Emergence of Disability Pedagogy

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It is without a doubt that education is liberation and when individuals are marginalized, segregated, and have no access to education, there exists, as Paulo Freire the founder of critical pedagogy would note, oppression (1997). People are of course oppressed for a diversity of reasons -- race, class, gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and ability. Ability is the foundation of the justification of the term and philosophy of disability, while disability has been the justification to kill, test on, segregate, abort, and abandon. Oppression is a universal experience that is felt by everyone at one time or another. What must be stressed is that the cause and experience of oppression is not universal, it is personal, while social, political and economic. The central task of critical theorists and critical pedagogues is to analyze and indentify the cause, justification, and history of particular oppressions and to provide space for experiences of that oppression to be heard and understood. We must challenge the systematic domination of all, which creates experiences of oppression, suppression, and repression. Sara Bareilles, the singer of "Love Song" expresses a brilliant, poetic, simple and succinct, experience of oppression in the opening of her song:

> Head under water,
> And they tell me to breathe easy for a while.
> The breathing gets harder, even I know that.

This is the essence of the experience of oppression, where the dominator similar to that of a doctor (i.e., expert) says, "Relax, it's not too bad," even though the dominator has never been dominated in such that manner, i.e., felt this experience before. Another classic case is when one individual emotionally hurts another and then says, "I did not hurt you." This statement, like the lyrics of the song, takes away the ownership of the experience, which is the central understanding and empowerment of knowing one is oppressed. If one does not critically understand they are oppressed and the state that they are in, they can never want or wish to be liberated and become free. Therefore, to control others is to take away their experience, for their experience is what unites them to create a collective identity, which aids in developing a social movement.

Recently critical scholarship on disability has been undertaken by people that are "disabled" and allies around the world, while still in its infancy disability studies is making an explosive appearance across college campuses on a global scale. Linton in the beginning of her book "*Claiming Disability. Knowledge and Identity,*" writes that disability studies is,

> a location and a means to think critically about disability, a juncture that can serve both academic discourse and social change. Disability studies provides the means to hold academics accountable for the veracity and the social consequences of their work, just as activism has served to hold the community, the education system, and the legislature accountable for disabled people compromised social position. (1998, pp.1-2)

She goes on to write,

> The field explores the critical divisions our society makes in creating the normal versus the pathological, the insider versus the outsider, or the competent citizen versus the ward of the state. It is an interdisciplinary field based on a sociopolitical analysis of disability and informed both by the knowledge base and methodologies used in traditional liberal arts. Disability studies have emerged as a logical base for examination of the construction and function of 'disability.' (1998, p. 2)

Therefore, as Linton notes, disability studies is not an approach or based on the classroom, but a dynamic philosophy looking at the macro socio-economically constructed relationships which create the dominator versus the dominated. Linton, Mello and O'Neill state that,

> disability studies challenges the idea that the social and economic status and assigned roles of people with disabilities are inevitable outcomes of their condition, and idea similar to the argument that women's roles and status are biologically determined. But disability studies goes beyond cataloguing discrimination and arguing for social change. It challenges the adequacy of the content and structure of the current curriculum. As with women's studies, disability studies redresses omitted histories, ideas, or bodies of literature and also analyzed the construction of the category 'disability,' the impact of that construction on society, and on the content and structure of knowledge. (Linton, Mello & O'Neill, 1995)

Disability studies is further defined by Linton (1993),

> Disability Studies reframes the study of disability by focusing on it as a social phenomenon, social construct, metaphor, and culture utilizing a minority group model. It examines ideas related to disability in all forms of cultural representations throughout history, and examines the policies and practices of all societies to understand the social, rather than the physical or psychological, determinants of the experience of disability. Disability Studies both emanates from and supports the Disability Rights Movement, which advocates for civil rights and self-determination. This focus shifts the emphasis from a prevention/treatment/remediation paradigm, to a social/cultural/political paradigm. This shift does not signify a denial of the presence of impairments, nor a rejection of the utility of intervention and treatment. Instead, Disability Studies has been developed to disentangle impairments from the myth, ideology, and stigma that influence social interaction and social policy. The scholarship challenges the idea that the economic and social statuses and the assigned roles of people with disabilities are inevitable outcomes of their condition. (1993)

In what follows is a critical engagement of dissecting the history and definition of disability on how it is used to oppress, dominate, repress, and suppress others and an emergence of a new pedagogy for those identified as disabled.

Dissecting Disability

What is "disability" and why does it have a negative connotation? Disability is a negative term because of the notion of being broken, not working properly, or something wrong with it. Disabled, like crippled, lame, and retarded all mean similar things and are all used commonly in U.S. society (Taylor 1996) to conjure up negative images that are most commonly used to insult and label someone, i.e., "You are being lame," "You are so retarded," "What, are you mad?" "Don't be insane?" and "What are you, crippled or something?" Thus, for example 'feebleminded,' 'retarded,' special educational needs,' special needs,' 'learning difficulties' are all examples of what Corbett (1995) calls 'Bad Mouthing'" (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Barton 2000 p. 3). Erving Goffman in his article, "Selections from Stigma," writes, "The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term *stigma* to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier" (Davis 1997, p. 203).

