Introduction: Disability Studies in Education—Critical Conversations

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This special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* brings together 19 articles by scholars and activists across broad academic disciplines and activist communities— from disability studies to inclusive education, early childhood education, decolonial studies, feminist anti-violence organizing, community health and more—as well as geopolitical locations. Such international and inter/multi/transdisciplinary work on education in disability studies, we assert, is vital as we confront intensifying social inequities—the continued assertion of populist regimes, ethno-nationalism, and economic and climate crises that disproportionately affect the life chances of disabled people, queer and trans people, Indigenous people, people of colour, people who live in the global South and other people denied full access to the category of 'the human,' education and life (Goodley, 2021). Since our call for papers went out, we also find ourselves in the middle of a global pandemic spotlighting and intensifying these inequities as well as resistance movements such as Black and Indigenous Lives Matter calling for abolition (see, for example, Walcott, 2020) and emphatically underlining the dire need for critical, creative and activist work. The contributions gathered here offer new theorizations, methodologies, and critical and activist practices in disability studies in education (DSE) that not only outline the fractures and fissures of neoliberal, colonialist ableist education systems (Ineese-Nash, 2020) but also gesture toward new possibilities for disability justice in education. If education is at its best,

as bell hooks describes (1994), a practice of freedom rooted in struggles for social justice and transformative praxis, then this special issue is an occasion for critical hope (Zembylas, 2017). Following Kafer (2016), we also make an accessibility note that some of the articles, such as those about the violence of systems may feel distressing to read, especially for readers who have experienced ableist educational violence. We invite you to care for yourself.

This special issue affirms what seems obvious to us as disability studies scholars—education needs disability studies. Disability studies makes crucial interventions into conventional educational knowledge and practice, shifting away from the predominance of psy-disciplines grounded in Western colonial capitalist hierarchies of disability and difference and toward revaluing embodied/enminded difference as fundamental to the world. Yet, despite established inter/multidisciplinary work in disability studies in education internationally (see Barton, 1997; Erevelles, 2005; Nguyen, 2018; Slee, Corcoran & Best, 2019; Titchkosky, 2011; Underwood et al., this issue) and legislation around inclusion as a human right (see United Nations, 2007), there remains in education—whether early childhood, teacher education or higher education—a deeply entrenched ableism and gap between policy and practice that understands some bodies/minds as 'fit' for education and others as not (Dolmage, 2017). The contributors to this special issue confront the systemic ableism and violence of education systems and marginalization of 'different' bodies and minds, issuing a critical invitation to take up disability studies and work for social justice in our teaching, research, creative work, activism, and scholarship.

Positioning Ourselves

We are inter/multidisciplinary disability studies scholars and activists in sociology and

education living, loving, resisting, teaching and learning across different locations on Turtle Island. Patty is an invisibly disabled and neurodivergent white settler and activist scholar in disability studies and social justice education, a former special education teacher and a mom of two sons, one of whom attracted the label of autism. Alan is a mad queer scholar and activist of colour working in sociology and sexuality studies. Alan grew up with an older disabled sibling in Brazil, fighting side-by-side with his brother to ensure his access to education. His sibling was in fact the first person with a physical impairment to access a 'regular' school in his city of Praia Grande, on the coast of Sao Paulo State.

The impetus for this special issue emerged out of critical conversations about disability studies in education Patty had with her graduate students and with faculty in the Department of Educational Psychology and Student Services at Brandon University, the small prairie university in Manitoba, Canada, where she works. After encountering disability studies, students in Patty's inclusive education graduate seminar began to notice the entrenched ableism and deficit approaches in the schools where they teach, the alarming lack of disability studies in their initial teacher education courses and the creative and critical possibilities disability studies offers for a more relational and hopeful, difference-and-life-affirming practice than deficit approaches aimed at 'fixing' disabled students. Students also began to express unease about the language of the "Special Education" Master's degree they were earning. Faculty began to ask questions, too, about intersections of ableism and colonialism at the university and the barriers that university processes and practices—such as the emphasis on written English—posed to those who might be in our university classrooms and on our faculty. Through these conversations, faculty at Brandon University would rename our graduate stream "Inclusive Education" and set to work reimagining

course offerings and admissions procedures incorporating disability studies, work that is ongoing as this issue goes to print.

