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EDITORIAL

Disability studies and inclusive education — implications for theory, research, and practice

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This paper serves as a broad introduction to Disabilities Studies in Education (DSE). The emergence of DSE over the last decade has resulted in a vibrant area of academic scholarship as well as a critical forum for social/educational advocacy and activism. First, the authors trace the roots of DSE in the growth of disability studies (DS) within the UK and the USA. Second, they describe the formation of international networks dedicated to DSE. Third, they chart the evolution of DSE's conceptual framework, complete with tenets and examples, carefully crafted over time by a community of scholars. Fourth, they comment upon twelve papers selected for this special double issue of the *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, highlighting the contribution of each toward both advancing and elucidating the tenets within the conceptual framework of DSE. Finally, the authors close with reflections on the significance of DSE, contemplating what it offers theorists, researchers, and practitioners, as well as highlighting future possibilities.

Introduction

For many, if not most, readers, this special issue of the *International Journal of Inclusive Education* will serve as an introduction to the newly emerging field of Disability Studies in Education (DSE). As a nascent field grounded within the broader province of Disability Studies (DS), DSE is both a vibrant area of academic scholarship as well as a critical forum for social/educational advocacy and activism. Scholars and practitioners working within this new discipline seek to reach beyond the parochial and persistently narrow boundaries within which disability is all too often conceived. Broadly, the aim of DSE is to deepen understandings of the daily experiences of

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people with disabilities in schools and universities, throughout contemporary society, across diverse cultures, and within various historical contexts. More specifically, and within the realm of praxis, DSE works to create and sustain inclusive and accessible schools.

The emergence of DSE over the last decade has provided new ways of theorizing about disability and educational issues. Previously such issues were relegated to and confined within special education which served as the unquestioned default box into which all disability-related issues were automatically placed. As a fledgling discipline, DSE has rapidly grown to include an annual international conference, a Special Interest Group (SIG) in the American Education Research Association (AERA), a series of books, and a significant body of papers published in a wide variety of journals.

In that this special issue is intended to serve as an introduction, it is useful to provide a historical backdrop for DSE. Although we do not aspire to present a comprehensive rendering of DSE's history, in what follows we first describe briefly the parallel developments of DS in the UK and USA while also noting several distinctions between them that made unique contributions to the rise of DSE. We then discuss the formation of international networks, particularly those linked to the annual conference on Disability Studies in Education. Finally, we detail the deliberative evolution of DSE's conceptual framework, complete with tenets and examples, carefully crafted by a community of scholars in multiple open forums both online and at a public meeting at the annual Disability Studies in Education conference. In the process, we highlight each of the following paper's unique contributions toward both advancing and elucidating the tenets within the conceptual framework. We close with reflections on the significance of DSE, contemplating not only what it offers theorists, researchers, practitioners, but also its current possibilities.

Disability studies in the UK and the USA

Disability studies (DS) in academia emerged at approximately the same historical moment in the UK and USA. In the UK, the movement began with the publication of the *Fundamental Principles of Disability* by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS, 1975), a disabled people's activist group. The *Principles* and their emphasis on the importance of full societal inclusion were subsequently taken up by Abberley (1987), Oliver (1990), and other British sociologists who theorized the social model of disability in which disability is primarily understood as a result of oppressive social arrangements:

In our view, it is society which disables 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.

(UPIAS, 1975, p. 3)

The social model of disability directly challenges the medical model, or what UPIAS termed:

the imposition of medical authority ... [leading to] the traditional way of dealing with disabled people ... for doctors and other professionals to decide what is best for us.

(Section 14)

In the USA, DS was institutionalized in 1982 with the formation of the Society for Disability Studies (SDS). SDS members galvanized around the ‘minority [group] model’ that emerged in the late 1970s and was influenced by the American Civil Rights Movement’s claims to equal status for minority groups such as African-Americans, women, gays and lesbians. Proponents of this model asserted that minority group members experience stereotyping, marginalization, and discrimination. Influenced by the use of concepts such as racism and sexism, Bogdan & Biklen (1977) coined the term ‘handicapism’, defining it as:

a set of assumptions and practices that promote the differential and unequal treatment of people because of apparent or assumed ... differences.

(p. 14)

Interestingly, the concept has endured over three decades, shifting in language from handicapism to ‘abelism’.

