

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF

# Disability Studies

Published by the Canadian Disability Studies Association · Association Canadienne des Études sur l'Incapacité

*Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*

**Published by the Canadian Disability Studies Association**

**Association Canadienne des Études sur le handicap**

**Hosted by The University of Waterloo**

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# **“Effective Schooling” in the Age of Capital: Critical Insights from Advocacy Anthropology, Anthropology of Education, and Critical Disability Studies**

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## **Abstract**

This paper argues that the ideological and material reproduction of “effective schooling” in the *Age of Capital* functions to normalize and perpetuate the unequal social relations and oppressive dynamics that characterize free market economies and their accompanying political and cultural practices in the historical and educational context of the United States of America. I argue that the intersection of three perspectives furthers the work of scholars grounded in the various disciplines—advocacy anthropology, the anthropology of education, and the mutual engagement of anthropology and critical disability studies—and demonstrates that a multi-inter-transdisciplinary lens is essential for deepening an understanding of the discourses as well as the concrete practices that push ‘disorderly’ student subjects into precarious circumstances that threaten their physical, emotional, and psychological integrity.

## **Keywords**

Schooling, Education, Anthropology of Education, Advocacy Anthropology, Critical Disability Studies, Disability Studies in Education

### **Introduction: Performing multi-inter-transdisciplinarity**

This paper argues that the ideological and material reproduction of “effective schooling” in the *Age of Capital* functions to normalize and perpetuate the unequal social relations and oppressive dynamics that characterize free market economies and their accompanying political and cultural practices in the historical and educational context of the United States of America. I argue that the intersection of three perspectives furthers the work of scholars grounded in the various disciplines—advocacy anthropology, the anthropology of education, and the mutual engagement of anthropology and critical disability studies—and demonstrates that a multi-inter-transdisciplinarity lens is essential for deepening an understanding of the complexities of “effective schooling”, past, present, and future. Using the lens of advocacy anthropology, I will demonstrate the benefits of the mutual engagement of the anthropology of education, education studies more broadly, and critical disability studies.

This paper launches from the modern era that is post-*Brown vs. Board of Education* and Public Law 94-142, a historic case in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiff, a Black family, that their children had the legal right to desegregated public schooling; prior to *Brown vs. Board of Education* school districts were allowed to provide segregated “separate but equal” education, with more resources reserved for white students. *Brown* ushered in a new era of conceptualizing public schooling within the context of civil rights, but it did not set a cultural precedent of welcoming students whose bodies are deemed “unruly” under white supremacist capitalism by way of their negatively racialized and/or disabled identity. Rather, a civil rights approach to legislated integration of students construed as “unruly” may have instead set the stage for the approaches to “effective schooling” that I critique here, that is -- an effective schooling invested on normalization and assimilation. Because this paper is informed by a

disability justice framework (Berne, 2017; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Sins Invalid, 2019) it is important to note the overlap and intersections of both racism/ableism and the impact of effective schooling on our society at large, but particularly on those who live at the doubly-oppressive intersection of disability and race.

Taking my lead from Nirmala Erevelles (2002, 2011, 2014) and her work on the convergence of disciplinary technologies of the body and a number of key educational themes, I define “effective schooling” as *the process whereby “unruly bodies” are assimilated into the everyday functioning of schooling through the disciplinary technologies of modernity* (Erevelles, 2000, 2014). In keeping with a commitment to critical and intersectional disability studies, this paper explores “effective schooling” through the following questions and arguments:

1. How are processes of disablement framed within capitalist modes of production and, by implication, how and to what end are disabled subjectivities produced as ‘deviant’ within this framework? *I argue that an exploration of the production of disabled subjectivities through a moral therapeutics of “effective schooling” necessitates a joint analysis of racializing processes enabled by dominant discourses in anthropology and education as well as the practices that actualize and activate an educational politics of bodily control along the lines of disability and race through a series of sorting and labeling processes.*
2. Why do well-established disciplines such as anthropology and education have an ethical responsibility to engage with and enliven controversies such as the nature/nurture debate originating at different historical and disciplinary junctures? *I argue that due to anthropology’s historic engagement and participation in scientific racism and its legacies, such as participation in “effective schooling”, processes of assimilating students into whiteness - including whiteness’s construction of default abled-bodied*

*normativity - these disciplines have a responsibility to enliven historical debates, re-examine paradigm shifts, avoid reification and allow emancipation and growth beyond intellectual dogma.*

3. What are possible productive tensions and points of convergence between advocacy anthropology, anthropology of education, and critical disability studies? *I argue that examining “effective schooling” through the mutual engagement of critical disability studies and the anthropology of education through an advocacy anthropology lens is the way forward. Employing an advocacy anthropology lens emphasizes the need to move beyond discourse and intellectual dogma in order to enact sustainable social change.*

Drawing heavily from Anglo-American cultural anthropological theory, this paper revisits the nature/nurture debate, beginning with the work of relativist anthropologists in the 1920s (see Benedict, 2005; Boas, 1920; Herskovits, 1970; Mead, 2016). The ongoing nature/nurture debate in anthropology and education presents contrasting views of human personality and behavior as fixed, potentially along race or disability-based lines (nature) or as socially constructed/mediated (nurture), with important implications for how education and normalization - especially of those considered "unruly" or deviant - should be approached. A historical materialist analysis of the nature/nurture continuum helps to structure my argument along two interrelated lines of inquiry: 1) the birth of the anthropology of education and its roots in counter-evolutionism and against scientific racism; and 2) the legacies of the anthropology of education and its role in calling attention to contemporary labeling and sorting processes whereby ‘deviant’ student subjectivities are administered across time and space according to the neoliberal (ill)logics of economic readiness, independence, and “compulsory able-bodiedness” (McRuer, 2010).