This special issue is also a result of the rich conversations we, Patty and Alan, had together about disability studies in education in Canada after encountering its astonishing absence from an initial review of teacher program curricula in Manitoba and Ontario we documented on Patty's project *Disability, Inclusion and Education: A Program Review*.[1] Our alarming discovery added a new direction to the project to help cultivate new work in disability studies in education that might begin to fill this gap. In our call for papers for this special issue, we were interested in contributions that confront and critique ableism and power; we also sought contributions that do something other than "damage-centred" research casting Indigenous and other marginalized and oppressed groups as only broken/injured and begin instead, following Tuck (2009), in desire—for Indigenous resurgence and sovereignty, for claiming disability as something to think with and as a valuable part of life (Michalko, 2002), for disability justice and more. We recognize, too, the limits of this special issue and of our own positionalities, as well as the ongoing critical work we must do to move disability studies in education away from its global North and white beginnings (Bell, 2006; Erevelles, 2011).

Disability Studies in Education Matters

Despite decades of activism and calls to fully open access to education and life by disability activists and scholars, in practice, governments, school boards, universities and early education have yet to fully enact this call. Following a recent visit to Canada, for example, Devandas-Aguilar, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with

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[1] The final report is presently in development—for more information contact douglasp@brandonu.ca

disabilities, noted a disconnect between policy and legislation supporting fully inclusive education on the one hand, and gaps and failures in educational practice on the other: segregated classrooms; suspensions from school barring access to education for protracted periods; lack of services for students with disabilities; emotional and financial strain placed on students and families due to system failures; and different types of graduation certificates for special education students leading to barriers to higher education (United Nations, 2019). Devandas-Aguilar writes, "The situation of Indigenous persons with disabilities is particularly worrisome, as they are far behind in the enjoyment of their rights, and they do not have access to the same services and opportunities, many of which are only provided outside the reserves and in non-cultural sensitive ways" (United Nations, 2019, section 5, para. 4). Similar disjuncture persists for post-secondary education, including physical architecture and biomedical models of disability that erect barriers. In *Academic Ableism* (2016), Jay Dolmage uses the "steep steps" metaphor to elucidate how, through ableist, eugenic and colonialist processes, "the university has been constructed as a place for the very able," meaning normatively embodied/enminded, bourgeois and white students (p. 42). Within early childhood education, Kathryn Underwood (2013) advances the social model of disability as a first move, noting that "research tells us that educators who believe that all children have a right to participation are more likely to find ways to reduce barriers, and to understand how each child learns" (p. 5).

If legislation and policy around accessibility and inclusion are not enough to break down barriers, grapple with intersecting oppressions or substantially change educational practice, then nothing short of a sea change in approaches to disability and difference in education is required. Meaningful educational inclusion and access, we contend, requires the centering of disability studies and non-normatively embodied/enminded people as marginalized—and at times

unwelcome or fraught—conversation partners in education. By meaningful inclusion we mean, "the need for schools to change their cultures and practices" (Runswick-Cole, 2011, p. 113), including practices that amount to inclusion-as-assimilation: for education to be moved by the experiences and knowledge of non-normatively embodied people. Specifically, we assert that attending to disability studies in education opens ethical and transformative possibilities for belonging and learning by centering difference and structuring teaching according to the needs and desires of those who have attracted disability labels (Douglas et al., 2019; Greenstein, 2016). While this approach aligns with approaches in inclusive education, such as Universal Design for Learning and differentiated instruction (see, for example, Hall, Meyer, & Rose, 2011), disability studies brings something critical, namely, a way to rethink the normative human lodged at the centre of conventional (and often inclusive) educational knowledge and practice; pay critical attention to intersections of difference; and reorient to disability as a fundamental—and valuable—part of life together (see Baglieri et al., 2011; Barton, 1997; Connor & Ferri, 2005; Cosier & Ashby, 2016; Erevelles, 2005; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2015; Titchkosky, 2007, 2011). This kind of vast re-imagining and radicalizing of the meaning of non-normative embodiment/enmindment in education introduces critical hope within an educational context where disabled, queer, Black, Indigenous, and non-normative students continue to face segregation, racism, colonial logics, violence and exclusion. At the same time, we acknowledge that disability studies in education, too, must work to decolonize its epistemologies, ontologies, methods and teaching.