During the late 1990s, the term ‘social model’ gained wide use by those working in DS around the world. However, there are countless interpretations of the social model and an equal number of critiques. Even proponents of the social model eventually criticized it on various bases. For example, because Shakespeare & Watson (2001) came to see the social model as a modernist theory of disability that sought to lend ‘an overarching meta-analysis covering all dimensions of every disabled person’s experience’, they came to believe it is neither useful nor attainable (p. 19). [Gabel & Peters \(2004\)](#) acknowledged that the social model is explanatory, but insufficient for creating change. To move forward, they suggested the use of resistance theory to comprehend the intricate and multifaceted relationships, interactions, and negotiations among divergent ideas, while simultaneously bringing together the global community in pursuit of praxis. Finkelstein (2002), co-author of the *Principles* and an original proponent of the social model, argued that it is not a model and urged its replacement with a more accurate term — ‘social interpretation(s)’.

Although the early social interpretations of disability evidenced both in the UK version of the social model and the USA minority model were concerned with the collective experience of marginalized and oppressed people, noticeable differences existed. In general, the UK version was influenced by sociologists grounded in a neo-Marxist philosophy that made a clear demarcation between disability as social oppression and impairment as functional limitation. The US version appeared far more eclectic (including a significant development within the Humanities), did not necessarily distinguish disability from impairment, and emphasized the social construction of disability rather than disablement via socio-political processes. However, the one defining characteristic of DS in the UK and US was the rejection of the medical model of disability and the advocacy of full inclusion of disabled people in all aspects of society.

A US 'network' of DSE is formed

While DS has grown as an interdisciplinary and international academic field of inquiry, DSE is a relatively new phenomenon (not quite a decade old) and has only recently formed an international network. In this section, we chronicle the initial formation of the network of educators doing work in DSE. Its formal inception began at the 1999 US conference of The Association for Severely Handicapped (TASH) when a panel calling itself the Coalition for Open Inquiry in Special Education (COISE) discussed the social and political value of current trends and developments in disability research and scholarship. At the centre of this panel's deliberations was the exploration of the importance of inquiry and scholarship for persons concerned with the social valuation and inclusion of persons with disabilities. The panel coalesced around the crucial need for 'open inquiry,' most particularly the expansion and diversification of what is considered legitimate and valuable scholarship within special education publications in the USA. Although alternative modes of inquiry and forms of scholarship have been developed and pursued extensively throughout other fields of educational study, the field of special education in the USA for the most part has summarily ignored these developments and remained grounded in a positivist discourse (Heshusius, 2004). This insular, unidimensional stance is reflected in the repetitive pages of the many national special education journals and bland university texts that teachers find unengaging (Brantlinger, 2006).

As a result of the small but growing number of educational researchers discouraged by the insularity of special education's traditionalism, and owing significantly to the influence of the broader field of DS, a special interest group (SIG) was formed in the American Educational Research Association (AERA). The Disability Studies in Education (DSE-SIG) held its first business meeting at AERA in 2000.

The DSE Annual International Conference

As interest intensified about how scholars might broaden the scope of conceptualizing disability in educational settings and, correspondingly, the ways in which their work could influence research, policy, and practice, a small, inaugural national conference titled 'Disability Studies in Education: Critical Reflections on the Themes of Policy, Practice, and Theory' was held in Chicago, Illinois, in July 2001. Hosted by National-Louis University, one of the founding values of this event was the support of doctoral students who were encouraged to participate actively in the conference. Due to its success, the conference subsequently became an annual event that continues to attract disability activists, researchers, professors, teachers, and other community members who vigorously seek changes in theory and practice within education and rehabilitation services for people with disabilities.¹ Although the conference has always drawn international participation, in 2007 it officially emerged as international with conference leadership and attendees from numerous countries. That year, the conference was deliberately scheduled to be held immediately preceding the annual AERA meeting, a change that substantially increased the number of international scholars who could attend and share their work.² Interest in maintaining international

connections led to the decision to hold the conference at the University of Ghent, Belgium, in 2010.

Inclusion as an ultimate goal

One consequence of the international conference and the global networks it has produced is the illumination of the varied meanings of inclusive education throughout the world. In many countries DSE scholars define inclusive education as full participation in general education classrooms and programmes with minimal or no segregation into special education classrooms or services. However, in numerous parts of the world, disabled people cannot even attend school or if they do, they find themselves in segregated facilities, a substantial portion of which are run by non-governmental organizations rather than the state's public school system. UNESCO's *Education for All* (1990) goal of achieving 'access to and complete, free, and compulsory primary education of good quality' (World Bank, 2007, ¶2) by 2015 seems infeasible at this point and leaves many disability rights activists wondering what can be done to quicken the pace of educational inclusion. Even the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 1994, appendix B) claims that 'regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes ... building an inclusive society and achieving education for all' and that 'children with special needs' must 'have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting those needs' (Section 2) seem to have had too little influence in too many parts of the world.