A perfect example of this stigma is found in the movie *300* in which the great fighting 300 Spartans battle the Persians who are depicted as "uncivilized". In the movie *Spartan King*, Leonidas is approached by a Greek who is strong and loyal, but physically disabled, to join the Spartans to fight. However, King Leonidas sees this man as a weak liability, rather than a powerful and strong soldier with wit. The solider with disabilities pleads his case to be part of the Spartans, but the King, after asking the solider to perform a few defensive and offensive moves, said he was not of the level he needed to be. This devastates the solider so much that he becomes a traitor for what the movie portrays as the uncivilized "wild"—the Persians. The meaning of the story is the Spartans, as a perfect society, could never have a person with disabilities among them, but for the uncivilized "wild" Persians, the movie portrays that to be acceptable, and as all marginalized groups are the same, this implies that "non–Spartan" equals non-perfect or not normal.

History has shown that terminology is a tricky game to play: one that always seems to foster a negative side to it. "Disability" and "disabled people" are the most endorsed and used terms by disability rights activists, theorists, advocates, and allies. As noted above, there are negative images of the term "disability," but the disability rights movement has reclaimed the term, more out of a universal global understanding of what the definition of disability means and who it is referring to. It is also the only term used to hold significant legal and medical value. "The term *disability*, as it has been used in general parlance, appears to signify something material and concrete, a physical or psychological condition considered to have predominantly medical significance" (Linton 1998, p. 10). This does not suggest that the term should and must be resisted. Most disability activists would not argue for resisting the term. The classic predicament in all names for particular identities is that not everyone will understand the term or not even be aware that it exists, thus forcing the focus group to put a great deal of energy into promoting the name and its correct and respected definition.

Much of the theoretical work on disability studies is centered around terminology because of the massive diverse array of imagery related to people with disabilities. There are two major tasks being initiated by the disability rights movement, the first of which is that they are not disabled, meaning they are not deformed, lame, broken, or have something wrong with them, they are perfect the way they are. This point has two sub-concerns. First, that what is wrong is societies' exclusion of difference and the reinforcement of the social construction of normalcy (Fulcher 1999) which allows capitalism to expand and further exclude people with disabilities from all parts of life that deal with economics, which means everything, and second, until all are accepted in society, there is truly an identifiable group that needs assistance and that are challenged in the current exclusionary society we live in.

The second main point is the theoretical understanding of all disability activists, which is the proactive revolutionary position that people with disabilities are not disabled, but that all

people are different and have unique needs. This point is critical of society and its role in how people are identified: recognizing that "normal," "average," or "able" are all socially constructed terms that can and must be changed. Capitalism must also be critiqued because it contributes to this marginalization by developing the image of a consumer and producer. Capitalism, especially in its post-war consumer form, tries to reduce our humanity and citizenship functions to these two roles, both of which support capitalism; consumption supports the engines of production because people have to work to buy and ideologically capitalism captures their desires and support (Gramsci 1989; Marcuse 1969).

Similarly, the concept of a productive employee, student, daughter/son, and parent must be critiqued. There is no measurement for an individual except within the context of himself/herself. Nothing is objective and able to be measured in a detached state. The disabled are not ill, sick, or diseased. They are different. A disease or illness is not part of ones characteristic or being. Let us take a moment to analyze some of the standard definitions of the names given to those identified as disabled. Let us first look at *illness* defined as, "Poor health resulting from disease of body or mind; sickness."[1] Now let us look at how *diseased* is defined, "A pathological condition of a part, organ, or system of an organism resulting from various causes, such as infection, genetic defect, or environmental stress, and characterized by an identifiable group of signs or symptoms."[2] It is also defined as, "A condition or tendency, as of society, regarded as abnormal and harmful."[3] Disability has traditionally been associated with illness and disease. Yet, this socially constructed meaning cannot be understood without examining the notion of normalcy. The "normal" is defined as "Relating to or characterized by average intelligence or development."[4] A standard dictionary type definition states that normalcy is "Free[dom] from mental illness; sane. Conforming with, adhering to, or constituting a norm, standard, pattern, level, or type; typical."[5] Fulcher (1999) writes, "disability is primarily a political construct rather than a medical phenomenon" (p. 25).

With this backdrop, it comes as no surprise that disability, is understood as "The condition of being disabled; incapacity."[6] Also, it is stigmatized as "A disadvantage or deficiency, especially a physical or mental impairment that interferes with or prevents normal achievement in a particular area"[7] It is defined as "Something that hinders or incapacitates."[8] As the definitions built onto each other we see the repeated theme of "something wrong with,"[9] be it defined as incapacity, harmful, or sickness. In contemporary society, these are the terms that are used interchangeably with disability. But until everyone is respected as being different and not measured according to an imaginary notion of a "normal person," there will be those that are marginalized, disabled, and challenged in a culture that is inclusive only to certain types of people.