What this special issue confirms to us as guest editors is that disability studies in education—broadly conceived as a practice of freedom toward disability justice that spans beyond formal schooling—is an inter/multidisciplinary field whose time has come, one that

builds on a legacy of critical, creative and intersectional work: from Len Barton's ground-

breaking work in inclusive education and disability studies within the sociology of education in

the UK (see Arnot, 2012); to the group of scholars at the American Educational Research

Association who initiated a disability studies in education special interest group in 2000 (see

Connor in this issue); to the radical contributions of disability studies informed by interpretive

sociology and cultural studies by Tanya Titchkosky and her students at the Ontario Institute of

Studies in Education, University of Toronto; to the emergence of international journals including

Disability Studies in Education (2018) and *Teaching Disability Studies* (2019); to this special

issue of the *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* (2020) and several recent events in Canada

bringing inter/multidisciplinary scholars and activists together to rethink disability, education,

inclusion and access.[2] We offer this special issue as a contribution within this growing wave of

disability studies scholarship and activism in education bringing critical hope for a better world.

Introducing the Contributions

The contributions to this special issue cross community/academic, disciplinary and

geopolitical borders and boundaries: from community-engaged research on disability self-

advocacy (Shanouda et al.) and feminist disability anti-violence organizing (Shelton) to a

rethinking of the anthropology of disability (Acevedo) and rebooting inclusive education in a

time of Industry 4.0 (Goodley et al.); from cultural studies (Karmiris) and Deleuzian analysis

(Roscigno) to medical education (Joseph & Nisker), international human rights (Underwood et

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[2] Examples include the international Summer Institute on Disability organized by Tanya Titchkosky at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in July 2011; the annual panels on disability studies in education at the Canadian Sociological Association and Canadian Disability Studies Association organized by Patty Douglas and Alan Santinele Martino; *Disability, Access, Equity and Inclusion: Creating Welcoming Spaces*, a national event to explore what welcoming spaces for all in education means organized by Katie Aubrecht at St. Francis Xavier University in August 2019; and *Mobilizing Disability Studies Scholarship in Non-Disability Studies Academic Spaces* organized by Karen Yoshida at University of Toronto in September, 2019.

al.) and quantitative system-level descriptions of intersecting oppression (Parekh et al.); and from geopolitical locations across Turtle Island to England, Australia, Singapore and Colombia. It is our belief and ethic as editors that our time of multiple and interwoven global crises urgently calls for the best of such boundary-crossing work in disability studies in education; epistemological and ontological friction generated at the borders of disciplines and academy/community offers opportunities for new understandings of difference, of the category of 'the human' and of access to education and life in ways that might help solve the problems we face globally (Wynter, 1999). While most of the articles in the special issue cross multiple themes, we describe below how we grouped them and briefly introduce each to familiarize— and entice—our reader to think and 'do' (Titchkosky, 2011) disability studies in education at the interstices.

Taking a 'Backwards Glance'

We begin with a set of articles that collectively take a 'backwards glance' in order to take stock of some of the lessons we might glean from this inter/multi/transdisciplinary field. This backwards glance is not only temporal, but also perceptual (Ahmed, 2006, p. 570). That is, we include articles in this set that 'look again' at the taken for granted assumptions 'behind' everyday practices and representations of disability and the human in education to release something new into the world. David Connor's, "'I don't like to be told that I view a student with a deficit mindset': Why it Matters that Disability Studies in Education Continues to Grow," is a personal narrative and critical reflection on the emergence of disability studies in education from a long-time scholar, practitioner and originator of DSE in the United States. Connor's piece will be of keen interest to readers researching this vital thread of DSE history in the global North as well as to critical practitioners in education working to disrupt the persistent hold of special

education knowledge and deficit approaches to embodied difference in schools. In her article, "Toward Inclusive Education? Focusing a Critical Lens on Universal Design for Learning," Susan Baglieri 'looks back' at Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and how it has gained prominence relatively independently of disability studies to open access to curriculum for disabled students in public schools. She suggests that disability studies scholars, following Dolmage, Hamraie and others, should engage more deeply in UDL research in order to disrupt the "desirability of the normate" and "normative curriculum" left untouched in the practice of UDL in schools. Lauren Beard's "Archival Artistry: Exploring Disability Aesthetics in Late Twentieth Century Higher Education" looks back, but this time through an archival historiography of disability representation and protest in higher education in the United States. Beard's archive surfaces aesthetic practices around disability that "widen the view of both disability history and disability rhetoric in higher education," prying open space for something new. The final article in this set, "The Myth of Independence as Better: Transforming Curriculum Through Disability Studies and Decoloniality," by Maria Karmiris brings readers close-up to the taken for granted background of one educational text produced by the Ontario Ministry of Education in Canada for teachers that enacts some of the tensions highlighted by the previous pieces. Karmiris puts disability, decolonial, and cultural studies into conversation to reveal the text's underlying ableist and colonialist assumptions about universal human development, 'independence' and normativity, assumptions that in practice exclude and marginalize racialized disabled students.