This parallel investigation into the history of anthropology in education is important for reflection pertaining to the contemporary lived experiences of students positioned at the intersection of multiple oppressions along markers of race, class, ethnicity, gender expression, sexual orientation, citizenship status, religious practice, nationality etc. The overall goal of this paper is to use a multi-inter-transdisciplinary lens to expose the impact of effective schooling discourses as well as the concrete practices that push ‘disorderly’ *embodiminds* into precarious circumstances that threaten their physical, emotional, and psychological integrity (Price, 2015)<sup>1</sup>.

A preliminary survey of the literature in the anthropology of education indicates that there is dialogic and political value in opening my argument by revisiting the nature/nurture debate (Badcock, 2015; Bolton 2004; French, 2003; Howarth, 2010; Lewis & Watson-Gegeo, 2004; Niewöhner & Lock, 2018). I follow this line of inquiry, this time by adopting a multi-inter-transdisciplinary lens to examine the interconnectedness of discourse, the lived body, the cultural body, and the engineering of discrete subjectivities enduring at the frontiers of social recognition in “late liberal” contexts (Povinelli, 2011). Overall, there certainly is an intuitive logic to the convergence of anthropological, educational, and critical disability studies research, especially given that “relationships of power, knowledge, and identity as well as critiques of the effects of globalization and increasingly market-based neoliberal approaches to social policy are issues central...” to all three (González, 2010, p. S250).

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<sup>1</sup> Disability Studies scholar Margaret Price (2015) popularized the term “bodymind” to emphasize the symbiosis, rather than the independent functioning, of body *and* mind. This counter-Cartesian exercise inspired a new iteration of the term in my own writing – *embodimind*. From the perspective of an autistic writer who lives with chronic illness, this spinoff aims to signify the somatic experiences of neurological embodiment – in a way, this is to represent the soma of a brain that *is* the body and a body that *is* the brain.

I pose that a joint exploration of scholarly literature emerging from three different perspectives facilitates a clearer articulation of the assumptions that underlay the politics of effective schooling and, in turn, promises to yield alternative patterns of culture, new areas of exploration – and thus open the possibility of more just educational futures for multiply-marginalized students. My own experience crossing and converging disciplinary boundaries is described below in the form of a brief auto-ethnographic vignette that illustrates both opportunities and challenges, and ultimately the pressing need for an expanded, inter-multi-transdisciplinary approach to the study of effective schooling in the late stages of capitalism.

### **My first incursion into anthropology, or the death of Indiana Jones**

As I reflect on my emerging role and forming identity as an activist ethnographer, I often recall an exchange with my (then) graduate advisor. It was 2009 and I had just completed my graduate certificate in Disability Studies. I remember feeling decided as I walked up to his office on Temple's main campus. It was a cold December afternoon. Upon entering, I proclaimed with certainty and an air of pride: "I want to go for a PhD in Disability Studies." He received my enthusiasm with a validating nod and then asked me to think about the importance of translation—a recurring theme during our seminars and independent studies. "Anthropology," he said. I gestured confusedly and furrowed my brow. He continued, and I paraphrase, "We are a small, interdisciplinary field, and we have to continue to dialogue with scholars in the social sciences." Although I am trained in linguistics, I had never thought of anthropology as a viable option for me. As I assume is the case for many others who lack exposure to the rigorous and interdisciplinary nature of anthropological research, my view of anthropology as a discipline was biased by Hollywood stereotypes like the Indiana Jones popular fantasy franchise. Nevertheless,

the nature of my training in disability studies at Temple had forged a deeply political approach to disability and the disability experience, especially with regard to issues of identity formation, politicized autonomy, and collective self-direction. Observed through this lens, the idea of strategically infiltrating a new field appealed to me—and off I went.

In my introductory courses in cultural and linguistic anthropology, I finally understood my advisor's insistence on the need to continue dialoguing with the social sciences. As I found myself often asserting the foundational distinctions between the medical and the social models, as well as revisiting disability culture and politics in my classes, I realized that the academic context in which I found myself did not seem ready to receive the contributions of critical disability studies. To my surprise, while I saw the potential for synergy and rich interdisciplinary exchange, I also observed a lack of mutual engagement between the two disciplines (Kasnitz & Shuttleworth 1999, 2001; McDermott & Varenne, 1995).