Emergence of Disability Pedagogy

Akin to other social movements, the disability movement has given rise to a body of theory and philosophy particular to its concerns, known as Disability Studies. Disability pedagogy can be considered a subset of the larger Disability Studies field, but with a strong connection to the field of critical pedagogy. While still marginal in the academic world, it is a powerful interdisciplinary pedagogy with great potential to make an important contribution to liberatory education on the whole. Disability pedagogy has its roots in social justice politics, and is influenced by philosophies such as critical pedagogy, anarchism, critical postmodernism, critical theory, feminism, queer theory, and critical race theory. In respect of the diversity of work in the field of critical pedagogy over thirty years, importantly summarized and collected in *The Critical Pedagogy Reader* (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2009), critical pedagogy still has much room to grow, specifically in the realm of disability.

While this article is the first to promote the interconnection between critical pedagogy and disability, it is I hope not the last, as we have all from birth to death experienced at one time or another being sick, dependent, "abnormal," and disabled in one way or another.

Though only an emergent discourse, disability pedagogy has already made some unique and highly important critiques of social problems and other pedagogies. While few have written on disability pedagogy, it is certainly an international pedagogy that is growing exponentially with the aid of community and activist organizations. Disability pedagogy provides one of the most radical critiques of mainstream power relations and the correlative need for respect of social difference. In this it is a companion to other radical pedagogies such as critical race studies and feminist pedagogy. Therefore, disability pedagogy should be thought of as a fundamental challenge to society and an attempt to provide a critical pedagogy into the nature of society's normal relations.

Despite these general descriptions outlining the field of disability pedagogy (Ben-Moshe, Cory, Feldbaum, & Sagendorf 2005), due to its brief history it presently lacks a clearly articulated definition of its aims, assumptions and methods. The following, then, is an attempt at a definition of and platform for disability pedagogy:

1. Disability pedagogy is *against* a universalizing, normalizing, standardizing, and equalization. It is thus *against* capitalism and all systems that reinforce such efforts (McLaren 2005).
2. Disability pedagogy *understands* that everyone is different and has different abilities. It is for this reason that it is *against* the socially constructed binary categories of abled and disabled and normal and abnormal (Fulcher 1999).
3. Disability pedagogy rejects the detached, modernist epistemological position which believes in the positivistic notions of objectivity. More importantly *it identifies and critiques* the results of such notions as involved in a wide range of ideological assumptions about reality (Alcoff 1992).
4. Disability pedagogy opposes theory for theory's sake; rather, disability pedagogy *strives* to unite theory and action, building an environment of praxis (Dewey 2007).
5. Disability pedagogy is *against* all forms of oppression, domination, and repression. It is *for* the development of educational spaces that are safe, inclusive, and liberatory (hooks 1994).
6. Disability pedagogy is *against* the notion of individuality. Rather, it is in *favor* of educing for people their collective dependence upon one another and in fostering collaborative efforts rather than competitive ones (Bowers 2001; Fox-Genovese 1992).
7. Disability pedagogy is *against* authoritarian teaching frameworks in which teachers do not believe they can learn from students, and it is *for* one in which teachers and students teach and learn from one another (Freire 1997).
8. As disability pedagogy is *against* competition and shaping individuals for the workforce, it is also against grading students on outcome and effort. Disability pedagogy believes schools should not become an industry to produce the future workforce, but rather a place of voluntary interest for those that wish to learn (Giroux 2001).
9. Disability pedagogy is in alliance with and supportive of theories such as feminism, critical theory, critical race theory, anarchism, and Marxism, that challenge and subvert the dominant authoritarian paradigm in schooling and society (Adams, Bell, Griffin 1997).
10. Disability pedagogy is *based on* providing spaces for people with disabilities, supports their/our inclusion in society and school, and supports their/our activism that promotes and supports these notions, which includes providing platforms for

their/our experiences to be heard and told (Ben-Moshe, Cory, Feldbaum, & Sagendorf 2005).

Inclusive Education

The question must be asked: why develop disability pedagogy if inclusive education believes in the same goals and principles? But, I must ask, do they really have the same goals and principles? Inclusive education, a highly accepted and useful lens to critique the traditional U.S. classroom, has, like all theories, its limitations. Who are the *all* of inclusion (Whittaker and Kenworthy 1995)? Does the *all* include disability, queer, people of color, all ages, religions, genders, sexualities and classes? Or do the theorists under this huge umbrella only focus on single issue essentialist agendas? Alfredo J. Artiles and Elizabeth B. Kozleski write in their article, "Beyond Convictions: Interrogating Culture, History, and Power in Inclusive Education," "For the most part, a prototypical inclusive community is deemed to be cohesive and harmonious – i.e., personnel commitment to a shared view of inclusive education, and resources and efforts are devoted to engineer inclusive school cultures. Race, class, gender, language, and power issues tend to be ignored in this literature" (Artiles and Kozleski 2007, p. 360).

