

## Challenging the Achievement Gap by Disrupting Concepts of “Normalcy”

Presented by Shawna Draxton, Kirstee Radley, and Joanne Murphy  
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We propose that Disability Studies in Education (DSE) offers a framework that (a) grounds policy and practice in the experiences and perspectives of people with disabilities, (b) challenges practices/ policy that isolate, de-humanize individuals, and (c) leads to new questions to pose. In this session, we describe the pedagogy that we used to develop the constructing position papers from a DSE perspective. We believe that our reflective essays can help others critically examine their own disciplines and the foundational principles on which the disciplines are built. We hope to challenge and change particular foundations that allow us to continue to marginalize people with disabilities.

We have two objectives in writing this paper. First, we describe the process of writing position papers to challenge current policies and practices, which we discovered led us to understand why a DSE stance is important for 21<sup>st</sup> century teachers, administrators, and teacher educators. Second, we share examples of position papers and activities that helped us interrogate and critique our current beliefs, and we conclude with our discoveries and insights about how our own interpretations changed.

We argue that teacher educators can guide their teacher and paraprofessional candidates to challenge the paradigms, policies, and practices that lead to presumptions of failure of America’s Pre-K-12 children. Educators who are able to do so are more likely to advocate for changes that result in correcting socially unjust practices and policies.

The ideology of ableism promotes the notion that it is better to be as “normal” as possible rather than be disabled, or different (e.g., speak languages other than English, come from non-Anglo heritages). Ableism pervades the American K-12 public education systems and is reflected the deficit-oriented perspective that children should be sorted and labeled. An ableist perspective considers “disability” to be a personal condition that must be corrected or cured through accommodations, interventions, and/or segregation. In contrast, a DSE approach views disability as a social construction that lies within the oppression of a given culture and historical period rather than in impairments per se.

### Who are We?

#### Challenging the Achievement Gap by Disrupting Concepts of “Normalcy”

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- Kirstee Radley, Autism Specialist for a district in Orange County, California, and doctoral student in the College of Educational Studies Ph. D. program in disabilities studies at Chapman University

## Step 1

On the foot provided write down one educational injustice you are facing.



## Ableism is Personal

- An ableist perspective considers “disability” to be a personal condition that must be corrected or cured through accommodations, interventions, and/or segregation.
- Ableism, intertwined with the ideology of normalcy, is the assumption, rooted in eugenics, that it is better to be as “normal” as possible rather than be disabled (Baker, 2002).

Baker, B. (2002). The hunt for disability: The new eugenics and the normalization of school children. *Teachers College Record*, 104(4), 663–703.

## Challenge the Concept of Normalcy

- Ableism promotes the notion that it is better to be as “normal” as possible rather than be disabled, or different (e.g., speak languages other than English, come from non-Anglo heritages).
- Ableism pervades the American K-12 public education systems and is reflected the deficit-oriented perspective that children should be sorted and labeled.

## How can a Disabilities Studies in Education (DSE) Challenge the Concept of Normalcy?

- A DSE approach views disability as a social construction that lies within the oppression of a given culture and historical period rather than in impairments per se.
- DSE grounds policy and practice in the experiences and perspectives of people with disabilities.
- DSE challenges practices and policies that isolate and de-humanize individuals.
- DSE leads to new questions to pose  
.... And thus new horizons to explore.

## Definition

DSE is an interdisciplinary field of scholarship that unites critical inquiry with political advocacy by using approaches from the arts and humanities and humanistic and post-humanistic social sciences to improve the lives of disabled people on the basis of their self-expressed needs and desires (Gabel, 2005\*).

\*Gabel, S. (2005). Introduction: Disability studies in education. In S. L. Gabel (Ed.), *Disability studies in education: Readings in theory and method* (pp. 1–20). New York: Peter Lang.



## DSE includes....

- intellectual and practical tools
- forms of thought and action that nurture a deeper awareness among educators about disability rights
- inclusive participation
- disability identity

### Shawna Draxton's Essay: *Why Teach DSE Principles to Students in Elementary School?*

- I ask an editor of an online resource for teachers to include resources about DSE so as to support the efforts of creating inclusive schools in a school system that traditionally sorts and labels children on the basis of race, disability, socio-economic status.
- I argue that lessons designed to explicitly teach disabilities studies concepts to students in kindergarten through sixth grade classrooms may allow students to appreciate where they are in the range of human variation.

### Purpose

Support teachers in infusing DSE principles into pedagogy through acknowledging and responding to student voice

Giving voice to young people with disabilities has provided many new insights about their experiences, including how they often feel deprived of influence on their own lives and living conditions. They also report loss of competence and opportunity for taking initiatives, making up one's mind and acting self-dependent (e.g. Ringsmose & Buch-Hansen, 2004; Høgsbro et al., 1999).

- Teacher leadership and teacher-led change in school improvement (Konings, Brand-Gruwel, & van Merriënboer, 2005; Midthassel, 2004; Muljs & Harris, 2006).
- Cognitive coaching and mentoring strategies to support both new and experienced teachers have also been used as a school-improvement strategy (Pelletier & Sharp, 2009).
- Warn against the tendency toward a superficial nod to “student voice” in schools which make only cursory attempts to solicit feedback from students, rather than a more fundamental change

### Project Outline

- Faculty Meeting: discussed the importance of eliciting students' perspectives regarding the classroom environment, culture, and instruction, reviewed social vs. medical model perspective, discussed student identity
- Teachers worked together during professional development to create an interview guide to elicit student voice
- Teachers introduced “student voice” in each grade through a mini-discussion with the students
  - 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade responses to the interview guide were typed
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students responded in writing to the interview guide
- All co-teaching teams developed a lesson plan integrating DSE principles based on the student voice interview guide information, shared their proposed lessons at a faculty meeting, and implemented their lessons

## Student Voice

Students participate in meaningful decision-making and dialogue regarding their learning environment and classroom climate for the purposes of building upon foundations of community and trust.

– Cook-Sather (2002) and Lodge (2005)

- Student voice is a fundamental characteristic of democratic education and change in teacher practice must be a collaborative effort involving students (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b)
- Self-determination theory suggests student participation in decision-making increases engagement (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Reeve & Halusic, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Stang, Carter, Lane, & Pierson, 2008)
- Student perceptions regarding their learning environment are seldom considered a valid source of data by school leaders or even teachers, particularly when the students in question also experience a disability (Angus, 2006; Mitchell, 2008)

## Lesson Plan Reflection and Actions

- Teachers sat in a dialogue circle and shared successes, challenges, and actions for next DSE lesson
- They decided to develop a faculty/staff tool for using language with children that supports integration of their voice into pedagogy
- Lesson plans and persuasive essay were submitted to editor of Scholastic Online Resources

### Kirstee Radley's Essay: *From Naming to Doing: DSE Principles in a Special Education World*

- I argue for a new way to speak about the role of special educators.
- I describe how they might transform their classrooms from nouns to verbs, from manipulating things (and children) to interacting, and from marginalizing to including those who are different.

### Kirstee Radley's Essay: *From Naming to Doing: DSE Principles in a Special Education World*

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### DSE Principles in a Special Education World: practical implementation of disability studies principles into a special education classroom

- Medical Model: special education teacher will label the persons, places, and things in the environment as a series of static events
- Social Model: special education teacher believes their students are individual with value, the classroom is an arrangement of opportunities to learn, and items in the classroom become more than busy work, but activities to influence an individuals' life for the better.

### A PERSON BECOMES AN INDIVIDUAL WITH VALUE

- Utilize staff purposefully to create group membership
  - Language used about students and to students should evolve into intentional encouragement where the student's deficit areas do not become a way to describe them or a reason of frustration
  - Integrate individual positive behavioral supports for the students throughout the day in order to teach students, with dignity and respect, to meet their expressed needs (The Hughes Bill, 2003)
  - Never give up on a child's perceived misbehavior; view all behavior as attempts to communicate
- Pediatric Services (2003). The Hughes Bill . Retrieved from [http://www.best-pals.org/legis\\_hughes2586.html](http://www.best-pals.org/legis_hughes2586.html)

## A PLACE BECOMES AN ARRANGEMENT OF OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN

• Create groups where the students have similar interests, allowing for free choice time within the day and utilizing small groups for learning in centers.

• Create membership by placing a student who is "very low" or a "behavior problem" in a group instead of separating them from their classmates

• As a path to membership increases in the special education classroom, so should it be in the general education classroom.

• As reported by Solis and Connor "Walsh (1994) found that some students with disabilities saw placement in general education as the defining moment in their lives in terms of career path, self-esteem, intellectual functioning, and social relationships." (as cited in Danforth & Gabel, 2006, p. 105)

## A THING BECOMES AN ACTIVITY OF INFLUENCE

• Materials should be age and developmentally appropriate. Nothing is more immediately stigmatizing in a special education classroom than inappropriate curricular activities and materials such as sixth grade students playing with a shape sorter

• A student's IEP is their most indispensable means of becoming an individual with value

• Using a critical DSE lens when writing an IEP, leads to age appropriate activities, LRE and inclusion, and ultimately a valued individual

• Allow others to contribute to the IEP, including the student and parents vs using "pre-generated computerized check off lists from which to choose 'appropriate' goals" (Solis & Connor as cited in Danforth & Gabel, 2006, p. 110)

Solis, S. & Connor, D.J. (2006). Theory meets practice: Disability studies and personal narratives in school. In S. Danforth & S. Gabel (Eds.), *Vital questions facing disability studies in education* (pp. 101-119). NY: Peter Lang Publishers.

### Joanne Murphy's Essay: *Presuming competence: Resisting ableism in the classroom*

- As a curriculum specialist for a large urban school district, I wonder: how can educators be responsive to all learners through standards based instruction while exemplifying inclusive, critical pedagogy?
- I hope to raise our *critical consciousness* by confronting the realities of ableist assumptions about student learning and exploring standards-based, instructional techniques based on assumptions of student competence.