Further, many of the ideas I brought seemed to fall flat within the context of a well-established medical anthropological approach to disability and illness (Whyte & Ingstad, 1995), which often also lacks engagement with disability studies and advocacy-oriented approaches in anthropology, and generally conceives of disability using a minority, rather than politicized model. In contrast, following a critical disability studies perspective, I conceive of disability not only as a highly oppressed form of embodied difference, but also as a cultural and political experience that merits study in and of itself. This politicized view of disability is enabled by my exploration of the possibilities latent in the mutual engagement of the anthropology of education, education studies more broadly, and critical disability studies. Overall, the convergence of anthropology and disability studies underscores the value of understanding the immediacy of marginalized cultures in our own backyard. It affirms that the exoticization of the *Other* does not



operate solely on the reification of geographical frontiers, the colonial imagery of a far-away land, or the fetishization of “primitive” regions and “simpler” societies where disability is culturally understood as a magical or spiritual gift (Evans-Pritchard, 1991, p. 194; see also Benedict, 1934).

It was in this context that I was so drawn to the work of Ruth Benedict (2005), which captured my interest and motivated me to find the right anthropology program (for me) - one that would enable me to continue the interdisciplinary work I describe above. I was particularly inspired by Benedict’s (1934) cross-cultural study of epilepsy in *Patterns of Culture*, as it was the first seminal study of disability in anthropology and remains a landmark for disability-related anthropological inquiry (Reid-Cunningham, 2009). In addition to rigorous scientific work and self-reflective ethnographic inquiry, one of Benedict’s most seminal contributions to the field was her work against scientific racism, especially as an originator of the anthropological study of education. Because scientific racism underlies much of the sorting and attempted normalization of deviant bodies at the heart of effective schooling, I will address this concept, including the tradition of resistance to it within the field of anthropology of education in more depth below.

The reflexive and auto-ethnographic tone of this paper originates from a fairly recent and transformative encounter with the anthropology of education, which is historically rooted in the *then* (1930-40s) revolutionary political agendas and innovative ethnographic methods advanced by the Boasian school (Boas, 1920; Handler, 1984). Named after German cultural anthropologist, Franz Boas, the foundations of this School were based on the theory of cultural relativism, which mobilized a crucial paradigm shift in anthropology. This new paradigm challenged the historical prevalence of nineteenth century evolutionism, the study of Amerindian cultures, reliance on and promulgation of scientific racism, and subsequent discriminatory policies resulting from the

troubled history of traditional anthropology and the colonial project (Handler, 1984). I read this paradigmatic shift as a preliminary - although consequential - challenge to the discipline's structurally racist foundations and an antidote to its haunting past. This shift, as well as the work of feminist anthropology and activist ethnography, encouraged my growing interest in the interplay between the history and the future/s of the anthropology of education in conversation with advocacy anthropology, and the possibilities of its mutual engagement with critical disability studies.

### **Historical Foundations: Towards a dialectical understanding of nature/nurture**

The problematic assumption that human groups who varied from the likeness of white European and North American colonizers were biologically and mentally inferior - in effect disabled - has been a central tenet of Western anthropology since its inception. The reification of this imaginary ladder figured as a “scientific” icon of systemic racism and subsequent anti-immigrant policies in Anglo-American societies (Greenfield, 2001, p. 41). Under this ladder, disabled people of all races, but especially disabled people who were not white, were coded as categorically inferior and deviant. In this sense, the social construction of disability is itself rooted in essentialist bias and pseudoscientific racism.

With their important contributions toward a dialectical understanding of the interplay between the biological and the social, commonly known as the nature/nurture debate, Boas and his students laid a political-cultural terrain wherein to expose and in-dispose deep-rooted legacies of racism and ethnocentrism in anthropology. Through their robust ethnographic fieldwork, (2005), Mead (2016), and Herskovits (1960) both confronted the pseudo-scientific basis for the classification of people into arbitrary categories of human worth. This imaginary

ladder, they argued, was construed according to the hegemonic imagery of the West and reified in the social policies engineered to uphold the bounded ecologies of modernity. Indeed, Benedict, Mead, and Herskovits worked to unsettle and disprove the assumption that “Western Europeans and their former North American colonials.... represented the pinnacle and standard by which others were to be judged” (Greenfield, 2001, p. 43). Instead, their ethnographic fieldwork foregrounded the political belief that:

Each culture was to be seen as a product of its unique history and resulted in a set of beliefs, values, and behaviors that were to be accepted on par, but different from those of Western Europe and North America, and each other. (p. 43)

Although the “true” intentions behind the Boasian project have been subject to substantial scrutiny and critiqued for the extractive nature of its work (a view with which I concur), its influence on the dialectical formulation of the nature/culture debate, which involves much more than “an abstract theoretical disagreement among dispassionate scientists” as well as its contributions to the development of the anthropology of education is not without import (González, 2010, p. 49; Greenfield, 2000). Thus, a more nuanced view of this classic debate is crucial to moving forward in our understanding of the specific cultural patterns that mark contemporary assumptions, values, and practices of effective schooling in the global North.

### **Classification in anthropology and education: scientific racism’s modern-day legacies**

Among the important contributions of cultural relativists was the articulation of an initial challenge to nineteenth century evolutionism and biological determinism in anthropology, including in the anthropology of education. However, the historic trajectory of scientific racism and sorting of bodies deemed unruly under white supremacy and capitalism has substantial legacies that result in modern day discriminatory educational policies with concrete and

dangerous impacts on the overall wellbeing of disabled students of color and their communities.