Thus, inclusive education is guided by the philosophy of recognition and therefore tends not to emphasize power relations and agenda. In addition, we must ask: how is a community defined by an inclusive educator? Can you support capitalism and still be an inclusive educator? Can you be religious or hold to an ideology and still be an inclusive educator? Can you support prisons and the death penalty and still be an inclusive educator? Can you advocate war or violence of any kind and still be an inclusive educator? I do not suggest to answer these inquires here, but rather to raise these questions and to emphasize that inclusive education, although liberatory in theory, in practice can perpetuate rather than challenge inequality. Paula Kluth, Diana M. Straut, and Douglas Biklen, disability studies scholars, write in their book, *Access To Academics for All Students: Critical Approaches To Inclusive Curriculum, Instruction, and Policy,*

> Like Udvari-Solner, we define inclusive education as something that supports, impacts, and benefits all learners. We see inclusion as an educational orientation that embraces differences and values diversity. Further, we view inclusion as a revolution, a social action, and a critical political movement. We also see inclusion as a way to boost academic opportunities and successes for all learners in public schools. (2003 p. 3)

Judy W. Kugelmass cites UNESCO (1997; 2000) in her book, *The Inclusive School: Sustaining Equity and Standards* (2004) when defining inclusive education:

1. All children attend the same schools and receive instruction in the same classes they would attend if not disabled or educationally disadvantaged.
2. Remedial, special education, and related services are provided within general education settings. Specialists work closely with classroom teachers to support all students and provide adaptations and specialized interventions to ensure successful participation and learning in the general education environment and curriculum.
3. When needed, accommodations are made in the general education curriculum so that all students attain skills appropriate to their chronological age and developmental needs.

4. The curriculum is conceived as promoting social-emotional and developmental growth, as well as providing instruction designed to help students meet age appropriate and grade-level learning standards in all academic areas.
5. All students are held to high expectations, while recognizing the need for individualization.
6. Classrooms are learning communities, in which all students are valued members who support one another.
7. Diversity in culture, language, ability, and student interests are all celebrated and are seen as enriching the educational experiences of all children.
8. Families are active and integral members of the school community. (Kugelmass 2004, p. 4)

Further, Artiles and Kozleski write, "The premise of inclusive school communities is that schools are about belonging, nurturing, and educating all children and youth, *regardless of their differences in culture, gender, language, ability, class, and ethnicity* (Gerguson, Kozleski, & Smith, 2003; Saldana & Waxman, 1997)" (2007, p. 357, emphasis added). They conclude the article by stressing that inclusive educators indeed acknowledge the inclusion of students with disabilities and "deemed different" (2007, p. 363), but point out that,

> this work has focused mostly on ability differences at the expense of other key dimensions of the majority of these students' existence - e.g., oppression and exclusion by virtue of their race, language, class, gender, and the status of their complex cultural practices that defy static categorical markers. Hence, inclusive schools must not ignore the ubiquity of enduring legacies of racial oppression and stratification in the U.S. society. (Artiles and Kozleski 2007, p. 363)

Therefore, inclusive education must take up the challenge for social justice and not to reproduce the very systemic oppression it is attempting to oppose (Applebaum 2001). Inclusive educators can strive to paint with a broad brush (by discussing *all*), but the result is missing the detail of all the students' personal experiences.

People do have disabilities and are different sometimes physically and mentally and those differences should not be disregarded. Introducing medication or developing an inclusive philosophy will not and cannot make a successful learning environment in the current state educators are dealt in the U.S. public educational system. The current U.S. educational system is not meant to be collaborative, but individualistic and competitive where the normal succeed. (Kohn 1992). It is not meant to be inclusive, but rather a place that has standards and if you do not meet those standards you fail. Inclusive education, a growing movement, has recently become more than inclusion for people with disabilities. It has evolved to become an intersectional philosophy and revolutionary concept for promotion of inclusion of all identities (feminist, LGBTQ, people of color, internationalists, environmentalists, etc.) in supportive of truly respecting and supportive of diversity and all differences. It is for this reason that while inclusive education is becoming an umbrella movement and/or ideology (which people are defining and re-defining), which some believe is being coopted, there still needs to exist a particular pedagogy that advocates and provides a platform for people with disabilities, therefore the rise of disability pedagogy.