The Violence of Systems

Our second set of articles take up anew the difficult topic of violence in educational systems. One prominent issue is the alarming, frequent, often hidden away yet mundane use of

restraint and seclusion to discipline or remediate 'unruly' disabled students. In "Interrogating

Sanctioned Violence: A Survey of Parents/Guardians of Children with Disabilities about

Restraint and Seclusion in Manitoba's Schools," Nadine Bartlett and Taylor Ellis document

findings from their online survey of parents and guardians of disabled children and youth in

Manitoba, Canada. They sketch an alarming picture of system-wide and frequent use of restraint

and seclusion in schools, often without any communication to caregivers. Of grave concern is the

continued use of dangerous mechanical restraints, ones that sometimes result in death (murder),

and the traumatic effects for disabled children and youth who have been subjected to this

violence. In "Semiotic Stalemate: Resisting Restraint and Seclusion through Guattari's

Micropolitics of Desire," Robin Roscigno also addresses the use of restraint and seclusion as

modes of normative violence and control in schools. Rather than an "anomaly," the author

articulates physical restraint alongside special education practice and Applied Behaviour

Analysis as "'normative violence' that has been ontologically sanctioned through a production of

an evidence base for its use and the manufacturing of a need for its application." Drawing on

Guattari's semiotics, Roscigno reveals the discursive mechanisms that justify such practices and

calls for their demystification through a politics of resistance and desire. Finally, in "The Social

and Epistemological Violence of Inclusive Education for Deaf Learners," Kristen Snoddon

examines how inclusive education practices exercise violence against deaf children by limiting

access to sign language instruction as well as to participation in Deaf culture and community.

Snoddon issues an urgent call to rectify this systemic disappearing of culture by supporting sign-

language policy and practice in schools to "ensure the viability of deaf futures."

Challenging Ableist Power/Knowledge

The articles in our third set take on knowledge/power in education and challenge ableist

knowledge production and curricula across a wide range of contexts. In "Falsified Incompetence and Other Lies the Positivists Told Me," Rua Williams examines a set of everyday scholarly texts about the scientifically contested practice of Facilitated Communication—typed communication used by non-speaking people to communicate. Williams challenges the embedded presumptions of incompetence, lack of humanity and evacuated agency made about this alternative way of communicating in quantitative studies relying on traditional positivist epistemology and calls for an attention to the relational and lived experiences within all knowledge production. In "Need for Prominent Core Curricula Designed and Taught by Persons with Disabilities in All Levels of Medical Education," Meera Joseph and Jeff Nisker introduce the social model of disability to medical education. They challenge the wide-spread practice of using nondisabled actors in "standardized patient" roles in medical training and argue for a disability studies informed approach in medical education developed by disabled people as knowledge producers and curricular co-designers. Finally, Sara Acevedo Espinal dismantles the ableism of "effective schooling" discourse in the United States propping up neoliberal capitalism. To challenge this discourse and its disciplining of the "disorderly," less than human disabled student, she calls for a multi/inter/transdisciplinary approach in anthropology melding advocacy anthropology, the anthropology of education and critical disability studies to challenge the discipline's colonialist and ableist legacy.

Provoking Systems

The fourth set of articles in this special issue provoke systems to address the continued exclusion of disabled students from education and life. In "An International Conversation on Disabled Children's Childhoods: Theory, Ethics, Method," Kathryn Underwood and colleagues document emerging conversations on the International Advisory Committee of the Inclusive

Early Childhood Service Systems Project, "a longitudinal study of interactions with institutional

processes when families have a young child with disabilities." The conversations challenge

international development discourse issuing from international bodies, such as UNICEF and the

United Nations, and the ethics of exporting medicalized understandings of childhood disability

from the global North to the global South. In the scaling up of disability services globally

through such international bodies, Underwood et al. call for an attention to the lived experience

of disabled children and offer critical theoretical and methodological resources that may help

provoke access in service systems across different locations, identities and cultural contexts. In

"Access to Inclusive Education for Students with Autism: An Analysis of Canada's Compliance

with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)," Phil

Lord advances a legal argument that Canada has failed to comply when it comes to access to

inclusive education for autistic students. He identifies five key failures—reductions to

educational funding; failure to provide individualized support for autistic students; inadequate

education for teachers; the use of language signalling a medical model of disability in education;

and the effect of "voluntary segregation" or the withdrawal of students by families due to

inadequate public supports. Lord's contribution points to the potential of leveraging the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) to provoke system

change. Finally, in "Naming and Claiming: The Tension Between Institutional and Self-

identification of Disability," Gillian Parekh and Robert Brown examine student census data from

the Toronto District School Board and ask how students come to identify (or not) as disabled.

