It is also useful to tap into those films that students see in theaters and that are likely to dispel myths and undermine stereotypes; for example, documentaries like *Murderball* (Shapiro & Rubin, 2005), about athletes who play wheelchair rugby, and movies like *Rory O'Shea Was Here* (Flynn & O'Donnell, 2004), about young adults struggling to choose where they live and with whom. The Farrelly brothers often produce films that end up being controversial in the disability community and can create lively debates about disability stereotypes and the ethics and meanings of representation. These include most recently *The Ringer* (Farrelly, Farrelly, & Blaustein, 2005), about a nondisabled man who pretends to have mental retardation in an attempt to infiltrate and win the Special Olympics.

Today's teacher has been given a monumental task that includes pressure to bring all students to grade level in literacy and math while adhering to state learning standards. When it is suggested that disability be integrated into the curriculum, the response is often, "I don't have time to add anything else to the curriculum." However, there

are teachers who have found this is possible (Dinero, 2006; Kates, 2006; Stolz, 2006). Innovative educators realize that many state standards clarify performance outcomes but avoid dictating the materials used to achieve the outcomes. Whether or not district policy requires the use of particular textbooks, teachers usually have the flexibility to select materials of their own choosing while still adhering to state standards. Finally, teachers often wonder how to make decisions about what curriculum materials are appropriate, and there are many resources available to help, including the *Ragged Edge Online* (formerly *Disability Rag*), the Disability is Natural website (2006), Disability Studies: Information and Resources (Taylor, Shoulz, & Walker, 2003), and the website Disability Studies for Teachers (Syracuse University, 2004).

Access to Curriculum

Another tenet of disability studies holds that programs should be accessible to all students. Access to the curriculum requires much more than merely physically placing disabled students in the general education classroom—an unfortunate and all too common response to the call for inclusion. Sitting in the classroom but having no means of understanding concepts, accessing text or conversations, or demonstrating what one knows or has learned does not represent inclusion. Access to the curriculum requires significant changes in the way curriculum is offered to students and the way in which students are given opportunities to demonstrate learning. One way of achieving this is through universal design for learning (UDL), also called university design for instruction (UDI) (Hackman & Rauscher, 2004; Pliner & Johnson, 2004; Scott, McGuire, & Shaw, 2003), and sometimes abbreviated as universal design (UD). The universal design literature echoes many of the principles of differentiated instruction but universal design deemphasizes documentation and labeling (proving eligibility for specific accommodations), particularly at the higher education level, and emphasizes the creation of environments accessible to the greatest number of people possible without regard to disability status (Burghstahler & Corey, 2008). Resources can be found at the University of Washington (n.d.), National Council on Disability (2004), and in various other publications (Pisha & Coyne, 2001; Preiser & Ostroff, 2004; Rose & Meyer, 2002).

In the last few years, interest in universal design has increased dramatically. IDEIA now requires the application of universal design principles to the education of disabled students in terms of access to assistive technology and the general education curriculum (U.S. Congress, 2004, Sect. 674). The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) recommended the use of UD in general *and* special education instruction. The Commission specifically stated that "all measures used to assess accountability and educational progress be developed according to principles of universal design" (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, Sect. 2, ¶ 24). It remains to be seen how schools and districts navigate the tensions between the medical model of the IDEIA in light of its call for the use of universal design in curriculum and assessment.

Numerous online resources are available for teachers, including: The Universal Design Education Project (University of Oregon, n.d.), the DO-IT project (University of Washington, 2006), Universal Design Education Online (UDE Online, 2004), and the Ivy Access Initiative (Brown University, 2002) which is a site intended for a higher education audience but it has specific examples of UD in subject matter curriculum as well as useful and specific how-to's.

Teaching

Mara Sapon-Shevin (2000) has noted that “[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). Critical race studies has been instrumental in helping teachers understand race in this light by creating awareness about the importance of racial self-reflection and White privilege. Queer studies and disability studies can help teachers recognize the artifacts of hetero- and ability-privilege, although they have been less effective at this task. Ability privilege plays out in the classroom through ability grouping, segregated classrooms, student leadership roles, playground taunts, and subtle verbal and nonverbal interactions with teachers. Teachers sensitive to the ways in which ability privilege marks some students as disabled while it advantages others can choose teaching strategies and make instructional decisions that minimize the effects of these social processes.

Phil Ferguson (2001) has published an excellent resource for teachers for the Office of Special Education Programs that is available online and includes practical ideas for infusing disability studies into the curriculum: (1) have disabled adults come to the class to talk about their lives; (2) have students do accessibility surveys; (3) have students write stories about disability; (4) incorporate and discuss stories that have disability themes; (5) have children do interviews with disabled people; (6) have students write an essay on stereotypes; (7) show students informational videos about eugenics; (8) have students write biographies of individuals with disabilities; (9) have students learn American Sign Language signs; (10) have students learn the alphabet in Braille; (11) take students to a museum and look for things about disability; (12) have students prepare photo essays; (13) teach students about different brain functions; (14) have students design assistive devices; (15) have students surf the web for disability resources; and (16) have students design a new graphic symbol to signify disability.