The need for clarity about DSE

Soon after the establishment of the DSE-SIG in AERA, it became apparent that as scholarship within DSE expanded, and while scholars working within a DSE framework had personally defined its value in framing their individual work, neither a collective nor explicit understanding of DSE existed nor was there agreement about the purposes and goals of DSE. By and large, scholars came together at annual DSE conferences united by three broad interests. As previously indicated, the first was a shared dissatisfaction with the field of special education's restrictive, insular stance toward scholarly diversity. Serious dismay had been growing on a number of fronts, including: egregious limitations in the forms of 'acceptable' research methodologies; highly questionable, if not detrimental and indefensible, instructional practices; the standard and widespread use of damaging labels; and deficit-driven, medicalized conceptualizations of disability that undeniably contradicted the views and life experiences of many disabled people. The second common interest was the creation of opportunities to explore respective personal understandings about working within a DSE paradigm and, by extension, to share ideas about how these understandings profoundly influenced all aspects of theorizing, teaching, and researching disability. The third shared interest, connected to the broader field of DS, is what had been happening in inclusive education at the international level.

At each annual conference, attendees deliberated on what came to be acknowledged as the elephant in the room: What actually constituted DSE? Reticent to rush headlong into substituting one confining paradigm for another, participants expressed serious misgivings about the prospect of 'institutionalizing' DSE. These qualms were especially acute in light of the fact that DSE had emerged and taken shape as a consequence of scholars articulating what it was *not*. Analogous to the concept of rendering 'negative space' in art, DSE's presence, in effect, was outlined by focusing on what was absent. Negative space is created, for example, by placing a pile of jumbled chairs together and drawing only the spaces between them thereby focusing on what lies outside of the object being defined. Paradoxically, this approach renders a 'shape' without actually qualifying it.

Although scholars were originally unified by what was not yet defined, a major factor that propelled clarification of what DSE *is* lay in the encroaching threat of co-option or appropriation by those who did not understand the radical nature of DSE and its implications for inclusive education. Early on, the term 'disability studies in education' was invoked by a disconcerting number of novelty seekers looking to add a veneer of distinction to their decidedly conventional special education research, inadvertently interpreting DSE as a trendy new term signifying 'special education with a makeover'. For example, over the years, DSE-SIG programme chairs have observed a striking increase in conference proposals laying claim to DS scholarship while the content of the proposals themselves assiduously retained traditional special education assumptions. Of necessity, it became time to clarify why DSE and special education could not be used interchangeably.

Framework for DSE

In 2006 the DSE-SIG invited all members to participate in a year-long conversation via their listserv to deliberate on the mission of DSE. Members were invited to share their thoughts about how Disability Studies in Education is (or should be) articulated in theory and research, and how it is (or should be) ultimately enacted in practice. A list of items was compiled and presented at the 2007 conference by the SIG chairpersons; and, after the document underwent final editing, a motion was made for its acceptance at the business meeting several days later. Members subsequently voted to adopt the following mission statement and framework for DSE with the strong proviso that these guidelines were meant to be heuristically useful for those working within the field. As such, they constitute a fluid document that can, and should, be changed over time.

In the following sections we share the Mission/Statement of Purpose, Tenets, and Examples of Approaches to Theory, Research, and Practice within DSE. We also make reference to, and comment upon, all papers featured in this special double edition. All authors originally presented these papers at the 7th Annual International Disability Studies in Education Conference held at National-Louis University in Chicago, Illinois, in April 2007.

The theme of the conference was Disability Studies and Inclusive Education: Implications for Practice. A total of 150 scholars attending the event shared their recent

research and current thoughts, engaging in productive conversations both within and outside of scheduled sessions. As attendees, all four of us were struck by the original thinking of participants, the high quality of scholarship, and a common desire for social justice around the issue of inclusion. As Guest Editors of this special issue, we were faced with difficult choices in selecting a representative sample of papers that illustrate current scholarship in theory, research, and practice within DSE. That said we believe the diverse papers featured in this collection all make individual contributions to an ever increasing collective body of knowledge in the field of DSE.