Disability pedagogy emerges as a much more liberatory approach then and from

special education, which still is very present and active in determining education for students with disabilities. Yet, special education, which began as the first advocacy and liberatory pedagogy for students with disabilities in the early 1800's, is now thought of as reformist at best and at worst reinforces the status quo of a segregated educational system (Osgood 2005). Special education promotes students with "special" needs (an offensive term critiqued by disability studies scholars) to be segregated from standard classes and (if wealthy enough) even schools, both of which I have had the sad fortune of experiencing. Many of my teachers had degrees in special education and thought that segregation was the ideal for students with a learning disability. Special education is the antithesis of both disability studies and inclusive education. Alan Dyson (1999) writes so brilliantly and to the point of what special education is in his article, "Inclusions and Inclusion: Theories and Discourses in Inclusion Education" (1999) published in *Inclusive Education* edited by Harry Daniels and Philip Garner. Dyson charges special education with serving "the interests of the advantaged members of society by maintaining and rationalizing the further marginalization of those whom it claims to help" (Dyson, 1999, p. 40). Special education was created to segregate children who were labeled as "deviant" and a challenge to the "established order of regular schooling" (Dyson, 1999, p. 40). Professional were established and authorized as those who had privileged "knowledge" about these children and discouraged any interrogation of the system that constructs such difference as deviance. Special education encourages society to ignore the distinctive characteristics that students different from the norm may contribute to the classroom. Special education is separate education that in unjust. "It follows, therefore, that only inclusive education can deliver social justice" (Dyson, 1999, p. 40).

Of course there are at least two sides to every story. Len Barton, author of *The Politics of Special Education: A Necessary or Irrelevant Approach?* (2004) makes a great comparison between inclusive education and special education, which follows. She writes first the position of special education:

> Special segregated provision is deeply entrenched within the system of schooling. This form of provision and practice has historically been justified by a series of ideological assumptions, including:
>
> 1. Such schooling is essential in order to provide the *type* of education and curriculum these children need.
> 2. Disabled children and young people need *protection* from the harsh and cruel realities of the world, including those to be found in mainstream schools – their size, the attitudes of staff and pupils, and verbal and physical abuse.
> 3. Normal pupils need to be protected *from the damaging influences* that disabled pupils will have on their development, especially their academic achievements.
> 4. Special schools are staffed by teachers *who have those special qualities* of patience, dedication, and love. Such schools provide good interpersonal relationships with staff and the same necessary staff-pupil ratios.
> 5. Special schools are necessary on *administrative efficiency grounds.* Thus, specialist teachers, equipment, and support services are most effectively deployed. (Barton, 2004, p. 68)

Barton writes about special segregation as, "Such developments have been depicted as being in the best interests of the child, peers, and society generally" (Barton, 2004 p. 68). Segregation is not for the benefit of the child; it is for, as stressed above, the safety of

society and the "normal" students. She goes on to write, however, that "The International Movement of Disabled People and the British Council of Disabled People" are critical of special education. Increasing numbers of disabled people, including those who are reflecting back on their experience of being pupils in such schools, are advocating the closure of such institutions in favor of an approach to education. She then writes on the criticisms of special schooling, which include:

1. Special schools are part of the disabling barriers within society and therefore need to be removed. This is a human rights issue (Oliver 1996).
2. Segregated provision tends to encourage negative labels, suspicion, stereotypes, fear, and ignorance of a reciprocal nature (Barnes, 1991; Rieser & Mason, 1990).
3. Pupils within such schools receive an education that is inferior to their nondisabled peers and the low expectations of teachers is a significant factor in this outcome. The rhetoric of 'caring' and 'supporting' often obscures this fact (Yates, 1994).
4. Such provision legitimates the notion of 'professional' and 'expert' and encourages passive dependency on the part of pupils (French, 1994). (Barton, 2004, p. 69)

Barton goes on to write,

> … it is essential as Booth (1996) so shrewdly notes, that we recognize 'compulsory segregation is never benign; it is always associated with devaluation' (p. 30). From a sociopolitical perspective, as long as there is a form of language that depicts some individuals as not 'normal' and 'special,' separate segregated schooling will continue (Ballard, 1996; Booth, 19996). Thus, from this particular political analysis, 'special educational needs' is to be understood fundamentally as a euphemism for *failure*. (Barton 2004, p. 69)

Due to both my personal experiences and my research in this area, I heavily support inclusive education and disability pedagogy over special education. However, inclusive education on its own will not challenge the larger system from which disability is constructed. Disability pedagogy critiques repressive systems such as capitalism, corporate media, and normalcy and also provides space for the experience of having disabilities in an educational setting to be heard and acknowledged. It is not only about access, or in recent years, "considering ways of challenging and intellectually engage learners with disabilities" (Kluth, Straut, and Biklen 2003, p. 1). Kluth, Straut, and Biklen in their book, *Access to Academics for ALL Students: Critical Approaches to Inclusive Curriculum, Instruction, and Policy* stress that inclusive pedagogy is about access to academy: everyone having an opportunity to learn in the classroom. They go on to write,

> We have chosen the term access to academic carefully, believing that it captures an important principle for educators, namely that participation or inclusion in schooling is not enough for any learner. All students deserve to be educated in ways that make them struggle, think, work, and grow. Students should have opportunities to tackle 'hard work,' they should be intellectually stretched. (2003, p. 3).

