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

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To engage in research, policy, and action that contextualize disability within and their own Qualitative, Theoretical, or empirical/objectivist model?

By widening that lens, we open up new areas of research that are predicated on the study of people labeled with Disability and disabled people. Disability studies is approximately 30 years old as a field of research. DSE is focused on the interlinked disciplines of Disability and Education, and is a field of inquiry focused on the intersection of Disability and Education. Disability studies demonstrates how such compartmentalization often serves some groups better than others but ultimately serves no one well” (Linton, 1998, p. 185-186).

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

What is the importance in viewing Dis/Abilities through theoretical frameworks other than the empirical/objectivist model?

“Disability studies introduces contradictions into the polarizing categories of weak and strong, normal and abnormal, revered and reviled, dependent and independent, expendable and essential. It reveals these as false dichotomies, and reveals the epistemological underpinnings of the privileged position in each pair. Other fields have described the consequences of the splits between public and private, personal and political, mind and body, or biological and social. Disability studies demonstrates how such compartmentalization often serves some groups better than others but ultimately serves no one well” (Linton, 1998, p. 185-186).

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 biological 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 usual issues in disabilities studies 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 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. “There is 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. 362).

This textbook used in graduate programs in special education looks at multiple issues, but does develop a chapter by Poplin, Wies, and Thompson about alternative instructional strategies that includes a constructivist, critical, multicultural and feminist 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 textbooks focused on more “how” than “why” of other theories. “The existence of special education programs are predicated on the inability of regular schooling to effectively control the disruptive interruptions of these bodies that appear to be too pernicious to the rigid demands for conformity and rationality in schools” (Erevelles, p. 72).

Between her article “Educating unruly bodies,” her chapter in Gabel’s book, and a recent publication of her own, Erevelles focuses on the political and economic issues surrounding discounting disability through the idea of the body; taking cues from critical theorists Giroux, Apple and McLaren with her focus on marginalization of people with Dis/Abilities and the idea of an ableist form of dominance in education and society.

REFERENCES


THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Disability studies is a burgeoning field in its nascent. Questions of identity and what is normal through the eyes of people who live in what society calls a disability, calls into question the deficit-medical model and what is worthwhile learning. It re-embaces the origins of disability rights in the civil rights movement. Only through focusing our outlook wider in a critical manner and a postmodern lens can educators build awareness, empowerment and enable equitable education for people with Dis/Abilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Freire is an important figure for many in the critical pedagogy theorists. Paulo Freire’s treatise on the oppressed, oppressions and importance of a different kind of education that did not depend on the “banking concept” of education was a crucial starting point for many critical pedagogy theorists to reconceptualize the movement of the 1970s. The dehumanizing effects of the 1970s in disability is an important point that differentiates disability studies from special education research. This became a route of viewing disability through a wider, more critical lens than the objectivist framework.

Thomas Skirick’s 1995 book is used to deconstruct or deconstruct modern (special) education theory and practice and its epistemological and moral framework to reconstruct it in the postmodern era. His premise that special education is, in general, atheoretical caused him to look for a way to view special education in a more theoretical manner in the postmodern era. His book looks at the structures and organizational theories of special education instead of individualized theories of the body that will inform individuals of their disabilities.

“An area of educational policy, special education must be concerned with more than technical issues. From the normative perspective of pragmatism, all social policy must be concerned primarily with moral transactions and social relations. In reconceptualizing their practices and discourses under the pragmatist orientation, special educators must be explicit about what they believe is morally and politically right. Moreover, like all those who approach social policy from the pragmatist perspective, they must ‘probe and push the value assumptions’ that shape special educational policy, and towards those that unite us” (p. 44).

Gabel’s book of readings in theory and method of Disability Studies highlight nine scholars’ views of disability studies ranging from: Aesthetics and art to politics and policy related to the education of individuals with disabilities and/or who are gifted. The goals of CEC-DR 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.