### Presuming Competence

- "Teachers cannot know what the student is thinking" (Biklen & Burke, 2006)
- Key assumptions of student competence:
  - Difference and deficit are not synonymous
  - Allowing for student voice through alternative communication methods
  - "Normal" is socially constructed

### Alternative Constructions of Knowledge

- Begin with questions, not answers:
  - Problem-posing
  - K-W-H
  - Essential Questions
- Differentiated Instruction Techniques
- Collaborating with Students

### Questioning for Instruction

- Essential Questions (Hayes-Jacobs, 1997)
  - Organized "declaration of intent"
  - Broad, thematic questions relevant to learners
  - Welcome and accept multiple perspectives
  - Examples (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006):
    - "What do we want students to know and be able to do five years from now?"
    - "If this unit is a story, what's the moral?"

1 Create a comic book detailing the main theme of the story that was read in class.	2 Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper discussing why the theme of the story is important in your community.	3 Create a scrapbook page that illustrates the theme of the story/novel. Include captions explaining the items on your scrapbook page and how each item is significant to the theme.
4 Draw a political cartoon that highlights the theme of the story.	<b>You design!</b>	
5 Create a "Hidden Picture" (e.g. Lily, Where's Waldo) that includes five or more icons representing the big idea or theme in the story. On the back, explain each icon and why it fits.	6 Create a "flow-map" that identifies and sequences the obstacles the main character had to overcome. Which obstacle did you find most challenging? Why?	Design a greeting card that represents one of the themes of the story.

Source: LBUSD Gate Office

### DSE can FEEL uncomfortable!

- Coming to critical consciousness (*conscientization*) requires analyzing (interactively and through dialogue) who is and is not allowed access to resources and opportunities, and how access is allowed or denied.
- Critical consciousness ultimately requires questioning the status quo rather than taking it as given – often creating an uncomfortable feeling.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire insisted that dialogical encounters help students to develop critical consciousness of social, political, and economic contradictions so that they can take action against them (1970/1990, p. 43)

### What Did We Discover?

- Challenging concepts of normalcy can feel uncomfortable!
- Dialogue and critique are essential.
- Change starts with us: we had to disrupt some of our own thinking!
- We decided to be problem-solvers instead of problem observers!

### Dialogue and Critique are Essential.

- We learned that controversies abound with respect to dealing with each of the issues raised by the authors.
- Writing the papers helped all of us “name the problem” in ways that allowed us to act in new ways to correct the social injustices we confront in our every day lives in school.
- Our voices represent insight into how best to redress the social injustices that we identified.

## Be Ready and Willing to Challenge!

Be ready to challenge the idea of normalcy as a regime of truth (Davis, 1997).

Be willing to expose the destructive consequences of “Othering”—framing disabled persons as outsiders (Goffman, 1963).

Be willing to speak out as public intellectuals-- an important role for teachers as critical thinkers.

Davis, L. J. (1997). Constructing normalcy. In L. J. Davis, (Ed.), *The disability studies reader* (pp. 9–28). New York: Routledge.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

## Significance

- We argue that teacher educators can guide their teacher/paraprofessional candidates to challenge the paradigms, policies, and practices that lead to presumptions of failure of America’s pre-K-12 children.
- Educators who are able to do so are more likely to advocate for changes that result in correcting socially unjust practices and policies.

## What Can Position Papers Do?

- Position papers and persuasive essays have led to changes in national policy as well as public attitudes towards people with disabilities.
- The position paper is one way to name the problem.

Blatt, B. (1965). *Christmas in Purgatory*. Syracuse, NY: University of Syracuse, Human Policy Press.

Ferguson, P. M., & Ferguson, D. L. (2008). Finding the “Proper Attitude”: The potential of disability studies to reframe family/school linkages. In S. Danforth & S. Gabel (Eds.), *Vital questions facing disability studies in education* (pp. 217–235). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Lilly, M. S. (1971). A training based model for special education, *Exceptional Children*, 37(10), 745-749.

SooHoo, S. (2004). We change the world by doing nothing. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Winter issue, pp. 199-211.

### Step 2...

On the second footstep provided write down an action to address the injustice that you identified on Step 1

## Challenging the Achievement Gap by Disrupting Concepts of “Normalcy” The Complete Essays



Authors: **Kirstee Radley**, Lawrence Taniform, **Shawna Draxton**, Trisha Nishimura,  
Darla Hage, and **Joanne Murphy**<sup>1</sup>

Editor: Ann Nevin (Professor, EDUC 776: Fall 2010 Chapman University Doctoral Seminar)

### Abstract

Using a Disability Studies in Education lens, we will share position papers and discuss strategies to guide preservice and inservice teachers to challenge the paradigms, policies, and practices that lead to presumptions of failure of America’s Pre-K-12 children. In this volume, professionals who prepare future teachers in general and special education and communication sciences and who work with children and adults with disabilities share their observations and concerns about their respective disciplines. We argue that a Disability Studies in Education (DSE) perspective offers a way to (a) ground policy and practice in the experiences [and] perspectives of people with disabilities, (b) challenge practices and policy that isolate and de-humanize individuals, and (c) lead to new questions to pose.

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<sup>1</sup> Paper Presented by Shawna Draxton, Joanne Murphy, and Kirstee Radley at Cal-TASH Annual Conference, Irvine, CA March 4, 2011.

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## Public Intellectuals Speak Out!

Dr. Ann Nevin, Ph. D.

This collection of essays represent position papers that emerged over a 2½ year period of study with professors at the College of Educational Services at Chapman University, professors with many years of expertise in Disabilities Studies (DS) like Dr. Phil Ferguson and professors with only a few years of experience with DS like Dr. Ann Nevin. As a result of tapping the expertise and viewpoints of scholars who write in the arena of Disabilities Studies in Education (DSE)—notably Scot Danforth and Susan Gable, Beth Ferri and Linda Ware, Robin Smith and Julie Allen—we were invited to write a persuasive essay which uses the intellectual tools of a DSE approach. From our studies, we have prepared essays that attempt to show how we are beginning to critique our respective professional disciplines. We hope that our reflections can help others critically examine their own disciplines and the foundational principles on which the disciplines are built. We hope to challenge and change those foundations that allow us to continue to marginalize people with disabilities.

We know that we are continuing a long tradition in education that requires us to be public intellectuals. In special education, the tradition has been influential in creating change on behalf of more socially just treatment of those with disabilities. For example, Burton Blatt's *Christmas in Purgatory* challenged institutional care for those with disabilities. This volume featured a photographic essay of legally sanctioned inhumane treatment of children in state institutions written and photographed in 1965, long before the current right-to-treatment lawsuits on behalf of institutionalized people. In 1971, M. Stephen Lilly wrote an essay in which he challenged the prevailing model of segregating students and teachers to deliver special education instruction by arguing that regular class teachers can, with support, learn the skills for coping with problem situations. New ways of thinking and acting towards parents and family members of children with disabilities were called for by scholars like Phil and Dianne Ferguson (1986).

In other words, position papers and persuasive essays have led to changes in national policy as well as public attitudes towards people with disabilities. Many students with disabilities experience bullying in their lives, a bullying process that is often not addressed by their educators or their classmates. Suzanne SooHoo tackled the issue of bystanderism when she argued, "We change the world by doing nothing." Her position paper is sprinkled with first hand accounts of teachers' experiences in being bullied as well their expressed hopelessness in dealing with bullying in their classrooms. SooHoo further argues that naming the problem is the first step that can lead to a journey of discovery for how to resolve the problem. I believe that the persuasive essays in this volume help all of us "name the problem" in ways that allow us to act in new ways to correct the social injustices we confront in our every day lives in school. We hope that readers can imagine how the position papers and persuasive essays presented in this volume might change the words we use in our work and thereby change the worlds of people with disabilities and those who work with them.

Each essay in this collection has been reviewed by a peer and/or the editor, often requiring several iterations so as to refine and enhance the arguments proffered by the authors. We believe that these essays represent the principles of disabilities studies as well as the perspectives of the disciplines of the authors (e.g., speech and language development, curriculum

development, pedagogy for students with disabilities). The essays also reflect their experiences in practicing their disciplines in public schools, private and charter schools, and international schools as well as clinics. We believe that each essay provides evidence for knowledge claims through citing relevant research for their respective stances. To be sure, controversies abound with respect to dealing with each of the issues raised by the authors. Their voices represent fresh insight into how best to redress the social injustices that they have identified.

In her essay entitled *Disability Studies Training Module: A Grass Roots Movement*, Darla Hagge refers to the overall goal of speech-language pathology services to optimize individuals' ability to communicate so as to improve quality of life. She argues that a DSE approach can lead to an increased quality of life because an understanding of the social construction of disability can mediate the effects of the medical model of disability that permeates the personnel preparation programs for speech language personnel (SLPs).

As a curriculum specialist for a large urban school district, Joanne Murphy poses several questions to address vexing issues that face educators who teach in today's inclusive schools-- How can educators be responsive to all learners through standards based instruction while exemplifying inclusive, critical pedagogy? In her essay, entitled *Presuming competence: Resisting ableism in the classroom*, she hopes to raise our critical consciousness by confronting the realities of ableist assumptions about student learning and exploring standards-based, instructional techniques based on assumptions of student competence.

Similarly, Kirstee Radley argues for a new way to speak about the role of special educators in her essay, entitled *From Naming to Doing: DSE Principles in a Special Education World*. She describes how they might transform their classrooms from nouns to verbs, from manipulating things (and children) to interacting, and from marginalizing to including those who are different.