Mission/statement of purpose

The mission of the Disability Studies in Education SIG is to promote understandings of disability from a social model perspective drawing on social, cultural, historical, discursive, philosophical, literary, aesthetic, artistic, and other traditions to challenge medical, scientific, and psychological models of disability as they relate to education. As Taylor (2006) points out:

Neither Disability Studies nor Disability Studies in Education represents a unitary perspective. Scholarship in these areas includes social constructionist or interpretivist, materialist, postmodernist, poststructuralist, legal and even structural-functionalist perspectives and draws on disciplines as diverse as sociology, literature, critical theory, economics, law, history, art, philosophy, and others.

(p. xiii)

Despite this multiplicity of scholarly perspectives, Taylor identifies what we (the Guest Editors) agree is the most important, indeed pivotal, unifying perspective central to DS and, subsequently, to DSE — that disability is a social construct. This perspective, as articulated in the social model of disability, diametrically opposes the medical model by virtue of its re-conceptualization of disability as inevitably values-laden and historically/culturally situated. Thus, disability is not a ‘thing’ or condition people have, but instead a social negation serving powerful ideological commitments and political aims. As such, DSE brings diversity in thought and plurality of perspectives about disability into the educational arena long dominated by traditional conceptualizations of disability that continue to justify and thus provide consent to the current field of special education.

The purpose of DSE is twofold. The first is to provide an organizational vehicle for collaboration and the exchange of ideas among DS researchers/activists in education. The second is to increase the visibility and influence of DS among all educational researchers. Ultimately, DSE’s purpose is to provide advocacy for, as well as the viable approaches for enacting, meaningful and substantive educational inclusion.

Tenets

The tenets of DSE centre on engagement in research, policy, and action that:

- contextualize disability within political and social spheres;
- privilege the interests, agendas, and voices of people labelled with disability/disabled people;
- promote social justice, equitable and inclusive educational opportunities, and full and meaningful access to all aspects of society for people labelled with disability/disabled people; and
- assume competence and reject deficit models of disability.

Examples of approaches to theory in DSE

As a deliberatively evolving field, DSE encompasses a variety of theoretical approaches. Below, we outline what we currently hold as examples of these approaches. DSE theory does the following:

- Contrasts medical, scientific, psychological understandings with social and experiential understandings of disability.
- Predominantly focuses on political, social, cultural, historical, and individual understandings of disability.
- Supports the education of students labelled with disabilities in non-segregated settings from a civil rights stance.
- Engages work that discerns the oppressive nature of essentialized/categorical/medicalized naming of disability in schools, policy, institutions, and the law while simultaneously recognizing the political power that may be found in collective and individual activism and pride through group-specific claims to disabled identities and positions.
- Recognizes the embodied/aesthetic experiences of people whose lives/selves are made meaningful as disabled, as well as troubles the school and societal discourses that position such experiences as 'othered' to an assumed normate.
- Includes disabled people in theorizing about disability.

Examples of approaches to research and DSE

As an expanding field, DSE encompasses a variety of approaches to research. Below, we list what we presently hold as examples of these approaches. DSE research does the following:

- Welcomes scholars with disabilities and non-disabled scholars working together.
- Recognizes and privileges the knowledge derived from the lived experience of people with disabilities.
- Whenever possible adheres to an emancipatory stance (for example, working *with* people with disabilities as informed participants or co-researchers, not 'subjects').
- Welcomes intradisciplinary approaches to understanding the phenomenon of disability, e.g. with educational foundations, special education, etc.

- Cultivates interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the phenomenon of disability, e.g. interfacing with multicultural education, the humanities, social sciences, philosophy, cultural studies, etc.
- Challenges research methodology that objectifies, marginalizes, and oppresses people with disabilities.

Examples of approaches to practice and DSE

As a growing field grounded in the daily lives of people with disabilities, DSE reflects a variety of practical approaches. Below, we delineate what we currently hold as examples of these approaches. DSE in practice includes the following:

- Disability is primarily recognized and valued as natural part of human diversity.
- Disability and inclusive education.
- Disability culture and identity as part of a multicultural curriculum.
- The Disability Rights Movement is studied as part of the civil rights movement.
- Disability history and culture and the contributions of disabled people are integral to all aspects of the curriculum.
- Disabled students are supported in the development of a positive disability identity.

