**The Halls of Higher (Mis)Education: Confessions of an ~~Inclusive~~ Educator**

**Priya Lalvani**

**Montclair State University**

**Abstract**

In this conceptual essay, I outline some ways in which teacher education programs may reify problematic ideologies with regard to students with disabilities, and I invite educators to consider the language, structures, and practices through which ableism is produced/reproduced in the academy. Grounding my arguments in the central tenets of disability studies in education and social justice education, I make a case for a paradigm shift in teacher education programs and a move toward liberating agendas that seek to confront the existing practice of institutionally sanctioned segregation of students with disabilities in schools. To this end, I argue, we need to first position inclusive education broadly as democratic practice for all students, and as a political issue relevant to all teachers.

*Keywords*: ableism; teacher education; inclusive education; social justice education; disability studies

**The Halls of Higher (Mis)Education: Confessions of an ~~Inclusive~~ Educator**

Disability has a troubling relationship with the academy; its place in the context of higher education leaves much to be desired. As Dolmage (2017) asserted, disability has long been positioned as the antithesis of higher education—as a distraction, a drain, a problem to be solved, or an obstacle to be tolerated. Despite increasing acknowledgement on many campuses of the value of diversity and the need to recognize and confront structural forms of oppression, issues rooted in ableism continue to be overlooked. Instead, the stigma associated with disability is often reified. In higher education, there exists a mass consumption of deficit models and biologically deterministic understandings of disability, even among those who acknowledge or teach about the constructed nature of other categories such as race or gender (Erevelles et al., 2006). One reason may be that, historically, disability has been conceptualized as a problem located within individuals. In colleges and universities, matters related to disability are generally understood to be within the purview of the offices of disability resources or disability services centers (which go by different names). While these entities provide undoubtedly necessary services, they tend to focus mostly on securing accommodations for individual students, and not as much on establishing broad access on campuses through the examining and changing of ableist policies and practices that limit the participation of individuals with disabilities. Ableism refers to the persistent devaluing of disability, or viewpoints in which disability is understood as an inherently negative state of being (Campbell, 2009); it unfolds as a system of oppression that operates at individual, cultural, and institutional levels (Rauscher & McClintock, 1997). By addressing issues of access for individuals with disabilities on a case-by-case basis, institutions leave structural issues, policies, and practices unchanged. Additionally, there often exists, even alongside progressive discourses and agendas aimed at greater diversity, equity, and democratic education, a relative silence on the topic of disability oppression, and able-bodied privilege remains largely unnamed in the academy.

The otherness of individuals with disabilities is sometimes reified, implicitly or explicitly, through higher education coursework itself. For example, Goodley (2011) asserted, psychology, with its dichotomous formulations of normal and abnormal behavior, has played a role in historical constructions of disability as pathology. Conceptualizing disability as embodied within individuals, practitioners in this field are trained to understand the psychological experience of disability as the result of impairments rather than as an interaction of impairments and sociopolitical environments in which people with disabilities are often denied access. Similarly, disciplines such as child development, social work, family studies, and many others have contributed to the construction of the Other through dichotomous formulations of typical versus atypical development, and functional versus dysfunctional family dynamics, or through restrictive definitions of healthy psychological adjustment, appropriate forms of self-expression, and so on. Sometimes implicit in the professional training of various disciplines are the boundary lines for *which* groups the discipline seeks to study or serve. For instance, over many years as an instructor teaching child development courses, it has not escaped my attention that children with disabilities do not feature in significant ways in its textbooks. Instead, they are usually relegated to the obligatory (and separate) chapter entitled “atypical development,” or “the exceptional child,” or, if the textbook’s author chose to approach it differently, in textboxes scattered across the book as a nod to the existence of children with disabilities. It seems that in the textbooks of child development, there is an implicit assumption that the child being referred to is a nondisabled one; it is generally accepted that individuals with disabilities are the topic of study in the coursework of special education, rehabilitation therapy, or various other fields devoted to serving children or adults with disabilities.

I initially encountered this dividing line in how children are conceptualized during my doctoral studies in developmental psychology. I recall being informed on more than one occasion, when I had inquired why we did not cover developmental issues as they relate to the experiences of individuals with disabilities, that I might consider taking a course in developmental psychopathology. The development we were studying was assumed to be that of “regular” people. In this and multiple other ways, notions about what counts as normative, adaptive, resilient, and so on, are constructed and communicated to future professionals. Additionally, ableist cultural attitudes and dominant master narratives that center on notions of disability as undisputable tragedy and outside the parameters of normative human experiences are upheld. The “gatekeepers of normalcy” (Lalvani, 2017) define and guard the parameters of what is socio-culturally defined as acceptable and desirable in families and among children.