Therefore, inclusive education is caught in a dilemma, where its champions want to teach for all, but are governed and controlled by repressive bureaucratic policies and social systems/institutions and industries (Giroux 2007). Inclusive education will never work with the presence of capitalism in our society, which breeds domination and promotes segregation. Many inclusive educators understand the repressive actions of capitalism. Inclusive educators do stress the importance of respecting difference and inclusion of all and there are even those that critique how class, race, and gender are marginalized because of capitalism (Cole 2006). There are a number of inclusive pedagogues like disability pedagogues who recognize that only until capitalism is abolished can there be the development of a true concept of inclusive education (Lankshear 1997).

The difference between the inclusive education and disability pedagogy is that the former is demanding a broad access and engagement of learning for *all* students, which can seem by many as a unrealistic task, while disability pedagogy is demanding a much more specific and smaller goal, which is to provide space for students with disabilities to learn and for people to listen to the experiences of students specifically with disabilities. Further, disability studies in general has stressed the need for the whole concept of the classroom to be revolutionized, which a number of radical inclusive educators have stressed too. But, the dilemma of inclusive education is that it is being co-opted by mainstream conservative educators, in favor of capitalism and other neoconservative initiatives. Consequently, radical inclusive educators have two tasks in front of them; first, to assure that all are being included and wanting to be included, and second, to endorse and engage with radical critical thinking for social justice (Applebaum 2001; Sapon-Shevin 2007).

Together inclusive education and disability pedagogy will be successful, but for one without the other, there will be no success. One cannot know if the student is successful if they do not ask (i.e., disability pedagogy) and they cannot ask if the student is not part of the class (i.e., inclusive education). Not to say that inclusive education does not take into account the disability experience, as many scholars do. But the trend of inclusive education is expansion, and therefore students get less attention from teachers and administrators, as profit-making and bureaucracy become more important than the people a school is supposed to serve.

Segregation of Education

It is true that schools attended by urban, poor, predominantly students of color are given bad and outdated textbooks and materials, too few computers, run down furniture, and teachers and administrators are overworked and underpaid. Consequently, children attending lower-tier schools tend to drop out or be kicked out because with mental and physical disabilities (ranging from not being able to sit down for long periods of time, unable to read or write, or merely not able to move about in the school because they are in a wheel chair, therefore always late to class) they are even more challenged than their classmates, and they find themselves in a vicious cycle of systematic social violence.

These "failed" students are typically sent to the streets only to find themselves in trouble with the law, where they end up in a juvenile hall, jail, or prison. It is true that elimination of segregation was a pivotal point in the civil rights struggle, and so it should be the same for the disability rights movement. There is clear segregation constructed by normalcy, standardizations, and conformities, which are carried out beginning with Congress, then school districts, and then teacher themselves, who are the last hope of stopping this oppressive system. While I write above how inclusive education is a great visionary goal, but currently not a reality, I am not on the other hand promoting segregation of people with

disabilities. Rather, I am advocating the vision of inclusive education so that it may become a reality, a new educational system that begins by edifying students, educators, and administrators so that they can learn to understand and respect the unique needs and experiences of students with disabilities. For the true essence of disability pedagogy is the experience of disability, which is the antithesis of normalcy.

Segregation today is still a very popular method by special educators as a technique to "manage" the disabled. In the first grade, I was put in segregated classes for learning disabled students. The students that were in the rest of the school did not play or talk with us. Rather, they laughed at us, physically hurt us, spit on us, and called us retarded. These types of events have shaped and hurt me in ways that I will not and cannot forget. On a daily basis I would cry for hours after school in my locked room. These taunts lasted through the fourth grade.

For the fifth and sixth grades I attended Temple University Laboratory School, a segregated school for students from seventh to twelfth grade. Possessing self-respect and confidence was difficult enough in the face of my peers, let alone being dropped into the middle of a Laboratory setting, where Ph.D. students studied, wrote, and put students through rigorous tests. The Laboratory had caring teachers, but the idea of us being segregated from other students in our community and society, only established the possibility of emotional, mental, and physical harm on those that are segregated. The act of segregation stressed directly and indirectly to myself and others that were segregated that we were inferior to those that went to "normal" schools. I very much clearly remember this idea always being spoken about by myself and others, that we were not normal and we did not go to normal school, thus we laughed at ourselves similar to the scene in the movie *Freaks* (1932) directed by Tod Browning and written by Clarence Aaron 'Tod' Robbins, where the circus performers i.e., "freaks," sat around a dinner table celebrating a recent wedding between a "normal" white-woman (who was marrying for the money) and a white-male dwarf . During the celebration the "freaks" chanted "We accept her, gubul gabul, one of us" the bride yelled at them telling them that she is not one of them and insulting them.