In other words, though the discursive impact of effective schooling must be understood as part of a long intellectual history, its material consequences must also be viewed through the lens of advocacy anthropology. This section examines the historical progression of a challenge first articulated but not fully examined by the Boasian School and the cultural relativists: the inevitable social and cultural consequences of scientific racism's present-day legacies upon students whose embodied minds are deemed unruly and uneducable.

As González (2010) puts it, “aspects of the dominant writing of anthropology were conscripted in the service of legitimizing the marginalization of many students, effectively undercutting the resources available in households and communities” (p. S251). As a result of these widespread beliefs, multiple societal systems developed with the intention of serving people instead grew into entrenched organizations deeply unprepared to serve people with multiple identities, particularly those living at the intersection of race, poverty, and disability<sup>2</sup>. In particular, extensive policies and practices supporting the “culture of poverty” approach led to additional labeling and segregation (Block et al., 2001). More recently, attention has shifted to the “school-to-prison pipeline” referring to unequal treatment of students of color in the punitive discipline systems of schooling (Annamma, 2018; Annamma et al., 2014; Artiles, 2013; Erevelles, 2014; Waitoller, 2020; Valle & Connor, 2019).

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<sup>2</sup> Returning to my own experience with introductory anthropology coursework, where I found that traditional social-cultural anthropology was often not ready for politicized, interdisciplinary understandings of disability as a culture unbounded by geography, I see an interesting point of tension with the wider historical acceptance of the “culture of poverty” hypothesis in anthropology. I propose that this differential treatment of two cultures that lack geographic bounds is related to the culture of poverty hypothesis's exoticification of the Other, which stands in contrast to critical disability studies and the disability justice movement's refusal to be othered, and our insistence on not just expanding representation within the academy, but transformation of oppressive structures therein.

Further, the continuation of these historical issues into present day can be seen in multiple aspects in the special education system that continues to subjectivize students, particularly those living at the intersection of multiple oppressed identities. Born from parent advocacy in reaction to their disabled children being barred from schooling and grounded in cultural notions discussed earlier, the special education system developed into a testing and sorting mechanism that simply uses different methods to segregate those at the margins (Carey et al., 2019; Valle & Connor, 2019). As Valle and Connor (2019) summarize, “Over the past 50 years, the structure of special education has been implicated repeatedly for stigmatizing difference, maintaining racial segregation, separating many migrant and indigenous children, diluting curriculum, limiting post-secondary opportunities, and contributing to the ‘school-to-prison pipeline’” (p. xv). Today it is well known and widely accepted that students of color and students from economically oppressed backgrounds are significantly overrepresented in the population of students labeled as disabled by public schools, segregated from peers and otherwise marginalized (Artiles, 2013; Connor et al., 2008). And yet, “the special education system remains, for the most part, intact and seemingly impervious to critique” (Connor & Valle, 2019, p. xv).

Notably, and as I argue elsewhere in this paper, a multi-inter-transdisciplinary approach informed by advocacy anthropology is particularly well suited to foreground a genealogical analysis of exclusionary practices in education starting with a history of the present (Foucault, 1980) of effective schooling, that is - how it is construed and experienced in contemporary contexts - and ending with an overview of how historical research can be used to redress and ultimately transcend disciplinary technologies in education and the racial and ableist violences

reproduced therein. The crossing of disciplinary boundaries and the politicized view of disability *as* culture I bring to my current scholarship is also situated in this dialogue.

### **The Origins and Legacies of the Anthropology of Education: The Neoliberal grip of effective schooling**

Almost a century later, however, the rationalization and normalization of effective schooling policies that disenfranchise students of marginalized identities are still present with even more force under the grip of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism in schooling was seen for instance in the forced integration of U.S. schools after *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court case discussed above (McCarty & Castagno, 2018), and was used to study its implications for public policy and its role in exposing and transforming the invisible processes within educational policies as they worked to affect racial disparities within education (Clement & Harding, 2016; Collins, 1978; Eddy, 1985, p. 85; Greenfield, 2001, p. 35; McCarty & Castagno, 2018; Ogbu, 1978). These policies continue to rely on a rhetoric of accountability in educational provision that assumes that “inequalities [are] inevitably determined and fixed” by ‘deficient’ biogenetic traits (González, 2010, p. 43-44).

In its inception, the forerunners of the anthropology of education countered these unfounded racist beliefs and their accompanying practices by demonstrating the import of anthropological inquiry in advancing equitable practices in education (e.g. Coleman et al., 1966; Lewis, 1959 as cited by McCarty & Castagno, 2018; Myrdal, 1944). Cultural relativists demonstrated that human behaviors were not inherent in any inevitable human nature or biological heritage, but rather tied to particular forms of cultural exposure. A revision of the nature/nurture concept proved crucial to this endeavor.