Through an intersectional approach, the authors identify trends related to class, race, gender and

sexuality around which students are more likely to claim disability identity (versus institutionally

ascribed labels). For racialized, working class, male-identified students who are already more

likely to be streamed into lower quality special education classes than their nondisabled and

white peers, disability self-identification is not often claimed. The authors provoke education

systems to examine their implication in constructing exclusions from disability identity and pride

along race, class and gender lines.

Community-Based Education and Disability Activism

The authors in this fifth set of articles offer theoretical and methodological resources for

community-based and activist approaches to disability studies in education. In "Cultivating

Disability Leadership: Implementing a Methodology of Access to Transform Community-based

Learning," Shanouda et al. describe a transformative, community-based education project

focused on "cultivating the next generation of disability leaders" in the Niagara region in

Ontario, Canada. Readers are introduced to a compelling "methodology of access" offering

resources for disability scholars, activists, and community organizations as they reflect on their

own access practices. Cynthia Bruce's paper "Self-Advocacy as Precariousness in University

Education" critically examines experiences of self-advocacy of disabled university students and

their professors across three universities in Nova Scotia, Canada. Bruce reveals the ableism of

system requisites that disabled students and faculty perform self-advocacy to secure access to

higher education accessibility services and how it generates uncertainty and precarity in disabled

students' and faculty's lives. In the end, self-advocacy as a system approach individualizes

access and leaves ableist understandings of disability at the university intact; however, Bruce

identifies moments of activist resistance and subversion that insert critical hope. Finally, Samuel

Z. Shelton's article, "Integrating Crip Theory and Disability Justice into Feminist Anti-Violence

Education," argues for disability activism and pedagogy guided by care and interdependence

within community-based, feminist anti-violence organizing. Shelton, an anti-violence feminist

disability community activist, draws on intersectionality and crip theory as resources to cultivate

a "radical imagination" and challenge the "sameness" that continues to haunt feminist anti-

violence work.

Innovations from Disability Studies in Education

Our final set of articles articulate innovative pedagogical, theoretical and methodological

approaches emanating from disability studies in education, ones that, like our first set of articles,

'look back' to move the field forward. Scott Danforth vividly recounts the life and disability

activism of Ed Roberts, a key figure who helped found the American disability rights movement.

Danforth brings alive Roberts' disability pedagogy, one that shattered ableist tropes through

camp-like performances by Roberts of his own disability to rapt public audiences across the

United States. In "Neuroqueer(ing) Noise: Beyond 'Mere Inclusion' in a Neurodiverse Early

Childhood Classroom," UK graduate student David Ben Shannon challenges the therapeutic use

of the arts within inclusion-as-rehabilitation models in education that aim to "tune up" "out-of-

tune, or noisy" students. To make his challenge, Shannon draws on affect and neuroqueer

theories and describes an innovative music research-creation project he led in an early childhood

classroom. Shannon invites researchers and teachers to tune into "noise" in order to move

classroom practice beyond "mere inclusion." The final piece in this set of articles, "Rebooting

Inclusive Education? New Technologies and Disabled People," comes from Dan Goodley et al.

who turn our attention to the relationship between technology and disability, specifically in the

context of inclusive education. Considering the growing interest in and use of technology in

education, the authors provide a nuanced discussion regarding some forms of inequality that may

be perpetuated through these technologies if disability is not considered "front and centre." They point to the ways in which ableist technologies have been used as a "therapeutic response to disability" and, at other times, have simply been inaccessible to some disabled people. Goodley and colleagues open promising paths to take up immediate concerns and "reboot" inclusive education through a critical dialogue between technology studies and critical disability studies.

We believe that disability studies offers unique, crucial, and transformative insights to education around what is required to value difference and fully open access to learning, particularly in this COVID-19 moment where state sanctioned systemic and interpersonal violence toward bodies marked 'different' heightens. We hope that the contributions in this special issue are one vital resource to help reshape educational knowledge and practice in social justice facing and radical ways.

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