Since I am presently a teacher educator whose work is grounded in disability studies perspectives, I focus my attention here on the ways in which ableism plays out in schools in the United States, and the role of higher education in maintaining the status quo. Ironically, the business of teacher education itself, with its dichotomy of general and special education—each with its own programs, coursework, certifications, and underlying implications about the two distinct sets of students it serves—can be implicated in the reification of the otherness of individuals with disabilities (Connor & Ferri, 2007; Linton, 1998; Skrtic, 1991). Elsewhere, I have argued that despite a growing focus on cultivating the dispositions of teacher candidates with regard to democratic and anti-bias education, there is little discussion on the dispositions of teacher educators themselves, with regard to ableism (for a full discussion, see: Lalvani et al., 2015). I revisit this idea here, and extend it further by outlining some ways in which teacher education programs perpetuate problematic ideologies with regard to students with disabilities; and I invite all educators to consider language, structures, and practices through which ableism is produced or reproduced in teacher education.

**Teacher Education and the Reproduction of the Otherness of
Students with Disabilities**

Elsewhere, I have made the claim that the gatekeepers of normalcy—professionals in the fields of psychology, social work, counseling, and so on—will find ready allies in the field of education, and, among them, leading the charge are special education professionals (Lalvani, 2017). Conceptually based in the medical paradigm of disability, special education locates disability within individual minds and bodies. When ableist perspectives are applied in educational contexts, they manifest as an institutional focus on the “normalization” of school children (Baker, 2016) and as expectations that the learning disabilities children experience be remediated so that they may learn or behave in the same ways as nondisabled individuals (Hehir, 2005). That the system of special education is fundamentally flawed, rooted in a deficit model, and ends up marginalizing or segregating many students with disabilities, has been widely critiqued (e.g., Connor, 2012; Gabel & Connor, 2009, 2014; Brantlinger, 2006b; Bagleiri & Shapiro, 2017).

Alternatively, disability studies (DS), an interdisciplinary forum for inquiry and activism, theorizes disability as a socio-culturally constructed phenomenon, its meaning situated in sociopolitical contexts (Linton, 1998; Davis, 2002; Hahn, 1997). Here, disability is positioned as an inevitably occurring form of human variation and a facet of diversity, rather than as embodied deficits. DS scholars petition us to remove our collective gaze from individual impairments, and focus it instead on cultural and institutional practices that contribute to systematic oppression and negative outcomes for disabled people (Linton, 1998). Conceptually framed in these critical perspectives, Disability Studies in Education (DSE) has emerged as a resistance against the oppression of children and young people with disabilities in and through education (Slee et al., 2019). From DSE perspectives, inclusive education is broadly conceptualized as a civil right and as a practice that relates to equitable access to educational resources and general education curricula for all groups of students. As Lester and Nusbaum (2018) note, its uniting thread is the commitment to reclaiming disability (Linton, 1998) as an empowered and positive identity marker, and to undo the damage done through negative representations and ableist schooling practices.

In the sections that follow, I use a DSE-informed and social justice-based framework to address the following questions:

1. In what ways is the otherness of students with disabilities produced (or reproduced) in the academy, often, ironically, in the very spaces in which we seek to do the opposite?
2. What are the mechanisms through which teacher education programs sanction ideologies of “separate and equal” for students with disabilities?
3. How do teacher education programs uphold restrictive notions about normality, and serve as a production line for future educators who are not prepared to disrupt ableist schooling practices?

**Parallel System of Teacher Education**

In dominant educational discourses, “inclusion” is considered a matter pertaining to students with disabilities. In schools, since all issues related to students with disabilities are generally relegated to the purview of special education, it is often taken as a given that the actual work of inclusion will be done by the special education professionals assigned to provide the relevant services. This idea is mirrored in teacher education; coursework in inclusive philosophy and pedagogy is most commonly offered within programs leading to certification in teaching students with disabilities. Pre-service and in-service teachers tend to think of themselves as either general education or special education teachers, and many hold the belief that only those with specific credentials are equipped to teach or interact with students with disabilities (Lalvani, 2013; Young, 2008). However, as Sarason (1990) noted:

School personnel are graduates of our colleges and universities. It is there that they learn that there are at least two types of human beings, and if you choose to work with one of them you render yourself legally and conceptually incompetent to work with others. (p. 258)

At the root of this dichotomous thinking may be the ways in which states deal with teacher certification and require universities and colleges to prepare teachers. In New Jersey, as in many other states, this is achieved through two separate tracks of teacher preparation, leading to certifications in either general or special education. This presupposes that the skills needed by general and special education teachers are distinct, and, by extension, reinforces the notion that there are two distinct sets of children—disabled and nondisabled (Connor & Ferri, 2007; Linton, 1998). The existence of this bifurcated system of education and of its problematic underlying assumptions are rarely discussed in teacher education.

Ware (2005) aptly notes that most teacher credential programs “have failed to imagine possibilities beyond the parameters of inherited institutional practice” (p. 105). To wit, traditional programs in special education are sometimes repackaged or labeled as programs in inclusive education—some in name only, others genuinely oriented in inclusive philosophy and committed to equipping teachers with pedagogical strategies to teach inclusively. In either case, however, the repurposing or rebranding of traditional special education as “inclusive education” (Slee, 2001) can be critiqued, since, ironically, their philosophies on inclusion exists within the context of a system that formally separates special and general education by maintaining parallel systems of teacher preparation, with separate certifications and different coursework linked to each track. Furthermore, as Brantinger (2006a) notes, the “big glossy” (and separate) textbooks of general and special education uphold a bifurcated system of education and construct problematic notions about disability. She explicates that in many of the special education textbooks, marketed with enticing features to sell them, there is little critical content with regard to the potentially damaging aspects of schooling structures and the diagnostic gaze. Instead, through their categorical chapters about types of disability or their normalizing discourses, many of these textbooks reinforce the notion that disability is intrinsic to the person, leaving an ableist educational system unquestioned (Brantlinger, 2006a).

Sometimes the solution to the problem of general education teachers not having enough understanding about teaching students with disabilities is addressed through the adding of a course or two in special education within general education teacher preparation. This, too, Slee (2001) argues, is a fundamentally flawed model because it embraces the same assumptions about special education as a distinct kind of education. Additionally, these added units of study are typically aimed at introducing students to the disorders or to pedagogical strategies, but do not necessarily introduce students to the ways in which ableism plays out in schools, or to conceptualizations of inclusivity as a practice pertaining to democratic education for students with a range of intersecting identities, not just those with disabilities “who are able to be included.” Thus, not only do we limit the definition of inclusive education, we fail to position inclusivity in all aspects of schools and communities as a fundamental civil right of *all* students, and as relevant to *all* teachers. This begs the question, even if teachers felt prepared, would they be inclined to engage in inclusive practice if they failed to understand the reasons for this engagement? Sending teachers out with a few strategies in their tool belt without attending to their underlying dispositions toward inclusive education and, by extension, their position on the existence of segregated schools and classrooms for some children, may be futile.

As Young (2008) cautions, if we retain a system such that we cannot prepare teachers to teach all children, then we reproduce boundary categories and create divisions among students that result in inequitable experiences and outcomes. The dual credentialing system, coupled with a societal acceptance of exclusion of students with disabilities, plays a role in the development of professional identities of general education teachers who believe they are only able to teach certain students and allows for a diffusion of responsibility for the education of students with disabilities to special educators alone.

**Institutional Sanction for *Separate but Equal* Education**

Coursework aimed at preparing teachers to work with students with disabilities generally includes providing some information about special education laws, specifically the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) and its historical journey. It is worth noting that the impetus for this legislation was the civil rights movement of the 1950s pioneered by African Americans who mobilized to protest their marginal status and secure access to civil rights in all areas; their efforts resonated with other marginalized groups, including people with disabilities, who also sought to access their civil rights. (Connor & Goldmansour, 2012). In the disability rights movement, parents were instrumental in aggressively seeking equitable educational opportunities for their children with disabilities. Through the actions of parents, who joined forces with activists with disabilities and allies, the landmark Education of All Handicapped Children Act (1975) was passed (the predecessor of current laws), which gave children with disabilities the right to a public education, previously denied to them. Later, in response to the segregated classrooms and schools that emerged for students with disabilities, the inclusive education movement was born; parents who were proponents of inclusion claimed that it was their children’s civil right to be educated within neighborhood schools and in classrooms that mirrored the population at large (Connor & Goldmansour, 2012).