More concretely, Boas' students revitalized an exploration of the culture concept in education and expanded its edges against-and-beyond Western-centric paradigms, particularly in promoting the incorporation of students' culture into the often hidden schooling processes of assimilating students into whiteness - including whiteness's construction of default abled-bodied normativity (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Cazden & Leggett, 1976; González et al., 2005; McCarty & Castagno, 2018; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris, 2012). For these thinkers, González (2010, p. S251) notes, the culture concept "was an important tool for understanding both cultural continuity and discontinuity within schooling processes as well as an important antidote against the assumption of genetic differences as causative explanations for differential academic achievement." Importantly, drawing on Boasian traditions, ethnographic studies in education provided important insight into the cultural reproduction of racism as they occurred through the cultural processes situated within education that served to sort and stratify students along a continuum of race and disability (Ladson-Billings, 2004; McCarty & Castagno, 2018). I contend that this approach is as vital as ever in approaching effective schooling and the modern manifestations of systemic racism, such as the school-to-prison pipeline or the overrepresentation of students of color within the special education system.

In sum, the work of early anthropologists of education opened the door to rethinking the culture concept in terms of complexity and multiplicity and, by extension, invited a challenge and a refiguration of modern education systems steeped in racism and ableism. In other words, the work of anthropologists of education, past and present, invites us to consider current educational landscapes not as an unalterable, homogenous and neutral configuration, but rather as a set of situated, heterogeneous practices that can "breach and displace authorizing paradigms" (González, 2010, p. S250).

### **The contributions of Postmodernism**

The conceptual framework of this paper benefits from an engagement with postmodern thought (Atkinson, 2000a, 2000b; Blake, 1996; Foucault, 1980) to further explain my argument that the anthropology of education and disability studies in education both work to unmask dominant cultures of schooling and their investment in the certainty of knowledge, the decidability of ‘truth’ (knowledge/power) and the dichotomous identities engineered therein.

Due to reasons of scope, I do not claim to provide an overview of the intellectual and political trajectories of the most celebrated postmodern thinkers here—see for instance Foucault (1972, 1980, 1990, 1995); Derrida (1976, 1982); Baudrillard (1994, 1995), Deleuze (1968, 1994, 2005); Deleuze & Guattari (1988, 2004); Butler (1990, 2006), Barthes (1968, 2012); Bourdieu (1986, 1991); or Lyotard (1984, 2011). I do, however, call attention to the contributions that a sustained critique of accepted modes of being, thinking, and relating within networked webs of knowledge/power has to offer to any form of liberatory work (Rabinow, 1984). Indeed, when it comes to the subversion and, ultimately, destruction of “a wide variety of settled assumptions concerning society, culture and the nature of the individual and questions concerning knowledge and truth” (Black, 1996, p. 42), postmodernism has been prolific and generative (Haraway, 1988, 2003; Harding, 2016; Butler, 1990; Mikula, 2008; Stronach & McLure, 1997). Yet, postmodernism and its main political-analytical tool, deconstruction, has been firmly called to more discernibly respond to the political, cultural and precarious materialities that are tangibly tethered to the figurations of the textual and the hermeneutic (Cole & Hill, Cole et al, 1997; Greenfield, 2000; Sahlins, 1993; Spiro 1996).

The concept of “new materialism” further extends this dialogue. In a 2012 interview with Karen Barad, Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin noted that the work of new materialism



“reveals the monist or ‘immanent’ orientations in its rethinking of humanism, dualism, and linear time, with its concomitant possibilities for a transversal and affirmative methodology, or ‘practical philosophy’” (para.1). Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012) also proposed that in rethinking the work of philosophers connected to the events of May 68’, among them and most influential to them Gilles Deleuze, DeLanda (2006) and Braidotti (2011) independently coined the analytical framework of “new materialism” in the mid 1990s, managing to seize and disarm the trap of modernity’s dualistic onto-epistemology (para. 1). According to Barad (as cited in Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012) new materialism goes beyond anti-Cartesianism to extrapolate the possibilities of thinking of the body *with* the mind and of the mind *with* the body fashioning an organismic network or assemblage of differently textured matter . I read this entangled materiality through what disability studies scholar Margaret Price (2015) otherwise termed the “bodymind.” To further situate their argument, Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012) Donna Haraway’s (2003) term “naturecultures” and reiterate that the “travelling of the fluxes of nature and culture, matter and mind,” are always already in symbiosis, always already entangled (p.48).

Following on the pioneering work of Benedict, Mead, and Herskovits in the 1920s and 1930s, and drawing on the postmodern notions of fluidity, immanence, flow, and emergence (Butler, 1990; Deleuze, 2005; Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, 2004), contemporary anthropologists of education (González, 2010; Henry, 1955/2011; Levinson et al., 2020; Ruth Benedict 1938/2011; Spindler, 1997) and scholars in disability studies in education (Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019; Mueller, 2019; Slee et al., 2019) acknowledge “[that] the textual construction of student identities (González, 2010, p. S250)” tethered Foucault’s use of genealogy and his key insights into the knowledge/power nexus and how it operates in concrete historical contexts (Foucault,

1980). Foucault's postmodernist genealogy excavates and analyses power struggles in concrete historical contexts. He follows these trajectories from an early focus on disciplinary technologies of control to more productive forms of subjectivation such as bio-power and governmentality. Put otherwise, in his early work, Foucault theorized knowledge and power primarily as punitive co-constitutive forces; in his later work, his focus shifted to conceptualize knowledge and power as productive co-constitutive forces (Devetak, 2013).