The papers contained within this volume represent a broad array of contemporary scholarship from researchers around the world. While differing in content and focus, each share a concern about ways in which children, youth, and adults with various disabilities continue to be excluded in schools and universities, and by extension, their larger communities. To counter-exclusionary practices, the papers offer new ideas, including: reframing deficit-based assumptions of disability; reconfiguring teacher education programmes; incorporating creative methods to engage educators in discussions about ableism; and developing inclusive schools via a systemic approach.

In their opening paper, Broderick and Ne'eman analyse cultural narratives in the discourse of autism. By assembling the metaphors used about autism in both popular culture and professional literature (foreign space, a retreat, a withdrawal, and so on), then coupling them with medicalized and charitized rhetoric of 'diagnosing,' 'suffering,' and children in need of a 'cure,' the authors elucidate how these images exert an intense form of 'othering' within the public imagination. As a self-identified person with Asperger's syndrome, Ne'eman collaborates with Broderick to repudiate such representations, offering in their place an understanding of autism as nothing more than (or less than) an example of our abundantly human neurodiversity. Their stance is one that assumes competence in individuals with autism, contrasting sharply with the tragic life-sentence of disease portrayed in mainstream discourse.

Further, the authors offer an enormously compelling critique of organizations such as Autism Speaks, an 'advocacy' group which ironically fails to involve people with autism, thus denying them the opportunity to speak for themselves. Instead, these

organizations largely feature their parents who have been subject to prevailing medicalized discourses. Disconcertingly, common depictions and understandings of autism appear to be more focused on the concerns and ‘hardships’ of family members rather than people identified as having autism. Undermining concepts of normality/abnormality by problematizing the neurotypical community, Broderick and Ne’eman urge the increased acceptance of a neurodiversity narrative as a more emancipatory understanding of autism. Conversely, they recommend rejection of autism as an abstract force that serves to other.

In the following paper, Young focuses on the configuration of physical and ideological spaces within a teacher education programme. She reveals how the too often tacit meaning of social arrangements profoundly shapes attitudes toward people with disabilities (and how people with disabilities are informed of their ‘place’ in society). Tellingly, Young’s study describes how a university’s programmes of general and special education and attendant departments have merged, primarily because of legislative requirements, to create a dual certification programme in both areas. Merger notwithstanding, and despite cosmetic touches and nominal changes, a genuine fusion between general and special education departments within the institution of higher education does not exist.

This unfortunate situation is reminiscent of hypocritical parents instructing their children, ‘Do as we say, not do as we do,’ and raises serious questions about the authenticity, and thus effectiveness, of inclusive reforms taking place at the university level. The configurations analysed by Young also indicate deeply entrenched levels of resistance and reveal the maintenance of long established boundaries beneath the fastidiously varnished surface of ‘combined’ programmes. Indeed, one of the many questions her research raises is: Why not have *one* inclusive programme that is not combined?

The main title of Ferri’s, ‘Changing the script’, can be seen as a metaphor for theorizing disability within a DSE framework, purposefully aiming to rewrite traditional meaning(s) of disability inscribed by non-disabled people. In highlighting Lynn Manning’s *Weights*, Ferri calls for a non-reductionist, expansionist model for understanding disability to counter the restrictive deficit-based models pervasive in special education. Manning’s personal experience at the interstices of race (he is African-American) and disability (he is blind) is the site from which his subjectivity *informs* us about disability, giving rise to a powerful counter-narrative. His embodied, intersectional, situated experiences reveal different ways of knowing the world that are antithetical to information found in traditional special education research and textbooks. As Ferri laments, the field of special education does not seem overly concerned with its history of labelling African-American males as disabled and placing them in segregated classrooms. In brief, the paper beautifully illustrates a humanities-based approach to theorizing disability, as well as the unquestionable power of social, cultural, and historical understandings of disability mediated through an individual, that can be used to highlight the political.

In ‘Who’s in, who’s out of New Zealand public schools? How decisions are shaped’, Wills and McLean take up a parallel between special education policy and

sheep farming practices. Although initially appearing tongue-in-cheek, their extended analogy succeeds in offering up a deeply satirical critique of national policies and practices concerning students with disabilities. The authors describe schools as sorting mechanisms in which professional elites determine the fate of children who do not fit within a prescribed norm. They also address the troubling issue of educational programmes that train teachers to be instruments of the state, technicians who sift and sort, relegating students with disabilities into segregated groups to preserve the overall quality of 'the herd'.