 These historical events are likely to be included in the textbooks and coursework of special education, as are various key aspects of current laws as they pertain to the education of students with disabilities. However, less likely to be discussed with preservice teachers is the idea that, despite IDEIA’s initial emancipatory intent, it is problematic in many ways. DSE scholars argue that it is a fundamentally flawed law, and in fact the very mechanism through which the separation of students with disabilities is justified. Indeed, it seems, ableism was baked into special education legislation from its inception (Lalvani & Hale, 2015). Although the inclusive education movement was modeled after the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 60s, laws pertaining to separations in schools in the case of race/ethnicity and disability look very different. Segregation on the basis of ethnicity and the principle of “separate but equal” was declared invalid in the landmark ruling, *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* (1954);however, Education of All Handicapped Children Act (1975)*—*the predecessor of IDEIA*—*stipulated that children with disabilities have a right to an education in the “least restrictive environment” (Slee et al., 2019). Least restrictive environment (LRE) refers to a continuum of learning spaces that vary in their levels of restrictiveness, from general education classrooms to completely segregated schools, which may be considered for delivering an “appropriate” education for students with disabilities. Determinations of educational placement along this continuum of options are made based on a clinical evaluation of the child, and a team of professionals, in consultation with the parent(s) or guardians of the child, are entrusted with this task (Ferri, 2008). However, as Taylor (1988) noted, by codifying the idea of educational services in terms of their restrictiveness is, in essence, to legitimize the segregation of some students; the existence of the LRE stipulation implies that a certain degree of restrictiveness may be necessary, and that, for some children, even the most restrictive places are appropriate. Consequently, in schools in the United States, the educational segregation of students with disabilities is legal as long as the decision to segregate is made on an individualized, case-by-case basis*—*when “the nature or severity of the disability of a child” is such that a child “cannot” be educated “satisfactorily” in a general education classroom. This determination can be made prior to, or in the absence of, any actual attempts to educate a child in a general education classroom (i.e., the law does *not* require that inclusive education be attempted before it is deemed an unsatisfactory option for a particular student). As such, students with labeled disabilities in the United States face not only *de facto*, but also *de jure* segregation (Lalvani et al., 2015).

In these individualized, case-by-case decisions about educational placement, there exists, as one might imagine, a fair amount of subjectivity that prioritizes the perspectives of the educational professionals making them. Additionally, because decisions pertaining to the placement of students in inclusive settings continues to be largely driven by the advocacy of parents (Lalvani & Hale, 2015; Lalvani, 2012), access to general education classrooms and curricula for students with disabilities is likely to be linked with socioeconomic factors. Advocacy has a price and takes its toll; privilege plays out in multiple ways as many families draw from their economic and cultural capital in order to access their children’s educational rights, leaving children from less advantaged families more vulnerable and more likely to be placed in segregated educational settings (Lalvani & Hale, 2015; Ong-Dean, 2009). A reliance on individual advocacy serves to undermine the potential for broader systemic change, while simultaneously reproducing social class hierarchies. It places many groups of families at an unfair disadvantage. For instance, contesting school authorities requires levels of cultural and economic capital that are often inaccessible to parents from lower income or marginalized groups, or such actions may be inconsistent with cultural understandings about parents’ role in their children’s education (Ong-Dean, 2009). Activities related to advocacy are based on the ideals of dominant Western culture, and entering into confrontations or conflict with educational professionals may be inconsistent with the cultural beliefs and values of many families (Kalyanpur et al., 2000). All of these allows some parents to wield power to access inclusive spaces or resources for their children, contributing to inequitable outcomes. Thus, the segregation of children in schools relies on intersecting racist, classist, and ableist ideologies. Indeed, a troubling issue since the inception of special education laws, and one that is well documented by scholars, pertains to the overrepresentation of students of color as well as students from lower-income families in more restrictiveness placements (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Losen & Orfield, 2002).

Inclusive education has been envisioned and implemented in vastly differently ways globally. For example, Italy passed National Law 517 in 1977, which enacted reforms that were instrumental in transforming the educational landscape through changes such as: reducing the maximum size of an integrated (or inclusive) class to twenty, limiting the number of students with disabilities per class to no more than two, and integrating special services for students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Ferri, 2008). Essentially, the practice of ability-based tracking was abolished, as were special classes and special schools (Berrigan, 1988). Italian Law 118 (1971) specifies the right of all children with disabilities to be educatedin *regular classes* and, in order to achieve this, the Italian educational system merged general and special education, transforming them into an entirely new system of education (Ferri, 2008).