Looking back on what we, the segregated students, were doing in the classroom to each other was a sick and sad act by segregated students. We laughed at ourselves, by calling each other retarded, LD, stupid, and dumb. These comments were followed by insulting gestures of fellow students acting "retarded" by hitting themselves in the head and speaking with a slow and slurred voice. I was only at the Laboratory for two years - fifth and sixth grade. Eventually, the school suffered tens of thousands of dollars in damages from the "unruly" students and was forced to close. New doors were put on because all the doors with windows were destroyed, replaced with prison doors, which were solid metal and painted flat gray. The hand rails were destroyed, even causing me to go to the hospital once because I slid my hand down one of the rails that was cracked, which drove a piece of wood completely through the center of my hand.

The school was under attack by its students; fireworks were shot off on a daily basis, fire exit signs were ripped down from the ceiling, and students blew up teachers' desks. One teacher was even assaulted by a student and had her arm broken. I was regularly chased through the school and was in fights often. The school was based on segregation, thus each student put each other down even more to proclaim their normalcy and why they should not be there. In actuality, each student needed specific help and had a learning challenge if not other mental disabilities. Almost every day after school since I was in first grade I went to my bedroom crying because of the amount of harassment physical and verbal I endured at school. I was laughed at because I was not able to read. I had *one of* the most severe disabilities of all of the students. I was called retarded on a daily basis and had my property destroyed and stolen as a form of marginalization. No, this was not just hazing or kids being

kids, this was what the institution was doing to all of us -- making us fight each other, similar to prisons.

I spent the seventh grade at a Quaker school, Delaware Valley Friends School, on the mainline in a wealthy area in Philadelphia for students with differences: a respectful way to identify students with learning disability. It was a great experience, but I could not shake the fact that I was segregated. I literally went to the school on the "short bus" or in a van. I was still segregated and marginalized from all the other kids my same age in my neighborhood. Even though the teachers, administration, and fellow students were very respectful to me, I was still in the mindset of feeling inferior and retarded because of my past experiences. As a Quaker now, while I think the school is needed for students to not be tortured like I was, it is covering a truly serious problem of universally accepted segregation of people with "disabilities."

Eighth through twelfth grade I spent at a wonderful utopia in Houston, Texas, Briarwood School, where my family moved because my father found a new job. At this school which was well-funded because of the price of the tuition, there was everything a "normal school" had: a gym, a track field, computers, a wood and metal shop, and even extra-curricular sports such as soccer, basketball, volleyball, tennis, track and field, and golfing. It was utopia for all that wanted it and dreamed of what it could really look like if it was possible.

There were of course some very hard times at the school, with students having guns, my teacher committing suicide, detention, being kicked out of class, spending most of my time in the hall, and continuing to get into fights with fellow students. We were equal, but still separate; the main emphasis was not on providing a quality education, but rather with establishing spaces and hierarchies of segregation and social control. Sure, faculty and administration patted us on the back and tried to boost our self-confidence, but when we found out that we could not get into most of the universities/colleges we dreamed of attending with our other friends at "normal schools," the confidence quickly faded away, and failure ran much of our lives. After graduation, most of the students worked for their families' businesses if possible, worked retail or blue-collar jobs, or attended another segregated learning disability school, these being one of the few colleges that would accept them.

Experiences such as the ones I provide above are fundamental and central in creating the understanding for the need of disability pedagogy. Disability pedagogy will provide people such as myself that have and are oppressed because of mental and/or physical disabilities a shield for education defense, critical theory to fight back against an oppressive and dominating system, and a space to speak about our experiences with others. I still today fight and defend my right to non-segregated education as I deal with and navigate through higher education for my Ph.D. at Syracuse University, which at times feels as though I am walking through a field of barbwire. While I spoke above about my educational experience as a youth, my article "We're not Stupid: My College Years as a Mentally Challenged Student," in the book *Building, pedagogical curb cuts: Incorporating disability in the university classroom and curriculum* (Ben-Moshe, Cory, Feldbaum, & Sagendorf 2005), touches on my educational experiences in college.

In Closing

As I noted throughout this text, domination and marginalization in education through normalcy and ablism should be challenged and teachers should find pedagogies that respect differences and challenge the current structure of the classroom and relationship between

teacher and students. It is the structures as much as the pedagogy that are repressive, violent, and marginalizing for people that are different and not dominant in this capitalist normalizing society we currently live in.

The steps to create a fairer educational system begin with an awareness campaign on dominance and marginalization of those that have disabilities (Applebaum 2001). Next, we must educate staff and faculty about how to constructively assist people with learning challenges. Finally, students with mental challenges must voice their concerns and stop hiding the fact they need help and are different. They need to first convince themselves that they are not "stupid"; I think that was my hardest battle—coming to an understanding of what diversity truly means.

