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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 wider lens issues that pervade every aspect of the civic life. A 1995 book is used to delegitimize or deconstruct modern (special) education theory, research and practice to:

• Aesthetics and art
• Political and economic issues surrounding discounting disability through the idea of the body; taking cues from critical theorists Giroix, Apple and McLaren with their focus on marginalization of people with Dis/Abilities and the idea of an ableism form of dominance in education
• Engage in erotic pleasures and who should not, and if reproduction is not the aim, who can 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).

Abilities studies is a burgeoning field in its nascence. 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.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

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**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 models are 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 theories 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 societal policy and practice. Scholarship in this field addresses such fundamental questions as who is considered a burden and who is 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. 262).

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 include constructive, 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 focused on more “how” than “why” of other theorists. 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 revolting to the rigid demands for conformity and rationality in schools” (Trevellis, 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 Giroix, Apple and McLaren with their focus on marginalization of people with Dis/Abilities and the idea of an ableism form of dominance in education and society.

**REFERENCES**


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