In sum, Foucault's genealogical excavation and his insights into knowledge and power helps us to understand the historical shift between punitive schooling and moral schooling. Whereas in the era of the Great Confinement (1600-1750) punitive schooling functioned as a proxy of population control via the "negative neutralizing of disorder" and "material disciplinary techniques" (Deacon, 2006, pp. 179, 180), mid-nineteenth century modern schooling saw the dawn of a new political economy of coercion. Its reach was productive and its function was to deploy new "relays of power and knowledge through which individual and collective subjects could be managed, their context regulated, their capacities augmented and their effects channeled" (Deacon, 2006, p. 181) into the world of work. Deacon (2006) termed the latter the "moral orthopedics of schooling" (p.177).

Following a Foucauldian perspective, these "moral orthopedics of schooling" must be examined within the specific historical and material contexts within which selected student subjectivities are formed and sequestered (Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019; Mueller, 2019). In the following section, I discuss the relevance of these theories and practices in connection with the managerial administration of disabled students across time and space within the functional regime of late liberalism (Povinelli, 2011) and the disciplinary culture that emboldens it, which is

in turn a legacy of scientific racism, grounded in sorting and fixing (and even disposing of) unruly/deviant embodied minds.

### **‘Effective’ Schooling and the Discursive *Effect* of Education**

To explore the relevance of these theories, practices, and histories of the spatial/temporal administration of disabled students under the regime discussed above, I focus on the following questions:

- How does the nature/nurture formulation impact the lives of disabled students labeled biologically and mentally inferior?
- How are processes of disablement (Oliver & Barnes, 2012) framed within capitalist modes of re/production and, by extension, how and to what end are disabled subjectivities produced as deviant within this framework?
- What is the role of effective schooling in reproducing and exacerbating inequality?

I do not claim to offer a complete and clearly defined answer for each of these questions (most immediately, this would be an impossible endeavor, and second, claiming to offer totality would defeat the purpose of this paper). What I do offer, however, is another entry point for multi-inter-transdisciplinary dialogue and a springboard for future research.

As Deacon (2006) notes, “the experience which we call education has been produced through historical forms of constraint and their analytical corollaries, discourses of teaching and learning” (p. 178). As such, and built on the legacy of biogenetics and scientific racism, the imaginary ladder of educational development is primarily echeloned in this fashion: Those who know and those who do not; those who teach and those who learn; those who can learn and those who cannot learn; those who are deserving of learning and those who are not deserving; those

who are *educable* and those who are not (Slee et al., 2019). My argument here is that dualist discourses of teaching and learning undergird the task of ‘effective’ schooling, which is the task of a *functional* life— that is, a life that revolves around the imperative of consumerism, economic self-sufficiency, and independence from the resources of the State (Atkinson, 2000a, 2000b, Atkinson; De Lissovoy 2015)

In this light, and drawing on Gonzáles’ (2004) concept of ‘quality education’, which is defined as the end-goal of educational reforms such as “federal law implementing widespread testing in an attempt to raise student achievement”, I propose the notion of ‘effective’ schooling as a complementary framework to the neoliberal and authoritarian quadrants that undergird ‘accountability’ policies (Ravitch, 2016; De Lissovoy, 2015). Extending this concept of “quality” education, the concept of effective schooling can be used to trace the roots of neoliberal disciplinary technologies back to the knowledge/power nexus. As discussed above, Foucault’s use of the genealogical method enabled an exploration of the capillary and productive nature of modern power in connection with “the schemes of conceptual understanding, systems of categories, [and] scientific theories” of a particular time period, a concept that Foucault termed “episteme” (Potts, 2011, para. 5; see also Foucault, 2002).

For Foucault, there is more freedom to the modern conception of power than is sometimes understood. Power for Foucault is not simply constraining, but rather productive insofar as it regulates bodies in a way that sustains existing structures and economic systems that profit from the subjectivation and managerial control of disability. I have posed that “[A] careful look at Foucault’s *governmentality*, that is—a productive yet constraining form of governance (productive power) that brings everything under gaze ... the making of [student] subjects is achieved and sustained through a network system of productive and reproducible

compliances...” (Acevedo Espinal & Nusbaum, 2020, p. 4). Within modern schooling systems, subjectivizing practices operate through binaries -- positives and negatives -- and ultimately through the antithetical construction of the self and the *Other*. Within such systems, students are thus construed as either productive (independent) marketable goods or as dependent bodily excess. These power relations operate on the basis of multiple social forces -- a historical push-pull predicated on a battle over meaning. Elsewhere I have argued that, “an understanding of the student-subject as *someone* who *acts* within and against subjectivizing power structures ‘beyond the purely negative act of disobedience’ (Foucault et al., 2007, p. xxi) requires an understanding of the engineering of docility (or reproducible compliance) beyond a binary understanding of power relations (e.g., sovereign and subject, physician and patient, teacher and student)” (Acevedo Espinal & Nusbaum, 2020, p. 4).

