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Being Critical: (In)Equity in Education for Students with Disabilities

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GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Disability studies is approximately 30 years old as a field of research. DSE is focused on the education of individuals with disabilities and/or who are gifted. The goals of CEC include the promotion of equal partnership with practitioners in designing, conducting, and interpreting research in special education. Evidence based practice is a strong emphasis. (http://www.cecdr.org/about/ourmission, 2016). Practitioner-based.

EDUCATIONAL/FIELD SIGNIFICANCE

Special education from its inception has focused students in a deficit model of society by comparing the lack of skills, and abilities to a norm. This very rigid and dominant system of comparison forms the basis of a very teacher-oriented and technically focused model enshrined in federal laws. The medical and educational deficit model is functional for the day-to-day practitioner in schools. But by looking through the lenses of critical pedagogy, and postmodernity, the idea of what a “regular education” or typical student is, knows, and shows is widened to be more constructivist. The decentered interaction between teacher and student and sharing of what is important knowledge in that examining critical pedagogy and emerging scholarship in disability studies through a postmodern lens can give researchers a new way to view people with Dis/Abilities and their own liberation and celebration of their unique identities. By widening that lens, we open up new areas of research and further study and empowerment in a constructed manner that is a hallmark of postmodern thought and studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“A disabilities studies perspective adds a critical dimension to the way we think about issues such as autonomy, competence, wholeness, independence/dependence, health, physical appearance, aesthetics, community, and notions of progress and perfection—issues that pervade every aspect of the civic and pedagogic culture. They appear as themes in literature, as variables in social and biological science, as dimensions of historical analysis, and as criteria for social policy and practice. Scholarship in this field addresses such fundamental questions as who is considered a burden and who a resource, who is expendable and who is esteemed, who should engage in the activities that might lead to reproduction and who should not, and if reproduction is not the aim, who can engage in erotic pleasures and who should not” (p. 188).

This comprehensive book examining disability studies as a field rooted in the body and essential to critical perspectives and the humanities offers passionate challenge to the status quo definitions of disability.

“Is there much to be learned about putting it all back together again so that students with disabilities can have an education that inspires them to become the best people they can become, not merely achieve the next little objective on the list” (p. 86).

This textbook used in graduate programs in special education looks at multiple issues, but does develop one chapter by Poplin, Wiest, and Thomson about alternative instructional strategies that includes constructivist, critical, multicultural and feminine pedagogy. This nod to alternative ways of learning shows the influence that disability studies and critical pedagogy have even in the scholarship of mainstream graduate school textbook focuses on more “how” than “why” of other theories. The inclusion of postmodern thought and studies in a comprehensive textbook used in graduate programs in special education programs are predicated on the inability of regular schooling to effectively control the disruptive interruptions of these bodies that appear to the rigid demands for conformity and rationality in schools” (Erevelles, p. 72).