In her essay, entitled *Untangling Family and School Relationships through a Disability Studies Perspective*, Trisha Nishimura asks how might a DSE perspective help us change how professionals and parents and family members of children with disabilities. She hopes to change the historically entangled web of distrust and conflict that pervades family-school partnerships.

Shawna Draxton asks an editor of an online resource for teachers to include resources about DSE so as to support the efforts of creating inclusive schools in a school system that traditionally sorts and labels children on the basis of race, disability, socio-economic status. In her essay (entitled, *Why Teach DSE Principles to Students in Elementary School?*), she argues that lessons designed to explicitly teach disabilities studies concepts to students in kindergarten through sixth grade classrooms may allow students to appreciate where they are in the range of human variation.

Lawrence Taniform reminds us that our responsibilities as public intellectuals includes addressing international injustices that pervade society's treatment of people with differences. In the final essay, Lawrence takes us to sub-Saharan Africa. He poses enticingly difficult questions such as "In what ways might a DSE perspective help create a new view for dealing with

stigmatization, discrimination, and fear? How might DSE principles be implemented so that people with albinism may develop resistance to the prevailing public attitudes towards their color and differences?" Lawrence writes a letter to the Secretariat in the hopes of influencing the policies and practices for promoting the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities.

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## **Why Teach DSE Principles to Students in Elementary School?**

### **A Letter to the Editor of Scholastic Online Resources**

Shawna Draxton

Educators are always looking for resources to support fine-tuning of their pedagogy. As the principal of an elementary school I frequently hear my teachers discussing where to find the best tools online for teaching lessons in their classrooms. Teachers often purchase accounts to access databases that supply books, lessons, and prepared units. Frequently the free Scholastic resource database is cited as a useful place where teachers can find just about anything. Due to the accessibility of your website because it is free and well respected in the profession it is essential that it include curriculum that not only meets grade level standards but also enhances the classroom community in ways that develop the whole child, including their social and emotional development. As I reviewed your incredible website, I noticed there was an ample supply of learning tools to assist with math, reading, and writing. Lessons for a generous amount of social studies and science curriculum also exist on this site. In this essay, I hope to persuade readers to agree that what is missing is lessons that create understanding and acceptance of human variation.

Disability Studies in Education (DSE) provides a way to address issues and problems of education that affect or are affected by disablement in educational contexts defined by people with disabilities as they relate to social exclusion and oppression and embraces a social model of understanding disability. In other words, DSE “focuses on social relationships among people and the interpretation of human difference” (Valle & Connor, 2011, p. xi). Three areas in particular where Disability Studies in Education can be integrated into the curriculum include teaching ableism, integrating the struggle that people with disabilities faced historically to establish civil rights, and integrating understanding of human variation into the standards involving student identity. By addressing these areas in our classrooms, teachers and students will begin to see the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability.

Ableism is a critical concept that needs to be integrated into elementary curriculum. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary the term is defined as “discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities.” For effective change to take place this term needs to be part of the curriculum and used as frequently as we introduce other terms that marginalize groups such as racism and sexism (Dansforth & Gabel, 2007). Ableist attitudes manifest themselves within our traditional educational models in a variety of ways. For example, students with disabilities are frequently excluded from field trips and students identified as Gifted and Talented are often provided exclusive access to desirable field trips that include overnight trips and project based learning. Sports teams generally have rules that preclude people with disabilities from participation based on ability levels. Valle and Connor (2011) argue that “to leave ability-based segregation in public schools unchallenged guarantees a future in which persons with disabilities can expect a second-class status” (p.59) and the structures that uphold ableism will continue to be replicated. Students deserve to have the opportunity to participate in dialogue through organized lessons that question practices of exclusion that are commonly accepted. Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a concept used to describe the effort made to include access to

buildings, materials, and participation occurs infrequently and educational facilities and programs often accept exclusion as a solution rather than making alterations. Utilizing UDL materials and methods in the classroom reduces barriers to learning and sets a model for building accessible communities where everyone belongs and is expected to have access to participation (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

Our social studies standards for elementary education address civic responsibility and the rights of individuals. In grade four students spend several weeks discussing the civil rights movement of the 1960's. Racism is addressed by presenting children with real examples in their everyday lives of the radical changes that took place within the last 40 years. Teachers remind students that drinking fountains, restaurants, and classrooms were once segregated. Leaving out the journey of people with disabilities who have worked so hard to establish civil rights denies students the opportunity to understand the oppression faced by largest marginalized group in the United States (Valle & Connor, 2011). Most significantly, "Disability was an [important] factor in the three great citizenship debates of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: women's suffrage, African American freedom and civil rights, and the restriction of immigration" (Bayton as cited in Longmore and Umansky, 2001, p. 33). When civil rights of marginalized groups of people were being evaluated disability was used as a defining element as to who deserved and who did not deserve access to citizenship. Understanding this is essential for students to fully grasp what freedom means and how it has transpired through democratic principles.

Many of the elementary standards address developing ones identity. It is challenging for students with disabilities to establish a positive self-image when the positive aspects of human variation are not addressed. Traditionally a deficit model approach is subscribed to by our special education system and teacher training programs in the form of segregated classrooms based on disability label and a dual credential system that sustains this marginalization by assigning credentials using a medical model framework (Valle and Connor, 2011). The N-word is broached in discussions about identity but rarely is the R-word examined. Integrating an understanding of the social model of disability in which "disability is caused by the barriers that exist within society and the way society is organized, which discriminates against people with impairments and excludes them from involvement and participation" (UPIAS, online) will assist all students in understanding themselves and their classmates better. Using this model, students can begin to understand the stigma and unequal treatment of classmates distributed along the continuum of placements identified as Least Restrictive Environments. Bell Hooks (2010) describes the classroom as one where all students "can be honest, even radically open. They can name their fears, voice their resistance to thinking, speak out, and they can fully celebrate the moments where everything clicks and collective learning takes place" (p.21). The assumption that everyone belongs and can contribute is present. Valle and Connor (2011) suggest that "if we think about disability as a natural variation among people rather than a pathology or tragedy, disability becomes one among many identity markers that people may claim" (p.192).

Please consider posting the attached lesson plans focusing on Disability Studies in Education on your website. Each lesson is well-designed, connected to one or more California State Standards, and addresses an area of need for all classroom communities. By introducing ableism, students can be better prepared to interpret the world through the lens of the social model that shows how disability is constructed and can help all of us move past the medical/deficit oriented model which continues the segregation and oppression of those who are

different. Sharing the history of the civil rights movement of people with disabilities brings to light the inequities still faced when buildings, classrooms, and community activities are not accessible. Integrating the positive aspects of human variation improves the self-concept of all students and facilitates discussions that help students make sense of the similarities and differences present. One of our priorities in education is to provide students with the tools they need to build socially just communities as adults. Integrating Disability Studies in Education tools into elementary curricular studies is one of the ways to build thriving and peaceful communities where all people belong and can participate meaningfully.

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## Disability Studies Training Module: A Grass Roots Movement

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Emerging out of the American elocutionist era, speech-language pathology is a profession that began in 1925 (Davis, 1993; Duchan, 2010). Originally, these professionals referred to themselves as workers who provided speech correction. The majority of the recipients of these private practice services were individuals who presented with a condition called stammering (Duchan). In addition, speech correction was provided in the public schools. As professionalism emerged and grew in America, the profession purposefully sought to create and maintain a professional organization and role for its members.

After both World Wars, however, the field of communicative disorders grew significantly (Davis, 1993). Soldiers, returning from battle, experienced a variety of wounds, including head injuries. Speech-language pathologists (SLP) and researchers began to investigate the correlation between size and site of brain injury with resultant injuries and deficits. Rehabilitation programs for adults with acquired neurological impairments began to appear in military hospitals and around the world. Out of this impairment-focused perspective, arose the field of speech-language pathology.

Although the field has a rich and diverse origin, there are few books and brochures that discuss the history of speech pathology. Further, there are no courses offered on the history and development of speech-language pathology in the United States (Kuster, 2002). The field's national organization, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), determines the required curriculum content in communicative disorders graduate training programs.

The official scope of practice (ASHA, 2007) for speech-language pathologists delineates the acceptance of the World Health Organization's *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* as the mitigating framework for providing clinical services in all settings, including educational, medical, and private practice (WHO, 2001). "The overall objective of speech-language pathology services is to optimize individuals' ability to communicate...thereby improving quality of life" (ASHA, 2007, p. 3).

The medical model is the primary model used by treating clinicians, researchers, and instructors. However, this overarching recently-accepted ICF framework has not been officially integrated into curriculum and instruction within the undergraduate or graduate-level training program levels. Instead, speech-language pathology and speech-language pathology assistant students are introduced to, educated within, and continuously reinforced to adopt a medical model perspective. So pervasive is the model that it is rarely mentioned directly or even defined. Exposure to identifying and understanding multiple frameworks and perspectives are rarely embedded into course curriculum. As a result, SLPs may be providing services across environments, ages, communities, and cultures without a clear understanding of the actual frameworks that serve to guide the profession's many and varied services. The education and training received in training programs may have a direct impact on the perspective of each clinician, and may serve to guide the diagnostic process, intervention planning, and types of clinical activities.

Within the last few decades, contemporary issues have surfaced that require inclusion into the core curriculum of communicative disorders training programs. Historically, core content areas are typically taught as individual courses. These contemporary issues include multiculturalism, diversity, and alternative and augmentative communication. Rather than create additional core courses into the curriculum, however, instruction regarding these current issues were recommended to be most appropriately disseminated by embedding the concepts throughout the already-established content areas such as child and adult language disorders or dysphagia. For example, researchers and advocates for effecting change within the field recognized a need to establish policy regarding training future clinicians to be culturally competent. Once this theoretical perspective was accepted, a design was created to implement this new policy. This resulted in a systemic change within the field—beginning with the national policy, acceptance of a theoretical perspective, and implementation of a designed created to effect change. In contrast, a decade has passed since ASHA’s acceptance and inclusion of the WHO’s ICF and there is no formal curriculum implementation established for graduate training programs to discuss frameworks and perspectives that challenge the prevailing medical model.