In the section below, I explain how effective schooling operates through biomedical frameworks that reproduce cultural, political, and material precarity. The medicalization of schooling construes student bodies as either problems to be fixed and ready for the labor market or as natural recipients of therapeutic “education”. Although the power of these frameworks has been questioned by each of these fields independently, further multi-inter-transdisciplinary inquiry into how they operate and how they wield and maintain power is imperative in order to address the systemic precarity of schooling for disabled students of color. In other words, using an advocacy anthropology perspective, scholars from multiple disciplines can and frankly must work collaboratively to explore historical landmarks, overlapping trajectories, oppressions and resistances in order to understand the entrenched systemic injustice within the biomedical practices of effective schooling - and the racism and ableism therein - in order to collectively identify, address and right harms.

### **Impact of biomedical frameworks on the pedagogical sanctioning of “effective schooling”**

From a biomedical perspective, the nature/nurture formulation claims to substantiate the etiology of disability as a form of inherent ‘deficiency’ and ‘lack’ for which only the individual “affected” is responsible (Mehan, 1993). Within this onto-epistemological framework, disability is routinely conceptualized and handled as pathological and undesirable, not only within medicalizing discourses and enclosures, but also in the context of everyday life (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Understood as such, the subjectivation of disabled students occurs through a system wherein they are made to form a *docile* (compliant) identity and to exist as the embodied antithesis of their able-bodied peers (Acevedo Espinal and Nusbaum, 2018; De Lissovoy, 2015; Foucault, 1995; Valle, 2009). Positioned in this way, students “with disabilities” become the ‘natural’ recipients of cure, rehabilitation, residential care, and medico-therapeutic forms of schooling—common interventions include speech therapy, physical therapy, psychotherapy, occupational therapy, recreational therapy, and music therapy among others (Petrina, 2006). Within this framework, disabled students are treated as patients, as opposed to students, and are thus primarily thought of as otherwise uneducable and thus unproductive (Jagger & Bauman, 2002).

Within the special education system, however, disabled students are not perceived as inherently deficient, but rather conceptualized as targets of structural and cultural discrimination based on the negative socialization of their perceived impairments (Mehan, 1993; Oliver & Barnes, 2012; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). Therefore, when they perform ‘normalcy’, disabled students are thought of as *educable* and thus potentially marketable (Govindshenoy & Spencer, 2007; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006).

In order to understand the full import of effective schooling, it is imperative to consider the broader context of disability as it is intertwined with other marginalized identities. Disability studies in education scholars (Annama, 2018; Artiles, 2013; Erevelles, 2000, 2014; Ferri et al., 2018; Valle & Connor, 2019; Waitoller, 2020) have written about the overrepresentation of children of color in special education, which is disproportionate to their overall population numbers in the school system. This is a phenomenon that disability studies scholars and disability justice activists alike critique as reflective of systemic racism within the educational system and society at large, and position it as emblematic of effective schooling's investment in classifying and criminalizing (rather than supporting and advocating for) children from structurally oppressed communities. The main question here is then, where do Black and Brown disabled students figure within neoliberal education's disciplinary schema? Critical disability studies and education studies literature indicate that students whose embodied identities intersect along a continuum of undesirable markers of identity face ever-narrowing thresholds of assimilation "opportunities" within the centralizing education landscapes of neoliberalism (Atkinson, 2000a, 2000b; De Lissovoy, 2015; Erevelles, 2000, 2014). The criminalization of race and the racialization of disability are to be understood, along the nature/nurture dichotomy, as co-constitutive neoliberal scripts. In other words, the mechanisms through which race-disability-criminality are set in motion as "naturally" entangled, are in fact culturally engineered within the very enclosures within which they are ascribed their meaning (Bourdieu, 1991). Within said enclosures, disabled students of color are portrayed as irreversibly damaged, often inherently corrupt, and their bodies handled as cultural excess -- to allow more room for disabled whiteness (Annamma, 2018; Annamma et al., 2014; De Lissovoy, 2015; Ferri & Connor, 2009; Watts &

Erevelles, 2002). “Effective” schooling in this case proves successful insofar as it manages to deliver “multiple separations” (Foucault, 1995, p. 198).

Students marked for *intrusive procedures, assessment, and management* are dependent upon a political economy that has established absolute authority over every aspect of everyday life, and where their subjectivity is “reconstructed ... into an ensemble of more or less powerful ‘achievement’ machines” (De Lissovoy, 2015, p. 37, 39). There is no question that the neoliberal education market depends upon the polarization of students’ identities across binary lines (marketable/non-marketable). This polarization glosses over the fluidity and hybridity of the human experience and its entangled materialities, that is —fluid organisms that inhere into their own parts —*naturecultures* (Barnartt, 2010; Haraway, 2003).

Ultimately, marketable education reifies for-profit subjectivities within the quadrants of neoliberal accountability (Berne, 2015; Brown, 2002; Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1980; Mitchell & Snyder, 2015; Stratigos, 2015). Indeed, the neoliberal machine endeavors to strangle the affirmative vital forces that elude prescriptive flows of identity along binary lines. In Deleuzian political philosophy these flows of desire, “... [N]o matter how small, [are] capable of calling into question the established order of society” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/2004, p. 126).