Disability pedagogy is not only about the process of teaching, but more so it is about critiquing social, economic, and political structures that have constructed the concept of normal, average, equal, and standard. Through my detailed experience of acceptance and inclusion into higher education, I have found myself marginalized, stigmatized, and discriminated against because of my status of being mentally disabled. "At a time when universities work to incorporate multicultural curricula and canon revisions, they still perpetuate the pathologization of Deaf culture, language, and literature" (Dirksen, Bauman and Drake 1997, p. 306). Society does not realize that there is a culture, history, and complex experience among the Deaf. Furthermore, "Only a handful of American universities, for example presently accept American Sign Language for legitimate language credit" (Dirksen, Bauman and Drake 1997, p. 306). What we must begin to do in the academy and society is show that Deafness and all disabilities as different and independent cultures and not disabilities or freakish independent anomalies that have no connection to each other. Multiculturalism defends diversity and the understanding that all cultures should be valued and that there is not a specific number of cultures, but that they are always being developed and recognized. "Clearly, discussing Deaf language and culture in multicultural context encouraged students to consider that American Sign Language is a 'real' language and that the Deaf are a 'real' cultural community" (Dirksen, Bauman and Drake 1997, p. 310).

Furthermore, where Deaf culture is not recognized as a culture in the academy so are other disabilities. At Howard University, a predominant Black school in Washington D.C., Rosemarie Garland Thomson (1999) writes in her article, "Integrating Disability Studies into the Existing Curriculum: The Example of 'Women and Literature' at Howard University", "While many of my colleagues balance race with gender and class analyses, introducing disability as a category of social analysis is rare. Disability studies is simply not a part of the general educational currency at Howard or at most other institutions" (Thomson 1999, p. 295). She goes on to write, "In short, this pedagogical goal requires removing disability from its traditional medical model interpretation and placing it into a minority role model understanding" (Thomson 1999, p. 296). Furthermore, Pfeiffer (2001) argues that the dominant medical model stresses the problem within the person, therefore making the person the victim of not being able to function "properly" as a "normal" individual. Stressing that individualism is normal and to depend on one another is not, a very strong colonial value. Reinforcing faults, impairments, and abnormalcy, rather than stressing difference.

In discussing the frustration of categorizing, labeling, and establishing disability studies courses at the university Thompson writes, "It is often not feasible or timely to convince institutions to offer new courses whose titles include the term 'disability' because it is difficult to classify them" (Thomson 1999, p. 296). This problem is the same problem of the critique of disability in a normalizing community, they just do not fit or standard. Normalization a repressive system in the academy promotes the notion that there is no place for students with disability, just as there is no place for disability studies noted by

Thomson. One of Thomson's main points in the article is that she strives to have her students understand that beauty is a social construction and that it is not a standard, but a personal belief. She is interested in beauty because it is "… an oppressive cultural ideology perpetuated and enforced by a wide range of institutions and received traditions, we are able at the outset to diffuse any simple split between those who could slip into the normative position in regard to our topic and those who are outside it" (Thomson 1999, p. 297).

Many in other marginalized fields of study ask: so what is the difference with disability studies and, let's say, Women's Studies, African-American Studies, Chicano/a Studies, etc.? The answer Jim Swan writes in his article "Disabilities, Bodies, Voices," "… I think, is the particular viewpoint that disability studies brings to an understanding of the body – an understanding that writing is not only about the body but of and from the body too" (Swan 2002, p. 284). Feminist pedagogues and theorists have finally linked the body and mind together, which radical disability feminists even more so, but what disability studies provides is a critique of not only how society and the body and mind relate to each other, but how the mind relates to the body and vice versa.

People who live with illness and disability are often compelled to rethink the relation between body and mind or body and self; in so doing, they both support and challenge Cartesian dualism, revealing the potential fluidity of the mind/body relation but also the persistent power, and sometimes the practical usefulness, of ideas of disembodiment and transcendence" (Smith and Hutchison 2004, p. 147). It is not only the experience of the relation between body and mind to society, but the infusion of difference that causes a struggle within that experience, which stresses the difference among people and their experiences, which provides the understanding of self identity. Therefore to reinforce this challenge to feminism, Kristin Lindgren, author of "Bodies in Trouble: Identity, Embodiment, and Disability" writes, "Feminist theory, even as it aims to privilege bodily experience sometimes reenacts Plato's devaluation of the diseased body" (Smith and Hutchison 2004, p. 147). She goes on to write, "Without a sustained consideration of the experience and representation of illness and disability, theories of embodiment, including feminist theories, too often depend on an abstract idea of normative body rather than on the widely varied forms and experiences of actual bodies" (Smith and Hutchison 2004, p. 147).

I hope I have demonstrated how disability pedagogy can aid much of the social justice pedagogies that exist (Applebaum 2001). If social movements can aid in the critique of the disability rights movement's analysis of domination and oppression, so can the educators in those movements. If we are going to change it will only occur through education. For, as Malcolm X once stated, "Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today." But more importantly, who is being educated and who is not is the primary question.

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