Their contribution raises serious and fundamental questions about governmental priorities, such as: What is the purpose of schooling? What is the expected outcome? What is the financial cost? What are some financial incentives and disincentives to support inclusion? Operating in an aggressive market economy, who gets to decide the best 'place' for students with disabilities? Wills and McLean also call attention to the ongoing disjuncture between the presumptive guaranteed rights of disabled students and the pervasively stereotypic attitudes that cast them as burdens upon the school system. In the spirit of Jonathan Swift, their method is playful, but their message is sobering.

In 'Institutional stories and self-stories: investigating peer interpretations of significant disability', Naraian weaves DS, narrative theory, and socio-cultural perspectives on learning, creating a vivid depiction and rich analysis of peer relations within inclusive classrooms. Using a Geertzian approach, she constructs a thick description of schools that abundantly reveals both the subtle and readily discernible ways in which students interact among each other. Her work deftly draws the reader into a complex world to explore the question: What kinds of stories about significant disability circulate in inclusive classrooms?

Naraian also tackles the thorny issue of children with significant disabilities being physically included without being socially and academically included. The author encourages student interpretations of the actions, sounds, and gestures of their significantly disabled peers to acknowledge and explore issues spontaneously raised in the context of real-life classrooms. Naraian views the classroom as a community in which the identities of all participants are forged through social interactions. And while the responses of non-disabled students toward their peers are vitally important in making sense of their world, the teacher must act as a mediator of knowledge, creating and modelling meaningful interactions.

In a similar vein, Bentley's research focuses on the one per cent of students with severe disabilities and their peers as co-participating agents in creating an inclusive community. The author moves the one per cent from the outmost margins to the absolute centre, thus countering traditional research in which:

The voices of children with labels of severe disabilities are missing from the important epistemological, political, pedagogical, and pragmatic currents that will shape their future.

Considering it a matter of social justice to 'listen' to children labelled severely disabled, Bentley emphasizes the agentic capabilities of those who are constantly spoken for within school by paraprofessionals and therapists. She describes how

Lynda, a child with Rett syndrome communicates, ways in which peers come to interact with her, and their ability to ascertain the intentionality of her behaviours. Using the analytical framework of symbolic interactionism, Bentley describes multiple daily instances of symbolic exclusion and symbolic inclusion, foregrounding the instinctive sagacity of Lynda and her peers as they work and play within their classroom.

In 'Worlds remade: inclusion through engagement with disability art', Ware reminds us of the common ground shared by qualitative research and art, both involving a highly personalized creative process within an unfettered imagination — ultimately leading to an original representation of ideas. Ware's discussion of disability art and its wonderful ability to destabilize the normative gaze of the viewer exemplifies DSE in theory, research, and practice. The work of selected artists with disabilities illustrates how their bodies have profoundly influenced their own meaning making of the world, offering further examples of valuable, contextualized, situated knowledge.

In particular, Ware features the exquisitely crafted work of Riva Lehrer, describing how she uses the artist's work in teacher education programmes to unpack students' previous knowledge of disability primarily gained through discourses of science, medicine, psychology, and charity before engaging them in ways to *unlearn* it. Each painting, sculpture, and sketch serves to portray disability in complex, layered ways, the antithesis of how it is conveyed as a clinical checklist in traditional textbooks. In this paper, as in her classes, Ware asks: Who is authoring the knowledge of disability in educational contexts? Juxtaposing representations of people with disabilities written by traditional researchers with self-representation, the author demonstrates the tremendous power of an interdisciplinary approach to understand the multifaceted phenomena of disability.

Similar to Ware, Baglieri engages actual and prospective teachers to focus on their own background experiences, identities, and knowledge to make meaning of social and cultural models of disability. In creating a space for deep self-reflection that, in turn, is used for ongoing classroom dialogue about everyone's 'place' in the world, Baglieri offers ways to foster robust personal connections that endure and expand as the course progresses. Universal issues of exclusion, stereotypic distortion, misrepresentation, and the absence of representation within personal experience create a visceral, emotional dimension within educators who may not have initially conceived of inclusion as a civil right (and therefore imperative for students with disabilities).