### **Educators and Disability Studies Perspective**

Educators who support a disability studies perspective typically embrace full inclusion. These individuals recognize the value of and need for a grass-roots approach to effecting change within and outside of the classroom. Although working towards creating change one educator at a time, a disability studies perspective may see beyond the classroom, the community, and even the state and national levels. Disability studies (DS) embraces a local as well as an international concern. DS acknowledges the historical significance of persons with disabilities--in the United States and beyond its’ borders. DS values a variety of voices, including those who live with physical, psychological and cognitive disabilities. Contributors to the field of DS are social advocates, researchers, writers, and clinicians. DS advocates communicate and disseminate a disability studies perspective using a variety of mediums. Their clarion call can be seen, read or heard in poster sessions at conventions, journal articles, professional presentations, book reviews, and other publications. For example, the social model of disabilities is now being defined by some researchers as outdated and in need of modification and/or replacement. People living with disabilities are making their opinions, their perspectives, and their lived experiences, heard. The lived experience matters: “nothing about us without us” (Charlton, 1998). Slowly, policy is being changed and shaped by those who are directly impacted by such legislation.

Wolfsenberger (1972) described several factors that contribute to perspectives resulting in othering and marginalization. First, training programs teach pathology and abnormality. Second, there often exists a sense of superiority from those who provide services towards those who receive services. Third, personal experiences of those who are living with disabilities are not considered to be too subjective to be valid. Simply stated, they do not count. Only clinical experiences as articulated by the lived experiences of trained clinicians are considered to be valid. Finally, professionals are eventually “imprisoned by their habits” (p. 153). Wolfsenberger’s factors are just as valid today and they were thirty years ago.

History provides a plethora of examples regarding the full continuum of behaviors towards and consequences experienced by persons with disabilities. One end of the spectrum



can be labeled “good intentions gone awry” and the other end of the continuum succinctly marked, “genocide.” This historical measuring stick provides a powerful reminder for professionals and layman alike to walk with fear and trepidation when desiring to help or support persons with disabilities. In addition, according to ASHA’s scope of practice (2007) SLPs can acceptably participate in: “advocating for individuals and families through ... education and training programs to promote and facilitate access to full participation in communication including the elimination of societal, cultural, and linguistic barriers” (p. 8). Therefore, it is appropriate for an SLP who is providing education and instruction to future SLPs and SLPAs to provide a teaching module that was purposefully created to introduce a DS perspective.

### ***Speech-Language Pathology***

The field of speech-language pathology could embrace a disability studies perspective using a similar grass-roots movement. Those individuals working within the discipline of communicative disorders, including clinicians, therapists, educators, researchers, and writers, all have multiple opportunities to express a disability studies perspective within their own environment and sphere of influence. As previously stated, communicative disorders professionals are immersed in training programs who historically embrace a medical approach to disabilities. Unfortunately, students are typically not informed of the medical model perspective in which their training programs are founded. Training programs have the opportunity to teach a perspective that does not contribute to “othering” or marginalizing those with disabilities. One step in this direction may be the purposeful teaching of a DS perspective. These future professionals have the unique opportunity to give voice to individuals who have historically been silenced.

### ***Grass-Roots Movement***

Locally, there are two opportunities for students to be exposed to a DS perspective. First, the student volunteers at St. Jude Medical Center’s *Communication Recovery Groups (CRG)* are almost exclusively students enrolled in the communicative disorders program (Vickers, 1998). Part of their initiation, orientation, and training into *CRG* includes the observation and discussion of training videos and a one hour hands-on training session.

A second opportunity for student education towards a DS perspective occurs at a local community college program to prepare speech-language pathology assistant (SLPA). Cerritos College (CC) has been educating and preparing SLPAs for the last decade. As part of the field experience courses, a DS teaching component can be integrated into the course curriculum.

For students at *CRG* and the CC SLPA Program, each group learns about acquired communicative disorders, such as (a) aphasia and apraxia of speech that typically result from a stroke, (b) higher-language deficits that are a result of neurological injuries, and (c) progressive disorders resulting in slow, insidious loss of language, memory, and cognitive abilities. While learning about these labeling concepts, constructs and categories, SLP and SLPA student neophytes are presented with the unfortunate temptation to begin viewing individuals with disabilities through a lens of “othering.”

## **Conclusion**

For the majority of these students, this learning opportunity may be their first exposure to hearing about the medical model as well as the historical treatment of persons with disabilities.

Using appropriate pedagogy (including the integrated use of original texts, photos and original quotations) may provide the opportunity to raise the awareness and understanding of each student--without indoctrinating the students into perceiving circumstances through a particular framework. For many SLP and SLPA students who are from culturally and/or linguistically different backgrounds, many will immediately recognize the characteristics of a group of people who have been marginalized within the mainstream society. As the DS literature suggests, many individuals who may situate themselves within a minority group often have not considered the “othering” that exists for those with disabilities. Given each student’s potential career and the number of individuals with disabilities who may be served during this career span, a DS teaching module may impact the delivery of communication services and the lives of many persons with disabilities across multiple environments for many years to come.

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## **The Intersection of Inclusive and Critical Pedagogy: Liberation through Presumptions of Competence**

Joanne Murphy

Picture yourself teaching in a diverse classroom. Imagine your students huddled together as they think critically, contribute ideas, pose questions and create new knowledge through a shared and supportive learning process. Listen as the contributions of each student are valued, discussed, and even challenged with respectful, differing opinions or perspectives. See your students' excitement as they make connections between what they are learning, other content, themselves, and their worlds. Now, imagine the dynamic, and collaborative student interactions in this diverse classroom includes children with disabilities who receive various supports ranging from minimal instructional accommodations to physical or hand-over-hand assistance. Does the presence of students with disabilities disrupt your picture of diversity or possible competence in interacting meaningfully? Do you find yourself having reservations about the capabilities or opportunities for participation of students needing extensive supports in such a dream lesson, particularly given the rigorous nature of standards and high-stakes assessments? Do you experience a brief moment of doubt about strategies you could employ to engage your diverse group of students in meaningful learning experiences?

If so, then how might the presumption of student competence combined with responsive, collaborative teaching strategies reorient your teaching perspective to one that ensures student participation is non-negotiable? How might presumptions of competence create a greater likelihood for student achievement and personal satisfaction so that your classroom reality is not a distant dream for you *and* your students? This paper will attempt to raise our "critical consciousness" by confronting the realities of ableist assumptions about learning. I will suggest an alternative assumption of competence in our learners, and I will explore teaching practices that are responsive to student diversity. In this way, we are more likely to meet our goal of full participation in the learning process for all our learners.

### **Presuming Competence**

Presuming competence is an optimistic stance toward students with disabilities who may have difficulties expressing themselves verbally (Biklen & Burke, 2006). In essence, it is a conscious choice to assume students are capable and they have something to say, even if they cannot express it in a way that is understood by the dominant culture. Given some students have difficulty expressing themselves or need to be supported to do so (e.g. using an assistive device or through scaffolding of English language instruction), essentially, "...teachers cannot know what the student is thinking" (p. 172, Biklen & Burke, 2006). Presuming competence rejects ableism (Heir, 2007), and the dominant, ableist assumptions about student learning that limit expectations for achievement embodied in deficit-laden labels. Conversely, presuming competence represents an open-minded view of children's potential and carries with it an assumption of responsibility on the part of the teacher to tap into it.

There are several corollaries to presuming competence including: (a) a strong commitment to inclusive education, (b) recognition that the words "difference" and "deficit" are

not synonymous, (c) providing alternative ways that allow students to speak for themselves rather than make authoritative decisions on their behalf, and (d) acknowledgement that our understanding of “normal” is socially constructed (Biklin & Burke, 2006). An educator that presumes competence, then, is one who has a persistent vision for possibility with the underlying assumption that all students can and will learn, despite the dominant narratives perpetuated by deficit-oriented labels. What might this transformative stance look like in action? How do these deficit-oriented institutionalized patterns of thought about learning for students who are marginalized in our school systems show up in our own classrooms?

### **Becoming Critical Educators**

Student achievement is a concern for all educators. Arguably, it is *the* concern. At the classroom level, tools for instructional delivery are at a teacher’s disposal including, standards, curricular guides, teacher editions, lesson plan books, and lesson plan templates. All of these tools provide the “what” and the “how” but not the “why”. When sitting down to write a lesson plan, teachers are expected to make sense of these tools, synthesize the information, and deliver or “deposit” the information in the minds students. Friere’s (1970) asserts oppressive educational practices are those wherein the teacher fills the minds of students with institutionalized knowledge, analogous to depositing money in the bank. In contrast, Friere argues that teachers can liberate their students from institutionalized, unjust patterns of thought. A critical educator is not only liberated from perspectives and beliefs that result in unjust practices but also is moved to change prevailing unjust practices.

In order for one to be equipped with the confidence and self-determination required to make a change, Friere reminds us that literacy is an essential skill. To be literate allows us to read “the word” and thus better understand “the world” of the writer as well as our own world(s). In addition, changing our worlds requires collective action and can be accomplished through dialogue between teachers and students. Through this dialogue, students and teachers alike arrive at a “critical consciousness” of their situation, often realizing that they live within an oppressive system. Teachers and students become energized to abandon fatalistic beliefs and patterns of thought about learning and achievement. The union of critical thought and action is what Friere termed *praxis* (Burbles & Burke, 1992). Thus, to be liberated from viewing students as receptors of knowledge, critical educators construct knowledge *with* their students by, first and foremost, knowing them.