Educational Policy

DSE has focused too little on educational policy (Gabel, 2008). A major obstacle to policy work in disability studies in education is the fact that U.S. educational policy—federal, state, and local—uses the medical model of disability. Within this model, policy interventions focus on curing, correcting, or caring for disabled people (Finkelstein, 1996; Longmore, 2003). In other words, the medical model of disability produces intervention models that aim to remediate or fix disabled people and, in turn, take care of them. As Longmore (2003) has noted, “cure or correction has been viewed as the only possible means by which people with disabilities could achieve social acceptance and social assimilation (p. 217). “Those who are cured or corrected,” he continues, “have been relegated to invalidism” (p. 217). This patronizing orientation has been criticized widely in disability studies as a means to oppress disabled people by keeping them subordinate to clinical experts and caretakers (Abberley, 1987; Ferguson, 1994, 2002; van Drenth, 2008). Contrastingly, the social model of disability, according to Finkelstein, produces intervention models that put disabled people in charge of their lives and construct experts as resources to be accessed as consumers. If policy is an attempt to find solutions to social problems, then one must ask whether or not the medical model produces solutions to the problems resulting from the challenging social conditions under which disabled people live their lives. Christopher Donoghue’s (2003) analysis of the purposes and outcomes of the ADA are an excellent response to this conundrum. He demonstrates that while the groups advocating for the ADA hoped for policy interventions that would transform social con-

ditions by eliminating discrimination in facilities, programs, and jobs, the federal definition of disability as a medical condition tied the hands of the courts when disabled people sought litigation. Judiciary logic required the application of medical definitions of disability categories to determine if someone was eligible for consideration under the ADA. Of course few impairments, particularly those that are intermittent and invisible, meet strict medical guidelines. Therefore, many disabled litigants have found themselves declared nondisabled and ineligible for protection under the ADA.

Since educational policy follows medical model definitions of disability, students who struggle in school face similar roadblocks to justice. They, too, often face discrimination by virtue of how or how quickly they learn, whether or not they speak Standard English, whether or not they behave or look “normal.” The sole recourse of most struggling students and their families is to appeal to special education—a system guided by the IDEIA and that adheres to the same model of disability as does the ADA. If these students are found eligible for special education, they may receive interventions but these interventions, unfortunately, are too often aimed at fixing the individual student—an outcome that flows logically from medical model definitions of disability. When this is the case, the social conditions that produce disability (e.g., inaccessible curriculum or instruction, ability privilege, social isolation, etc.) receive little or no attention.

In 1975, P.L. 94-142 (now the IDEIA) was heralded as civil rights legislation and, to be sure, disabled children have benefited from many of the protections in the law. Yet because the IDEIA also provides the means to discriminate (i.e., segregate) against students based on race, language, behavior, and body function, it can be difficult to argue solidly for maintaining the IDEIA if one adheres to a social model or social interpretation of disability (Beratan, 2006). However, Gabel (2008) has demonstrated that the IDEIA requires states to incorporate universal design for learning in state assessments and curriculum as a means toward student achievement of learning standards. Perhaps this is where disability studies in education can influence policy. First, DSE can advocate for the application of UDL principles in all curriculum and assessment practices. Second, DSE can propose alternatives to the IDEIA. How could we shape policy that protects equal access and opportunity in inclusive learning communities, particularly for the most vulnerable disabled—students with very significant functional limitations? What might that policy look like, what might be its intended and unintended consequences, and how can we be ready with such alternatives when the time is right and policy windows open?

In the meantime, we propose four things that can be done by those interested in these issues: (1) actively pursue research agendas that illuminate the inherent problems with IDEIA, ADA, Section 504 (U.S. Congress, 1973), and any other educational legislation or policy applied to education; (2) disseminate descriptions of efforts by local educators to creatively build inclusive school communities in spite of legislation built on the medical model, including efforts that utilize universal design; (3) disseminate policy alternatives that protect equal access and free appropriate public *inclusive* education but that adhere to a social model or social interpretation of disability; (4) do numbers 1 through 3 in collaboration with the disability rights community and disability studies researchers.

A Way Forward

In *Challenging Orthodoxy*, Gallagher (2004b) notes that “for more than a decade a vigorous discussion has taken place among educators in special education and disability studies...that, despite its importance, has had relatively few participants” (p. vii). Continuing, she claims that “this conversation is of crucial importance because it confronts the fundamental frameworks within which the debates over full inclusion, disability

definitions, labeling, and the like are deliberated" (p. vii). We would broaden her claim to point out that while few scholars, practitioners, or policy analysts outside special education have shown an interest in the rights of disabled people in schools, the issue raised by Gallagher extends beyond special education and disability studies. We have attempted to show that there are connections between the issues facing disabled people and those facing people identified by race, sexual orientation, and culture—job and housing discrimination, poverty, suppression of their right to choose who to love and live with, to give some examples.

First and foremost, disability intersects each of these other social groups through the lives of members of those groups and through their shared experiences with discriminatory social arrangements. As Eli Clare (1999) has so eloquently put it: "Gender reaches into disability; disability wraps around class; class strains against abuse; abuse snarls into sexuality; sexuality folds on top of race...everything finally piling into a single human body" (p. 123). Recognizing this as the reality complicates things but also offers interesting challenges both inside and outside the field of education, challenges that are only beginning to be explored (Danforth & Gabel, 2007). "Deliberations on ideas," suggests Gallagher (2004a), and, we would add, deliberations on curriculum, teaching, and policy, need to be "deeply and broadly informed. And this requires...the opportunity to explore disciplines of study outside the confines of [one's] own field" (371). We propose that any movement forward in social justice must integrate disability studies and that this integration deepens and broadens what can be understood and accomplished.

Notes

1. We are using this form to be consistent with the international Disability Rights Movement. Simi Linton (1998) writes that although there is some disagreement about disability language, "[t]he terms *disability* and *disabled people* are most commonly used by disability rights activists" (p. 10). See Titchkosky (2001) for critique of people-first language that points out the ontological problems with its use.
2. For a discussion of two common disability stereotypes—Tiny Tims and supercrips—see Doris Fleischer and Frieda Zames (2001), and the Education for Disability and Gender Equity Curriculum (EDGE) (n.d.).

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