By exploring the origins of negative attitudes of usually non-disabled teachers toward students with disabilities in their classrooms, Baglieri makes a persuasive case for the need to teach disability in college courses through a social model. In so doing, she recasts disability as a valued part of diversity akin to other members within minority models rather than a constellation of medical symptoms. Additionally, Baglieri conveys that teaching about disability is far beyond sharing methods of teaching; it is a way to educate the non-disabled members of the community about privileges they have, as yet unrecognized, that help maintain exclusive practices.

McLean's paper directly poses the important question: is teaching about disability an ethical responsibility? Like Baglieri, she seeks to challenge ableist assumptions and beliefs held by graduate level students in education. Part of McLean's concern lies in what often appears as students' overwhelmingly entrenched ableist ways of understanding disability, knowing that they will likely influence all professional interactions involving people with disabilities they will serve throughout their careers. Ironically, she realizes the risk in teaching against ableism, noting how it becomes reinforced when people feel defensive and subsequently erect barriers to conversations about important issues such as able-bodied privilege, accessibility, and stereotyping.

Guiding students through a process of becoming critical thinkers about disability, aware of the complexities, nuances, paradoxes, contentions, histories, perspectives, and their self-implication is neither simple nor straightforward. The breakthrough McLean seeks with students — worthy of pursuit despite the resilient discourse of normalcy — is referred to as 'the jolt', a moment, incident, or realization that serves as a catalyst to begin the initial steps of disestablishing their own ableism. Although creating disequilibrium vis-à-vis ableism involves the risk of alienating students, McLean deems it worthy of undertaking. As one participant in her class writes, 'What you assumed to be, you had no reason to question, is now no longer.' McLean believes this earth shattering occurrence, being unable to look at the world in a certain way any longer, is the epiphany needed to enable understanding the roots of exclusionary thinking.

Considering ways of increasing inclusive practice from another perspective, Blumberg, Carroll, and Petroff describe a post-secondary college education programme for young people with Intellectual Disabilities (ID). Their content based programme is far beyond the 'functional life skills' assumed to be all that students with ID can handle. The topic of disability is central to the curriculum, including a freshman seminar titled 'Human Abilities Unplugged'. In this course, open to both students with and without disabilities, disability is taught as an integral part of human experience, and human difference is taught from a multiplicity of perspectives. Major topics such as the institutionalization of people with disabilities are explored through students becoming researchers who interview residents of institutions. In addition, a class called *Great Conversations* is deliberately configured to promote dialogue between all college students in small groups. Based on best practices existing in K-12 inclusion classes, this programme demonstrates ways in which college can be inclusive of students with ID.

In analysing the results of their own research, Ocloo and Subbey compare general education teachers' perceptions of inclusive classrooms in Ghana to those from other parts of the world. The authors' meta-analysis shows a great deal of similarity to research findings in other nations including: inadequate school facilities; lack of teacher education around issues of disability; and a paucity of in-service professional development. Additionally, the traditional Ghanaian school system has maintained segregated facilities for children who are blind, deaf, and with intellectual disabilities. In their desire to support inclusive classrooms, the authors assert that teachers' beliefs

and attitudes are the foundation on which successful inclusive practices are built, and the Ghanaian Education Service and other stakeholders in education should formally address these issues through meaningful professional development, instead of paying 'lip service'. Ocloo and Subbey's paper reveals both similarities and disparities between what are commonly referred to as 'developed' and 'developing' nations in their support of inclusion. Their work highlights the importance of inclusion within all communities, and the need to keep advocating in the face of indifference.

In the final paper, Kinsella and Senior contemplate a systemic approach to inclusion in the Republic of Ireland. Influenced by the work of Skrtic (1995), the authors contend it is organizational, not individual, pathology that is responsible for traditional exclusionary structures in which students with disabilities have received their education. Evoking social and political discourses to support change, Kinsella and Senior recast the inclusion of students with disabilities as a clear issue of social justice and case of civil rights. The authors identify and evaluate many components of successful inclusive education, including an understanding of existing structures, the availability of personnel with various levels of expertise, and the processes needed to be in place to mediate change by those with expertise working within structures. Urging a systems theory approach to schools, Kinsella and Senior remind us that significant change at the organizational level will only occur if all participants collectively agree to explore the implications of potential change at personal, professional, and organizational levels. Institutions must become, in effect, learning organizations around the principle of inclusive education because there are no blueprints or templates leading to quick fixes.