### **Beginning with the End in Mind**

Steeped in historical notions of the teacher as the depositor of knowledge (Freire, 2008), teachers can find it is difficult to move away from authoritative teaching styles. However, inquiry is a teacher directed method of posing questions to find new understandings from multiple perspectives that taps into a learner’s natural, inquisitive, and curious thinking (Short, Schroeder, Laird, Kauffman, Ferguson, & Crawford, 1996). Inquiry allows the teacher to learn more about how and what students are thinking. To begin the inquiry process, teachers work with their students to establish relevant learning questions. One powerful variation of the K-W-L strategy that taps individual learning-style preferences and multiple perspectives is K-W-H (Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2010). Using K-W-H, students are not just asked “what” they want to

learn but “how” they want to learn it. Another variation that was effective for students with significant cognitive disabilities is K-W-L-H (Jiminez, Browder, & Courtdale, 2009). Using the K-W-L-H framework for deciding on the content of science lessons, students with significant cognitive disabilities engaged in a self-directed learning process for science by discovering “how they find out” and “what they have learned”. Using this systematic approach for inquiry of science content, students began to generalize and use the science information because this approach is consistent with general education teacher pedagogy.

A problem-posing, curricular framework for the inquiry cycle was developed by Short, Harste, and Burke (1988). This recursive, authoring cycle begins with student perspectives where personal experiences and prior knowledge can be drawn upon. Next, students take time to find questions for inquiry and they “wander and wonder” (p. 17) through exploration centers, browsing materials and objects to generate new questions for inquiry. Learners then move to learning centers to gain multiple perspectives through cooperative conversations about the topic. After the conversations, they study the new material to resolve differences of opinion, reflect on opposing or alternative perspectives, and then formally share their investigations with others. Finally, the learners decide upon new understandings and actions they want to take as they reflect on the application of the new learning to their respective worlds.

Essential questions are yet another way to both pose grand, curricular questions or problems to solve and highlight the essential learning of a given curriculum. Simply put, essential questions are just that: questions that guide curriculum. Hayes-Jacobs (1997) defines essential questions as organizers, a creative choice, and a conceptual commitment or “declaration of intent” (p. 27). Moreover, essential questions can and should be raised by learners and teachers may do this by modeling question formation and probing. To take it a step further, critical and responsive educators are comfortable with dissenting or critical questions that represent a different perspective from that of the dominant or “popular” perspective.

Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) propose an additional strategy for identifying the “big ideas” students learn that involves “interrogating the content” (p. 32). This approach to lesson planning aligned to content standards involves questioning and unpacking the standards through a task analysis of skills, coupled with meaningful questions relevant to students. For example, teachers might ask, “What do we want students to know and be able to do five years from now? If this unit is a story, what’s the moral?” (p. 32). Teachers can pose such questions to themselves to determine learning objectives in a curricular unit before planning lessons geared toward those instructional targets. Once these big-picture targets are established, student interests, preferences, and learning styles are solicited and incorporated in the delivery and assessment of learning the content.

### **Flexible Assessments of Student Learning**

Complementary creative assessment tools that align with instructional flexibility are assignment menus, student created rubrics, and differentiated products (Tomlinson, 1999). Assignment menus are carefully crafted choices presented to students, which represent options aligned with various learning modalities and preferences. For example, rather than assessing students only with a multiple-choice test, the multiple-choice format becomes one option of

several choices. Other choices might be writing an essay, preparing and giving a multi-media presentation, creating a newspaper article that summarizes key points, etc. To really hand the creative reins over to students, you might consider a “student choice” option that students construct independently. You can see that possibilities are limitless when we capitalize on student strengths, interests, and learning styles!

Student created rubrics also incorporate student perspectives as to what exemplary culminating products or assessments might “look like”. Ratings can be standard numeric values with descriptive criteria of the essential features of a given assessment/product (e. g., 1-4), or they may be given narrative descriptors such as excellent, good, fair, needs work. The narrative descriptors can be something students arrive at collectively, and can provide yet another way to have fun with judging student work while providing critical and constructive feedback. Finally, similar to assignment menus, differentiated products provide opportunities for students to show what they have learned by building on their strengths, and they also are an easy way to adapt for learners who need significant supports. For example, consider a California mathematics standard for grade three, Measurement and Geometry: “Identify attributes of triangles (e.g., two equal sides for the isosceles triangle, three equal sides for the equilateral triangle, right angle for the right triangle)” (pg. 15, California Department of Education, 2007). Students who need adaptations to meet this standard might use the three triangle manipulative shapes labeled with picture icons and categorize them or match them to their corresponding labels. Other adaptations for students who are interested in art may involve creating figures using specified quantities of each triangle, while adaptations for other students with a visual-kinesthetic learning style may involve an exploration of the classroom or building to hunt for examples of the three triangles. Perhaps student teams that include all types of adaptations can become co-explorers! Once again, possibilities for accessing and mastering this standard are infinite if presumptions of competence compel your brainstorming of participatory opportunities.

### **Person-Centered Education**

Knowing the context and the cultures of the students is a key component of critical education and it is essential for person-centered education. In Friere’s work, the teacher is a cultural worker who uses the terms and concepts most familiar to the learner. Listening to what students say about their lives, their worlds, their hopes and dreams is a first step to entering their worlds. By establishing meaningful connections, teachers can design lessons that help students achieve not only what is mandated by content standards, but what students themselves say they want to learn.

There are many ways that we can get to know our students: interest inventories, self-identity activities, and child-centered assessment systems. Despite all that we might be surprised to learn about our students through these methods, we may find some striking similarities when we ask students about who they are and whom they hope to be. We might find the responses fall into categories of independence, generosity, belonging, or mastery. These categories represent facets of a concept known as self-determination. Self-determination is marked by “respect, dignity, and choice” (Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2010) and self-determined learners know who they are, they know what they need, and they know what they want. When self-determination is taking place in the classroom, learners are collaborative designers of instructional goals,

methodologies and assessments. Self-determination behaviors are taking place through choice-making, goal-setting, problem-solving, self-advocacy, and planning for the future, to name a few.

Making Action Plans (MAPs) is a person-centered planning process, where the future of the individual is planned *with* the individual within a group of people who know the student well (e.g., parents and other family members, friends, siblings, teachers and other professionals, etc.). Their multiple perspectives can add to the student's voice and help represent the goals of those who need supports to communicate. MAPs sessions involve two facilitators and the setting of the meeting should be a mutually agreed upon, friendly, welcoming space. There are eight guiding questions for the MAPs process. They are: (a) what is a map? (b) what is the story? (c) what is the dream? (d) what is the nightmare? (d) who is (the student)? (e) what is the student's strengths, talents and unique gifts? what is he/she good at? (f) what does the student need? what do we need to do to meet his/her needs? (g) what is the plan of action to avoid the nightmare and make the dream come true? (Forest & Pearpoint, 1992). Questions framed in this person-centered process can elicit new educational goals for a student that might not otherwise have been discovered or anticipated. In addition, it is a way to promote and invite self-determination in all students, regardless of the supports they need.

### **Confronting Mismatches**

In diverse, inclusive classrooms, teachers will encounter students who differ in ways that are unpredictable. Depending on our own subjectivities, those differences may either resonate with us, or they may challenge us and stretch us. Regardless, it would be nearly impossible to imagine a classroom where we will not encounter mismatches, either between students learning styles and our teaching preferences or curriculum and student need. Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) assert teachers need to be mindful of the basic human needs of students in order to design quality curriculum that plays a central role in meeting those needs, such as affirmation, affiliation, accomplishment and autonomy.

Moreover, to be liberated from lowered expectations, we must resist consciously sorting students into categories of successful and unsuccessful based on the attributes we feel are a best match to our curriculum or preferred teaching style. Some possibilities to help achieve this liberation are through differentiated instruction and collaboration techniques.

### **Differentiation Techniques**

Differentiated instruction is an approach to crafting lessons that are geared toward students' interest, readiness, and learning styles (Tomlinson, 2001) by carefully tailoring content (what we teach), process (how we teach), and products (how is learning assessed). "Teachers in effectively differentiated classrooms are hunters and gatherers of information about what best propels learning for each student" (p.47, Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Differentiation is about "shaking up" classroom practice "...so that students have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn" (p. 1). Characteristics of differentiated instruction include: (a) ensuring multiple approaches to content, process, and product, (b) keeping the focus on student centered learning, (c) blending whole-class, group, and

individual instruction, and (d) being flexible to redesign if lessons are not achieving desired objectives.

With the “what” of differentiation established, the next question is “why differentiation?” Kluth (2007) notes several benefits of differentiated instruction, some for teachers, some for students. For teachers, differentiation can not only inspire us to reach more learners through varied instructional techniques while reaching standards, but also keep teaching fresh, making our classrooms more joyful, cooperative and collaborative places to learn. By emphasizing the importance of recognizing that students learn differently and thus, content, processes, and products should be adapted accordingly, Bender (2008) offered ideas for differentiating a given content according to learning styles of verbal linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, special, bodily-kinesthetic, naturalistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and existential learning styles.

### **Collaborating with Students**

Collaborating with students can take multiple pathways, yet one approach that may be the least intimidating for teachers assuming a stance of student competence is co-teaching with students. Generally speaking, the methods for co-teaching involve four different arrangements with varying degrees of sophistication (Villa et al. 2010). In the supportive co-teaching approach, one teacher takes the lead role in instruction while the other circulates to provide support as needed. This is often the first step toward implementing co-teaching models. In another approach, complementary co-teaching, teachers enhance instruction by adding to each other’s statements, paraphrasing, providing additional information, or modeling learning strategies. The team teaching approach involves capitalizing on the strengths of both teachers to divide the lesson equally and contribute in an alternating style.