In the United States, by contrast, the dual system of education is alive and well, and the removal of students with disabilities from general education classrooms is enshrined in our laws. In the preservice training of special education teachers, the segregation of many students with disabilities in schools is neither brought to the forefront nor positioned as a form of educational oppression. Instead, the concept of LRE is presented and generally accepted as a fair practice. Thus, as Slee (2001) explicates, teacher education becomes an avenue for the sanctioning and formalizing of exclusionary practices. In failing to invite teacher candidates to question or problematize the laws, teacher education lends support to a bifurcated system of education in schools and legitimizes the removal of some children from the collective.

**Inclusive Education Omitted in the Agendas of Social Justice Education**

That students with disabilities should be educated inclusively is a matter of children’s fundamental rights; UNESCO (2017) proclaims the right of all children, including children with disabilities, to be educated in the “regular” school and classroom. As Slee et al. (2019) assert, “exclusion and inclusion from the neighbourhood school is first a political issue and second a technical issue.” (p. 5). However, in the discourses and theorizing of social justice, people with disabilities—and particularly people with intellectual disabilities—often remain overlooked. Slee (2019) reminds us that, historically, schools have always engaged in the business of constructing the boundaries of who belongs; educational policies and practices reflect hierarchies of belonging and exclusion from the educational main-game. Furthermore, he notes, “belonging” may be an accoutrement of privilege—not just material privilege, but privilege as is applies to all identity markers.

In teacher education, issues concerning social justice, equity, and diversity continue to be considered distinct from those pertaining to disability. The latter is relegated to the purview of special education coursework (sometimes rebranded inclusive education, as I mentioned earlier). Connections between inclusive education and the agenda of education in a democracy are infrequently made, and, amidst a growing acknowledgement among social justice educators of the need to address the persistent problem of bias and prejudice in schools, the silences around the topic of ableism in the agendas of social justice education is remarkable (Lalvani et al., 2015). Perhaps this is because “ableism is deeply and subliminally embedded within the culture” (Campbell, 2009, p. 153), and, as such, it largely remains a “permissible prejudice” (Chodorow, 1999).

Nancy Gallavan writes that teaching about social inequality presents “challenges and conflicts for instructors *unlike* the challenges and conflicts encountered when teaching most other courses in higher education” (2000, p. 5, emphasis in original), in that there is likely to be a certain degree of student resistance to complex topics they may not fully understand. In the case of teaching about ableism, however, it is the silences within social justice teacher education itself that I wish to bring to the forefront. For example, although preservice teachers may be asked to articulate a stance on inclusive education, they are not likely to be explicitly invited to position themselves on the existence of the persistent practice of ability-based tracking in schools and the subsequent segregation of large numbers of students with disabilities in “self-contained” educational environments—in some cases, spaces so segregated that they offer no opportunities whatsoever for any contact with nondisabled peers.

This raises questions about how social justice teacher educators position themselves in relation to this practice. In an earlier work, I sought to open a dialogue among colleagues and scholars invested in social justice education about how we, as teacher educators, account for the systematic educational segregation in the case of students with disabilities, and how we reconcile the existence of separate classrooms and schools for students with disabilities with an agenda for education in a democracy (Lalvani et al., 2015). These are much needed conversations that do not take place to the extent they should. Instead, many teacher educators assume that inclusion is a worthwhile endeavor, but “simply does not work for every student” and this message is implicitly—and sometimes explicitly—communicated to preservice teachers. In this arrangement, Slee (2011) notes, we retain “our capacity to turn away from exclusion, the indifference or determination to *look away*” (p. 35).

**The Reification of Otherness through the Language of “Inclusive Education”**

Lately, I find myself musing over the language of “inclusive education.” I must admit, I am deeply conflicted about the phrase. On one hand, I confess, I position myself as a teacher educator preparing inclusive teachers. I am presently the coordinator for the Graduate Program in Inclusive Education housed in my department. I have, on more than one occasion, promoted the program on my social media, using the tagline I created: “Become an Inclusive Educator!” I am firmly committed to an agenda that moves all educators toward fully inclusive philosophies and practices. Yet the language of *inclusion* troubles me, and, I wonder, to what extent does it serve as a tool to sanction exclusion? For embedded in the language of “inclusion” is the assumption that inclusivity is a choice. If some people can choose to “become an inclusive educator,” does that mean that others may choose to *not*?