Conclusion

Although DS stretches back for almost 30 years, Disabilities Studies in Education (DSE) is a relatively new field, not yet a decade old. Bearing this in mind, scholars in DSE have articulated some areas of further potential study. These include the following:

- Constructing a new discourse of disability in education that emphasizes disability in its socio-political contexts and that is respectful of disabled people.
- Identifying connections, overlaps, and dissonance between DSE and special education.
- Exploring tensions, paradoxes, contradictions, and reticence within education toward conceptualizations of diversity that include disability.
- Further developing an intersectional approach to understanding disability at the interstices of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, etc.
- Foregrounding explicit and tangible examples of ways in which DSE undergirds classroom practices.

We believe these areas hold great promise and represent only the tip of the iceberg in terms of possibilities of working within DSE. In this special double issue, we have begun to address the implications as theorists, researchers, and practitioners currently

working within DSE. The phrase ‘begun to address ...’ is used consciously and respectfully, acknowledging that DSE is only a recently recognized field, constantly evolving in terms of cultivating theory, expanding research and defining practice, all with view to influencing policy. As scholar-practitioners, we consider DSE to be one of the most important developments in the field of inclusive education, a discipline in which we can ‘talk back’ to forces in education that undermine inclusive values. Barton (2008) reminds us:

We work in a culture increasingly characterized by measurement and control in which image and accountability are crucial. How we think, talk, and understand educational issues and practice has been influenced by the language of business and its vocabulary of targets, efficiency, and effectiveness. Inclusive thinking and practice involve such values as openness, reciprocal respect, trust in which there is a genuine sense of being learners. To what extent do we see evidence of such a thriving, creative, encouraging, and disturbing process in our daily working lives?

(pp. xix–xx)

Just as DSE research favours the counter-narratives of people with disabilities, DSE itself may be seen as a counter-narrative to the prevailing and intertwined hegemonic discourses of normalcy, deficiency, and efficiency operating in (special) education. DSE has already proven its worth: challenging many ontological and epistemological assumptions that under gird traditional special education practices; re-defining how the concept of disability can be taught within school and college curricula; emphasizing disabled people’s experiences, concerns, and ideas about their lives; and directly embracing disability as a ‘natural’ part of human diversity. The value of DSE is further apparent as it becomes increasingly recognized at an international level, where its possibilities are just beginning to be realized ([Gabel & Danforth, 2008](#)). Ultimately, we believe that working within DSE gives us tools to help clarify our thinking, critique existing exclusionary practices, build alliances with the Disability Rights organizations and collaborate in a movement that envisions international possibilities to improve the lives of all students and educators with and without disabilities.

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Selected parts of this paper were taken from the History of DSE, posted since 2005 on the annual DSE conference websites. It was originally assembled from DSE-SIG members’ collective recollections gathered via email.

Notes

1. The conference also became a co-sponsored event, receiving support from the Professional Development and Research Institute on Blindness at Louisiana Tech University. The second annual DSE conference (‘Education, Social Action, and the Politics of Disability’) and third conference (‘Traversing the Chasm Between Disability Studies and Education’) remained in Chicago, and the fourth conference (‘Reforming, Restructuring, Resisting in Special Education’)

- was held in Ruston, Louisiana. At the first milestone of five years, Teachers College, Columbia University hosted the conference ('The 30th Anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and its Impact on American Society'). The next conference was held at East Lansing, Michigan State University ('Disability Studies and Inclusive Education: Negotiating Tensions and Integrating Research, Policy, and Practice'). The Chicago-based seventh conference from which papers in this special double issue are taken ('Disability Studies and Inclusive Education: Implications for Practice?') was the first to coincide with AERA. The following year, the eighth conference ('Mitigating Exclusion: Building Alliances toward Inclusive Education Reform in Pedagogy and Policy') saw a return to New York City at Teachers College, Columbia University. In addition to being a venue in which papers are given, conferences have also afforded the chance to celebrate the work of scholars in DSE who are honoured by their peers. Senior scholar awards have been given to William Rhodes (2001), Susan Peters (2002), Lous Heshusius (2003), Ellen Brantlinger (2005), D. Kim Reid (2006), Len Barton (2007), and Douglas Biklen (2008). Junior scholar awards have been given to Alicia Broderick (2002), Beth Ferri (2003), David J. Connor (2005), Jan Valle (2006), Srikala Naraian (2007), and Susan Baglieri (2008).
2. The dovetailing of the annual DSE conference and AERA proved very beneficial, especially to international participants, in 2007 and 2008. However, the coupling of conferences is decided on a year-by-year basis.

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