With appropriate training and support, students might enter the co-teaching arrangement to collaborate with their teachers in instruction and decision-making through methods such as tutorials. Not only does this approach empower students, but it can assist with futures planning as students gain an authentic experience linked to a potential career. Moreover, classwide-peer tutoring is an effective co-teaching model where students are grouped into teams and students are instructed by trained peers while the teacher supervises and monitors appropriate tutoring behaviors. This powerful instructional model has research evidence dating back 30 years utilizing various methodologies yielding consistent, successful results both socially and academically (Maheady & Gard, 2010). Critical, responsive educators may adopt any of these approaches as another step toward dynamic, student-centered learning. Imagine the power of this untapped resource: self-directed learners as teachers!

### **New Hopes for Students and Teachers**

This brief review of responsive teaching and instructional approaches geared toward students’ interests and strengths draws from both theoretical assumptions about students with disabilities and inclusive, educational best practices. However, it becomes clear that teachers can tap into some teaching-learning methods that presume competence in the learner. Thus, the research to practice gap driven by presumptions of student incompetence can be replaced with a belief in the transformative potential of critical pedagogy. I hope you might take the first step



toward resisting ableist assumptions embedded in deficit-oriented labels by trying new teaching strategies and by inviting students to participate in both instruction and decision-making. As you consider some of the instructional approaches described above, I hope you are delighted by the capability of each and every one of your students and I wonder... might your passion for teaching and learning be renewed? What promise might that possibility hold for your students?

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## **Untangling Family and School Relationships through a Disability Studies Perspective**

Trisha S. Nishimura, M.A.

For over 30 years, family-school collaboration has been an official policy within the United States (Ferguson & Ferguson, 1994). Yet conversations about how to build successful family-school relationships continue to surface in spite of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) which reaffirmed the commitment to involve families in educational decision processes. The continuing effort to bridge the gap between families and school personnel is highlighted by the terms “involvement”, “partnership”, and “collaboration” which underlie prevailing practices that allow school personnel to make the educational decisions. Parents with the “proper attitude” (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2008) are expected to passively agree to the predetermined plans completed by the school team. The purpose of this position paper is to clarify the need to restructure and reform parent-school relationship.

The relationship between family and schools are entangled through a history and culture of distrust and conflict. A social constructivist model framed within a disability studies perspective may help create a more collaborative relationship between families and school personnel. Infusing a disabilities perspective in our schools can begin to create open communication, collaboration, and communities. However, in order to create a disabilities studies perspective the shift from a medical model mentality to a social model must take place. This takes careful and deliberate steps to creating a social, disabilities perspective lens.

### **Understanding the Medical Model**

The medical or “deficit” model has dominated the field of special education since its beginnings. It has shaped public perception and our relationships with families of students with disabilities (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2008). The medical model presumes that disability has a negative connotation and is something that needs to be “fixed”. It presumes that family members grieve for the loss of “normalcy”.

According to the prevailing medical-deficit oriented model that permeates special education, professionals and specialists are designed to find, evaluate, and treat the conditions of the students (Harry, 1997). It presumes that the label designates supports and services, rather than tailoring the supports and services to the individual needs of the student as a whole. Consequently, in order for students with disabilities to qualify for special education services in schools, the student must qualify in at least one of the thirteen federal categories of eligibility. Therefore, if the student meets the eligibility criteria, services and supports are provided to the student. With these labels however, students in special education experience oppression and exclusion. Their voices are often silenced or repressed (Baynton, 2001). Baynton (2001) suggests that the medical model of disability creates a system of oppression and exclusion for both families and students with disabilities. In what ways might we shift our perspectives towards a system where deficit-laden labels do not determine the supports and services?

## **Negotiating Relationships**

The relationship between families and schools is at times a balancing act. Epstein (1995) refers to these relationships as revolving spheres. The spheres at times successfully come in contact, and at other times the spheres repel each other from any interaction. In order for the spheres to successfully overlap, many factors need to be considered to balance both power and authority (Epstein, 1995). Our current system is guided by specific guidelines and laws. The language within the laws specifies not only parent involvement but the ways in which parents are to participate within the process. Thus, the special education system sets family-school partnerships up to fail.

Harry (1992) argues that the language of our laws set up parental participation to entangle our relationships. From P.L. 94-142 to the reauthorization of IDEIA (2004), the language of the law makes it clear that the medical model dictates the roles of both our students and parents. Our current system creates an atmosphere of contention and dissent. According to Harry (1992), the law casts students into the role of patients and parents are seen as consumers of services delivered by the experts who determine the curriculum and program. As a result, schools and personnel are seen as the experts, with no need of parental input. Thus, according to this model, parental input and involvement is not needed. Therefore, it is important for schools to encourage parents to participate at their own levels of comfort and give meaningful consent (Harry, 1992). Some families might have their own definition of what “being involved” in their student’s education might look like. Each family’s interpretation of involvement in education is different. School personnel who are sensitive towards both familial and professional cultures can better facilitate successful partnerships by bringing new interpretations of what “involvement” may entail (Harry, 1992).

## **Creating Change with a Disability Perspective Lens**

Creating a shift from the medical model to a disabilities studies perspective is complex and multi-faceted. The disability studies perspective is rooted within the understanding that disability is a social construction rather than a clinical label (Danforth & Gabel, 2008). The perspective provides a critical examination of structures and questions the existence of such structures. It is through the critical examination and questioning that a deeper understanding and awareness of disability rights can begin to take shape (Danforth & Gabel, 2008).

A change in perspective requires small, incremental steps to lay the foreground for sustainable change. First, an examination of our language must begin to take place. According to Ferguson and Ferguson (2008) the first step to restructuring our practice and negotiating meaningful relationships between families and schools is to change the terminology that we use within our schools. The term “parent involvement” symbolically represents the limitations of unsuccessful attempts to build relationships between homes and school (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2008). Defining “involvement” or engagement is a subjective process. The definition varies by school and by family members (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2008). Therefore, instead of limiting the relationships by a specific term or label, the focus of creating a meaningful relationship must shift to understanding and creating an environment in which cultural awareness and mutual respect is at the foreground.

### ***Transforming School Environments***

A warm, welcoming environment provides parents a sense of community and commitment. Research conducted by Ferguson & Ferguson (2008), found that by providing parents with various opportunities, both in their native language and English, to participate in schools creates a successful environment for family-school partnerships. Providing parents with opportunities to participate in education classes, family events, and other activities, encourages parents to participate in their own way (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2008). Second, providing parents with information in their native language creates a culture of awareness and provides a welcoming school environment. The environment must have a mutual commitment, interaction, and collaboration between the home and school (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2008). A commitment to shift our language can create an environment for sustainable change for both families and schools.

### ***Creating Collaborative Communities***

The surrounding communities play a vital role in the success of creating sustained relationships between families and schools. The community provides a context to the work we do on a daily basis. Without involving the community, we are a separate entity continuously fighting for support. According to the disability studies lens, we must be continually problem solving and reframing our solutions as a collaborative team. Thus, if schools create opportunities to be involved in planning, activities, and programs, families and staff are more inclined to feel the commitment and support. Ferguson & Ferguson (2008) describes family-school partnerships as critical triangles. These critical triangles are successful only when the power is equally distributed. Unequal distribution of power creates an obscure triangle where support cannot be equally distributed (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2008). Thus, we must find the equal balance for each part of the triangle.

## **Conclusion**

Historically, family-school partnerships are entangled in a web of distrust and conflict. From the laws that govern the special education system to the daily practices of school, our system sets family-school partnerships up to fail from the very beginning. The disability studies perspective, by focusing on a social constructivist approach, shifts the focus away from the deficit model by understanding the family perspective, including the child's perspective, and recognizing the strengths and needs of each individual student. The disability studies perspective considers all individuals as important and critical contributors to the success of family-school partnerships. Awareness and understanding become the critical first steps to infuse the new perspective into the field of special education. As critical educators, we must never accept status quo, but critically examine and challenge our current practices in order for the field to grow and develop.

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## **From Naming to Doing: DSE Principles in a Special Education World**

Kirstee Radley

*Professions that are most salient to the policy-making processes reflect societal responses to disability and thereby affect policy.*

(Turnbull & Stowe, 2001, p. 198)

This statement underscores the importance of teaching as a profession because how we as teachers treat our students can make a world of difference to policy makers. Special education teachers are some of the most patient and loving people in the world; or are they? Is the way that special education teachers think about and treat their students with disabilities how people with disabilities would think about themselves? With a background in teaching students and teachers leads me to think that the answer to the question is an emphatic no. When looking at the way students with disabilities are treated in the everyday context of special education classrooms, one thing becomes clear: special education classrooms are just that; classrooms for students considered to be disabled. What would a special education classroom look like if it were to take on another lens; a disability studies lens? Would it look any different? I believe that it would.

To me, current special education classrooms are full of nouns: people, places and things. On the other hand, if special education teachers applied a disability studies lens to their classroom, those nouns may transform into verbs where students evolve into little people, and the room is reborn to become a path to a different destination, and teachers and students interact with materials in the classroom as they learn together. The objective of this paper is to present ways in which a special education teacher may practically implement disability studies principles by turning their classroom into a place of action instead of a mere location for labels.

### **From a Noun to a Verb: Disability Studies in Special Education Classroom**

In looking at how a teacher may practically implement disability studies principles into a special education classroom, I will first define disability. Looking at the term disability as it is classically defined, the medical model describes disability “to explain, diagnose, treat, and ‘cure’ disability as pathology” (Gabel & Peters, 2004, p. 588). While the medical model definition of disability can be an important way for people with disabilities to acquire medically related interventions, this definition does not value the idea that individuals with disabilities are people first and their disability is part of their identity. The social model of disability, however, allows for the individual with a disability not to have be “fixed” in order to be normal, but who they are with their disability is normal for them as an individual if they so choose (Donoghue, 2003).