## **Moving forward: Disability as culture**

### ***Convergence of disciplines***

I have argued that each of the disciplines upon whose work I draw question the simultaneous subjectivation and marketability of disabled and other marginalized students in schools. Within the bounds of their disciplines, each field works to uncover effective schooling ideologies and practices that force disabled students into dichotomous categories and experiences (such as those resulting from outcomes of standardized testing required by No Child Left



Behind). Within this convergence of disciplines, I have also explored “effective schooling”, drawing from the power/knowledge nexus theory, the binaried construction of identity in modern schooling, and critiques of the political economy of neoliberalism as it applies to marketable education. This trifecta promises to yield alternative patterns of cultural analysis in education as well as continue to build toward more socially just trajectories in schooling for *all* students.

Moving forward, it is only through an affirmation of disability as a cultural and political experience that multi-inter-transdisciplinary work can succeed to challenge discourses and structures of “effective schooling”. In this case, combining the core principles of advocacy anthropology, the anthropology of education, and the mutual engagement of anthropology and critical disability studies can and must be responsive to disability communities’ self-identified political agendas and goals, not only in education, but also in every other area that impacts our lives. Moreover, the need for an expansion of transdisciplinarity within anthropology itself is evident in the many silences and erasures I have encountered around and about disability in the field’s otherwise socially responsible and materially applicable literature (Linton, 1998). The mutual engagement of anthropology and disability studies is not new and its roots are tethered to the fundamental idea that the disability experience *is* a cultural experience (Kasnitz & Shuttleworth, 2001; McDermott & Varenne, 1995).

Observed through the lens of advocacy anthropology, the convergence of the anthropology of education, education studies more broadly, and critical disability studies underscores the value of understanding the immediacy of marginalized cultures, embodied minds, and identities in our own backyard. This mutual engagement is a theoretical and heuristic intervention: it uncovers and alters the political and cultural configurations, social relations of production, and institutional enclosures within which disabled people are erased as agential

forces and shapers of naturecultures. A prolific conversation between these disciplines goes beyond the deconstruction of oppressive systems and dwells instead with the poetics of our cultural survival and the vibrancy of our homecultures.

***Implications for education scholars in all areas***

From an advocacy anthropology perspective, scholars in the anthropology of education, education more broadly, and critical disability studies can benefit from exploring the historical landmarks and paradigm shifts of each discipline as well as the importance of mapping overlapping trajectories and connections such as the ones described in this paper. As a case in point, a multi-trans-interdisciplinary revision of the nature/nurture debate beyond the polarizing continuum model enables a more nuanced understanding of the limitations of either/or approaches as well as a more critical look at the role sharply polarized views play in the perpetuation of systemic injustice in education and beyond.

Some concrete strategies for addressing gaps across disciplines might include, for example, scholars in the anthropology of education and education scholars more broadly recognizing and incorporating critical disability studies scholarship and its wide-ranging contributions into the archival heritage of disability. For instance, 1) critical disability studies scholars have documented the historization of disability, including systemic erasures from cultural movements, and rhizomatic entanglements of the past and present as well as the impact of both in unfolding futures; 2) critical disability studies affirms disability *as* culture in both its fluidity and in its grounding in heterogeneous although concrete community practices.

Finally, one of the major implications for scholars in education studies (including in anthropology) is the challenge of meaningfully incorporating critical disability studies theories and methodologies into educational practices; especially practices that function as gatekeepers of

access to equitable opportunities and resources and thus impact the material, emotional, and psychological wellbeing of disabled students living at the intersection of multiple oppressions. That said, shedding a light on the benefits of multi-inter-transdisciplinarity opens up the possibility to move beyond rights-based approaches to disability in education scholarship (including in anthropology) and upend existing systems built on liberal ideals of inclusion, rather than on holistic access and justice.

As an example, Disability Studies in Education has worked to reframe assumptions of educators that are grounded in deficit models and involve teachers in discussion about ableism with the purpose of developing inclusive schools (Connor et al., 2008). However, this paper brings to light the need for broader understandings of the origins as well as cultural and political movements silently undergirding the field of education in order to move forward with a plural approach across disciplines. Indeed, resistance against the current neoliberal (assimilationist) education system comes from employing various disciplinary lenses and entry points specifically geared toward exposing and subverting the precarious experiences of students enduring under oppressive systems. This paper offers additional tools in this pursuit.

To close, the pluralistic discussions presented here have brought into focus the symbiosis between modernity's onto-epistemology of dualism, the cultural and political configurations that sustain it, and the institutional enclosures within which it materializes in various contexts—including in academia. This paper models and further advocates multi-inter-and-transdisciplinarity by weaving in critical insights from advocacy anthropology and teasing out possibilities for the mutual engagement of anthropology, education studies more broadly, and critical disability studies. Overall, the concepts and themes explored throughout this paper contribute to a multilayered exposure of the disciplinary technologies of effective schooling as

well push the envelope against the primacy of anthropological studies of human difference steeped in legacies of racism and ableism.

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