In this paper, I argue that viewing disability from the social perspective does not lead to seeing the disability as an individual tragedy to overcome but those who take on this approach to

disability, may then be motivated to help the fight of oppression. Given that a typical special education program in a school district operates within the medical model of disability, there appears to be a gap between disability studies in education principles and how teachers behave in special education classrooms.

For example, operating within the medical model, special educators work with other specialists to label the persons, places, and things in the environment as a series of static events or nouns. As a verb, however, a special education classroom can be transformed into a series of actions where a student is now viewed as an individual with value, an area of space becomes an arrangement of opportunities to learn, and items in the classroom become more than busy work, but activities to influence an individual's life for the better. Special education teachers who learn to revise their definition of disability, and therefore special education can not only change their classrooms, but their own lives as teachers (and their students' lives) will change.

### **A Person Becomes an Individual With Value**

With a disability studies in education (DSE) lens, a person with a disability is not just a student in a special education classroom, in contrast they become an individual with value. Once this idea of disability resonates with the special education teacher, consideration is then given to the students in the areas of the use of aides, language, and behavior plans to name a few interventions.

#### ***Aides***

In a special education classroom where the teacher uses DSE principles, the instructional assistants, or aides, would be viewed as partners who facilitate learning so that students gain the skills needed for independence (working alone) and interdependent (working together with others). This will require the teacher to understand student needs ahead of time and purposefully place the aides in areas of need with clear instructions on how to assist students in reaching their full potential. For example, instead of placing an assistant one on one with a student that may not be as academically proficient as others in class, the teacher may have the student in a small group with a teacher and the assistant could be there as back up. This will allow the student access to his or her peers, purpose within a group and part of a community.

#### ***Language in Classroom***

As DSE principles become the foundation of thought in a classroom, one of the most effortless ways to change the environment is to change the language, or the words we use. Language can become quite ugly in a special education classroom not holding to DSE principles. Words like "very low," "behavior problem," and overall sarcasm used about students and to students is unfortunately a common occurrence. However, as the students become more valuable as individuals to the teacher and aides, the language used about them and to them can evolve into

intentional encouragement where the student's deficit areas do not become a way to describe them or a reason for frustration.

Not only is inconsiderate language used about and with the students in a classroom not using DSE principles, it is also used about and to parents. As a student becomes more valuable and valued as reflected in the words we use to describe them, so do the families and again, language is an effortless way to demonstrate a change in attitude. In a typical special education classroom, parents may be told that their students are exhausting or low functioning or staff members may comment on how "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree," however in a classroom based on DES principles, the special education staff could encourage the parents by reporting about a student's accomplishments that day or express empathy for their feelings of frustration.

### ***Behavior Plans***

"A Behavior Intervention Plan is developed, if needed, based on the assessment to address identified behaviors in a positive way" (The Hughes Bill, 2003, para. 4). The operative statement being "in a positive way." In a special education classroom, there are students who may injure others, themselves or property. Whatever the case, permission to restrain a student, as referred to in the Hughes Bill, is only possible when other interventions have not been successful at that moment in time and there is real danger to the student or someone else. However, this idea is not upheld in some special education classrooms. In classrooms where students are not valued as individuals, destructive behavior may be interpreted as intentional and unfortunately give teachers and aides the impression that holding a student down or placing them in a corner is the only way to stop the behavior. On the other hand, for classrooms using DSE principles, the teachers and support staff will integrate individual positive behavioral supports for the students throughout the day in order to teach the appropriate behavior to replace the undesired behaviors. In this manner, a student is taught how to meet their expressed needs through appropriate communication interactions. When they are given consequences to unmanageable behaviors, students can still be treated with dignity and respect within the positive behavioral support approach.

### **A Place Becomes an Arrangement of Opportunities to Learn**

Using a disability studies in education (DSE) lens, a special education classroom transforms from a place to an arrangement of opportunities to learn or a "valued space" (Kliewer, 2006, p. 100). As teachers and staff treat their students as individuals with value, the classroom programming also cultivates an area of value where students are members of a group, inclusion is more than lunch and recess and data drives goals in order for students to gain access to the least restrictive environment (LRE).



### ***Membership***

Membership in a group is crucial to early relationships. It presents opportunities for connection and attachment with others that is hard to manufacture. To create group membership in a special education classroom using DSE principles, a teacher might create groups where the students have similar interests, allowing for free choice time within the day and utilizing small groups for learning in centers. As far as a classroom is concerned, membership is first established by the teacher and staff, such as placing a student who is “very low” or a “behavior problem” in a group instead of separating them from their classmates. As teachers and other special education staff become educated in DSE principles, they may be surprised to see how much separation is actually occurring.

### ***Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) vs. Inclusion***

“Many special education teachers are socialized to view the special education intervention on the disabled student as the best option for disabled students” (Mutua & Smith, 2006, p. 124). As a path to membership increases in the special education classroom, so should it be in the general education classroom. Whether or not a student with an IEP needs or desires to be in a segregated classroom, inclusion with their general education peers is essential. As reported by Solis and Connor (2006, p. 105), “Walsh (1994) found that some students with disabilities saw placement in general education as the defining moment in their lives in terms of career path, self-esteem, intellectual functioning, and social relationships.”

### **A Thing Becomes an Activity of Influence**

When I reflect on my most influential teachers, they are the ones to whom I never asked, “Why do I need to know this?” In truth, it did not matter why. I wanted to learn because valued teachers used their knowledge to influence my enjoyment of learning. In the same way, special education teachers have an opportunity to teach their students, using DSE principles, to want to learn. This can be done by considering a student’s age when choosing curriculum and writing IEP goals.

### ***Age Appropriate Activities***

Nothing is more immediately stigmatizing in a special education classroom than inappropriate curricular activities and materials such as sixth grade students playing with a shape sorter or a first grade student using a teething ring. Materials should be age and developmentally appropriate.

### ***IEP***

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a student’s most indispensable means of becoming an individual with value. As teachers prepare a student’s IEP, do they use “pre-

generated computerized check off lists from which to choose ‘appropriate’ goals” (Solis & Connor as cited in Danforth & Gabel, 2006, p. 110) or do they allow others to contribute, including the student and parents? It depends on whether they are using DSE principles or not. Using a critical DSE lens when writing an IEP, leads to age appropriate activities, LRE and inclusion, and ultimately a valued individual because a person’s differences does not change their worth.

### **Conclusion**

The social disability theory has a spectrum of views from the extremely objective medical model to the extremely subjective social model (Gilson & DePoy, 2002). In spite of the differences in definition, this paper makes a case for how a teacher’s view of disability shapes their special education classroom. From the person, to the place and the things in the classroom, teaching from a DSE perspective supports students to become individuals with value, in a place where there are opportunities to learn, with activities that influence their lives. “A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops” (The Quote Garden, 2010, para. 2).

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## **How Can DSE Support the Advancement of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (SADPD): A Letter to the Secretariat**

Lawrence Taniform

I was born and raised in a small village in Cameroon, West Africa. Like many African countries south of the Sahara and north of the Kalahari deserts, Cameroon is made up of 252 ethnic/tribal groups, with more than 200 dialects. I am proficient in English, French, and two African dialects- Nkwen and Bambili. With my rich socio-cultural upbringing, I consider myself an indigenous African researcher with a Western educational background.

I am currently a special education teacher at Huntington Park High School- Los Angeles Unified School District. As a special educator, I have had the privilege to work with students whose learning is affected by conditions such as autism, intellectual disabilities, speech and language impairments, traumatic brain injury and much more. For example, Paige (2004) emphasized that 6.4 million students (13.4%) are served in federally supported programs for students with disabilities. I have seen first hand that students with disabilities who live in poverty, who are Black, Hispanic, Native American, or Asian/American, and who speak languages other than English, are less likely to succeed in school even with special educational services: Nevertheless, although the daily challenges I face as a special educator vary tremendously, my goal of achieving individual student success has always remained steady.

I have a very strong commitment to the education profession. Over the past 11 years, I have worked indefatigably to prepare all students with special needs to develop the essential skills that would lead them to a more successful and productive adulthood. My fascination with teaching motivated me to pursue a doctorate degree program to learn the various research methodologies and survey techniques in the field of Education and Disability Studies that are relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I have been making constant progress in achieving this goal and to become a steward of the discipline.

Upon completion of my dissertation, I would like to become an international scholar and a disability rights advocate for the voiceless people with disabilities around the world, especially those from Sub-Saharan Africa where disability and poverty continue. For example, people with disabilities, especially those with albinism, are still the most marginalized and stigmatized by society. Today, many people with albinism in Sub-Saharan Africa continue to be marginalized and stigmatized in many aspects of their lives from childhood, relationships, employment, and public places (Wan, 2003). As an indigenous researcher who has traveled the entire African continent and is knowledgeable about the various cultures and the environment, I would like to conduct research that would lead to an improvement in the lives of all persons with disabilities.

I have been following, with keen interest, the upsurge of disability rights movements around the world over the past three decades. I am especially fascinated with the current wind of change blowing all over Africa in the form of disability rights movements. In different parts of

Sub-Saharan Africa, according to Baker (2010, p. 202), people with albinism “have been alternately venerated and alienated, lauded as emissaries from the spirit world or feared as harbingers of disgrace or punishment for the misdemeanors of the family or tribe”. Since people with albinism are White and “real people” are Black (Kromberg, Zwaine, & Jenkins, 1987, p. 162), many people with albinism “are seen not as real mortals, but rather as spirits, or reincarnations of spirits”. BBC (2010, October 24) reported that the dismembered body of a nine-year old boy with albinism was retrieved from a river on the Tanzania-Burundi border. Atrocities like this should not be happening in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is imperative that the indigenous population is educated about Albinism. A better understanding of the science behind albinism could lead to a better treatment of people with albinism. Many people with albinism will also be able to gain equal access to employment and educational opportunities, and be respected, valued, and included.

In December 1982, experts in the field of disability met under the umbrella of the United Nations to establish the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983 -1992). This triggered an array of programs designed to improve the living conditions and status of persons with disabilities around the world. Key to this proclamation was the need to raise new financial resources, improve the education and employment opportunities for people with disabilities, and to increase their day-to-day participation in their communities and countries.

While the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons raised the expectations of people with disabilities around the world, its effects varied from continent to continent, and from country to country. It is unfortunate that the Decade succeeded mainly in North America, parts of Europe, and the Scandinavian countries where meaningful, well organized, well funded, and government supported disability rights movements had existed for decades. In Africa, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, the United Nations Decade had a minimal impact on the lives of persons with disabilities. First, the United Nations failed to publicize the Decade, and many developed and developing world governments did nothing to promote it after signing the resolution. Second, the United Nations Decade and many governments failed to adequately fund the Decade activities.

In spite of these shortcomings, I must admit that the Decade was somewhat successful because many organizations of persons with disabilities were formed, while existing ones were strengthened during this time than any other time in the history of disability rights movements. On every corner of the globe, disability rights organizations led by persons with disabilities were championing their own agenda. Opportunities were also created for persons with disabilities to have global meetings where issues can be discussed. In my opinion, the most significant success of the United Nations Decade was the general improvement of attitudes towards persons with disabilities in many parts of the world.

However, in the case of Africa, the United Nations Decade was a total failure. The continent is plagued by social, economic, and political problems. These include wars and other

types of civil strife, natural disasters, lack of infrastructure, natural disasters, hunger and famine, epidemics such as HIV/AIDS, and low levels of economic growth. The basic needs of persons with disabilities in many African countries are so pervasive that a Western style theoretical approach such as disability studies can often seem to be a luxury for the privileged few.

Because the United Nations Decade failed to bring any meaningful change to the quality of life of persons with disabilities in Africa, organizations of persons with disabilities lobbied and gained support from the United Nations for the creation of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (1999-2010). The African Decade was designed to have an African approach, as opposed to a Eurocentric approach, to the problems encountered by persons with disabilities, and to develop indigenized solutions to their problems. The African Decade of Persons with Disabilities has been extended to the second decade where the principal objective is to create a link between the struggles of persons with disabilities in Africa with other global disability rights struggles. In Southern Africa, the Southern Africa Federation on Disability (SAFOD), which represents the National Disabled Peoples Organizations (DPOs) in ten Southern African countries, has emerged as a principal player on issues of disability at the global level.

On December 13, 2006 during the 61<sup>st</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (resolution A/RES/61/106) was adopted. Unlike the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons that was mostly crafted by academics, disability researchers, and disability rights advocates in the so-called first world nations, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was drafted in part by persons with disabilities in poor and developing countries throughout the world. As of November 25, 2010, 41 of 53 African countries have signed both the Convention and Optional Protocols, and the following 23 countries have ratified the Convention: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. I am very optimistic that the DPOs in Africa will continue to put pressure on the countries that have not yet signed and ratified this convention to do so as soon as possible.

Currently, persons with disabilities are spearheading disability issues in Africa, but they depend heavily on the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the many charities that operate on the continent. Because of extreme poverty and lack of government funding, many of Africa's DPOs exist only on paper, as many do not have the financial means to effectively advocate for their members. The World Bank has a huge presence in Africa when it comes to disability issues, but I think that its major focus should be on the alleviation of poverty, given the correlation between poverty and disability. Disadvantaged, poor, or marginalized people are more likely to be or become disabled, and persons with disabilities are more likely to be poor (Swartz & MacLachlan, 2009). Poverty alleviation in Africa, in my opinion, could lead to the eradication of some of Africa's problems, and a more socially just treatment of persons with disabilities.

I argue that now is the time for disability rights advocates and researchers to work together to pursue a common disability agenda. Scholars, researchers, and practitioners who are implementing a disability studies approach can contribute to this agenda by documenting the unique ways in which people with disabilities from different parts of the world experience and deal with disability.

I further argue that, in order to address the needs of people with disabilities in Africa, it is imperative that the Secretariat of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (SADPD), and all DPOs are organized and fully prepared to address the needs of all persons with disabilities head on. The Secretariat and others are encouraged to continue allowing persons with disabilities themselves to lead the African Decade. The Government of African nations, NGOs, and worldwide charities are encouraged to continue their financial and logistical support, but persons with disabilities must come out of the shadows and become foot soldiers in the fight for recognition, respect, and equality.

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### About the Editor and Authors



Ann I. Nevin is currently working with doctoral candidates in the Ph. D. programs (disabilities studies, curricular and critical studies, and school psychology) at Chapman University College of Educational Services. In addition, I am a Professor Emerita at Arizona State University. I am learning how to apply DSE concepts to inclusive and multicultural settings. I feel privileged to have enriching experiences with inventive teachers, parents, and students in mainstream classes since the early 60s where students with disabilities were able to increase their access to the general education curriculum but more importantly, they were able to befriend and learn with their peers who do not have disabilities.

### About the Authors

**Shawna Draxton** is a mommy of two amazing little ones (Ollie, 7, and Molleigh, 4). Whenever I am not at work or school, I enjoy traipsing around the community, playing basketball and dollies, building forts, and playing scrabble with my kiddos. I am moved by critical social theory, constructivist methodologies, and postmodern inquiry. I've spent the last 12 years working in a variety of capacities to support inclusive education. My research interests include critical pedagogy and systems change within educational structures, credentialing systems, and special education. I am interested in how technologies like computer simulations and online learning are used by people who would consider themselves as having a disability. I'd like to read more literature and dialogue with classmates regarding the intersection between race, class, and disability and how this influenced the construction of our education system.

**Darla Hagge** I am a daughter, granddaughter, sister, wife, mother, employee, and student. I enjoy traveling, writing, and spending time with my friends and family. Currently, I am a medical-based speech-language pathologist, working with adults that have experienced neurological involvement and their partners and families. In addition, I am pursuing a Ph.D. in Education with an emphasis in Disability Studies. I am interested in feminist theory and supporting social justice. Since I enrolled at Chapman University, I have met many wonderful people and have experienced an abundance of opportunities. I am incredibly grateful!

**Joanne Murphy** counts inclusion as a life's passion is inclusion! I am a "single lady", with wonderful and supportive family and friends, and two very adorable nieces that I enjoy doting on



regularly. I moved to California from Ohio in 1996 and I wasn't planning to be here very long, but here I am. I am the Special Education Curriculum Leader in Long Beach Unified School District. I live and work in Long Beach and I think it is a fantastic city with diversity and much to offer, especially great food! I am interested in inclusion in international contexts and just returned (on Wed) from my fourth trip to Bucharest, Romania, where I've been volunteering and attempting to help transform deficit mindsets and advocate for inclusion on behalf on institutionalized children and young adults. I LOVE travel and have been to several countries, but my passport could use a few key stamps such as Italy, France, the Czech Republic and Africa :) My credential and training is in working with children who are diagnosed with mild disabilities, and I have learned so much from the Chapman University Ph. D. program and have been grateful for my own transformation regarding inclusion and disability. I am a Christian and my worldview frames my perspective on disability. I've become more interested in disability voice and the powerful impact it can have on paradigms (including my own). Finally, after thinking about it for a couple of years, I'm pursuing a Fulbright for my dissertation research in Romania and have spent the last few weeks on the application process.

**Trisha Nishimura** is entering the sixth year as a Resource Specialist (K-6) at Luther Elementary School located in La Palma. After receiving the masters degree in education from Chapman University in 2007, I decided to pursue my dream and entered the doctorate program at Chapman. Since then, I have had the privilege to be an adjunct faculty member for Chapman for the past year and a half in the Special Education department. My husband Scott and I have been married for four years. We are currently in the process of moving to our first home in Long Beach. I first discovered my love for special education from two s individuals with special needs who are near and dear to my heart .They have taught me so much throughout their journeys and experiences. I have had the privilege to watch them grow up and find myself continuously challenging the current education system.

**Kirstee Radley** is a mother of two, Tyler who is 4 and Teegan who is 8 months. I received my general education credential in 2000 and decided that it was not for me, so I wrote my masters thesis on best practices in autism and became an instructional aide in a classroom for children with behavior disorders. I loved the atmosphere and decided to go into special education. After my credentials, I taught for 8 years and then this last year I was the director of a therapy clinic and I am continuing the job of Autism Specialist this year. I hope to understand ways to bring the families of person's with disabilities along in the ride of current controversies and how to teach others to think more critically about their understanding of disability.

**Lawrence Taniform** was born in Cameroon and immigrated to the United States in 1999. I am currently a special education teacher at Huntington Park High School- Los Angeles Unified School District. I'm very interested in learning about the current controversies in disability studies. As I go through the doctoral program at Chapman University, the knowledge that I acquire continues to guide and shape my research interests. My rich socio-cultural background makes it possible for me to easily integrate with people from other socio-cultural backgrounds, and I hope to incorporate myself and my social background into my future research. As a high school special education teacher in an inner city school district, I come in contact with students that share similar socio-cultural interests with me. At this moment, I'm currently living with several questions that I hope to narrow down as I pursue the doctoral program. For instance, why do we have so many minority students in special education? Is this a problem? Is the current

special education system designed in a way that benefits, or takes into consideration language minority students and socio-economically disadvantaged students, especially African American and Latino students? Is there another way that the educational needs of these students could be met other than in the current special education system? Significant research has already been conducted in this area, but unless my research interest changes in the next several months or years ahead, I hope to devote a significant amount of my time and energy to contribute to the field of minority special needs education and the field of academia in general. I am also interested in gaining new knowledge in the field of special needs education and disability studies, becoming a steward of the discipline, and contributing to the literature.

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