Laclau (1996, as cited in Hansen, 2012) explains that all concepts are constructed by virtue of the otherness—i.e., the opposite or absence—of the concept. If so, then inclusion as a concept exists only in relation to exclusion. If all concepts presuppose their state of otherness, and that “this otherness of the concept makes the concept possible as a concept” (Hansen, 2012, p. 93), then we must contend with the idea that in order to conceptualize inclusive spaces, we would need to first create the concept of exclusionary ones. Hansen (2012) further explains:

If we understand inclusion as all individuals’ right to participate and if we argue that active participation in the established communities is a prerequisite for learning and development, then we base inclusion on assumptions that, in principle, make inclusion limitless. In this sense of inclusion, there will, in principle, be no limits to diversity and no limits to the right of participation, because it is a right which applies to all individuals and which is necessary for all children in order to ensure their learning and development. (p. 91)

Perhaps, in using the term “inclusive education,” we render the endeavor meaningless. In order for true inclusion to exist in schools, it has to exclude that which constitutes its otherness - exclusion (Hansen, 2012). And, if we could actually achieve that (i.e., *nobody* was excluded), then we would not need the term inclusion at all, since we would have dissolved “inclusion” as a meaningful category. I wish to acknowledge here that there are other dimensions of “inclusion” beyond schooling. If we think of inclusion as a social movement, with a set of mindsets, structures, and practices that aspire to a goal of full membership and meaningful participation for all in society, then, similarly, the achievement of its goal—eradicating segregation in all aspects of community life—would render the phrase “community inclusion” meaningless.

I am reminded of Diana Ferguson’s (2004) piece discussing the contradictions inherent in being an inclusive educator, in which she explains how she is sometimes maliciously dismissed by opponents of full inclusion as being a “rabid inclusionist” —a label she unapologetically claimed for herself. I wonder, then, if all educators were “inclusionists” (rabid or otherwise), would we even need the descriptor? Strangely, my word processing software is already aware of this bit of wisdom: when I type the word “inclusionist,” it is flagged as an error —a word that does not exist. “Exclusionist,” on the other hand, *is* recognized as a word. Indulge me here, but it seems to me that my computer is visionary. As teacher educators, we might heed what I would like to believe it is trying to say: it is only the act of exclusion that requires justification and is worth discussing; if someone is truly an “inclusionist,” then the concept itself ceases to exist, therefore, the term is no longer needed.

**A Call to Restructure Teacher Education**

I end with some thoughts on approaches for moving teacher education programs toward a paradigm shift and liberating agendas. Conceptually and theoretically, we might address some structural and policy problems through the infusion of disability studies in education (DSE) perspectives in teacher education programs. The ideas and insights offered in DSE, especially when coupled with the constructivist traditions of critical, transformative pedagogies, counter-narratives, and social action (Freire, 1970) can inform teacher education. Some of the central tenets of DSE, identified by the mission statement of the DSE SIG of the AERA (2020), as intertwined forms of praxis that:

(a) contextualize an understanding of disability within political, historical, and social spheres; (b) privilege the perspectives, interests, and agendas of disabled people; (c) promote social justice, inclusive and equitable educational opportunities for all people, with particular attention paid to the experience of disabled people; and (d) reject deficit assumptions about disability and in their stead adopt a stance that assumes the competence, worth, and value of all human beings. (SIG Purpose, 2013)

However, for this work to begin, teacher education programs need to be fundamentally reconceptualized, based on an understanding of disability as an aspect of human variation and a renewed commitment to education for social change—including social change pertaining to disability. If we wish to prepare teachers who are poised to critically examine and reform practices in schools, to name ableism, and work alongside students to dismantle it, then the structures, curriculum, and policies of teacher education need to be reconsidered. For a start, a dismantling of separate tracks for general and special education teachers is long overdue. Beyond this, we need to reinvent curricula such that all teacher candidates learn strategies to teach all children. In such curricula, the perspectives of those with lived experiences are privileged over those of professionals; there are spaces to explore the ways in which structural ableism, racism, classism, and other forms of oppression intersect to impact outcomes for students; and inclusivity in schools is understood to be, as Bernstein (1996) asserted, “an assumed precondition for a democratic education?” (p. 6-7).

Baglieri (2005) states that we need to prepare teachers such that they can problematize multiple perspectives on disability. Furthermore, she argues, we need to:

develop a view of students labeled with disabilities not as intrinsically disordered, but as those who are continuously constructed within discursive contexts as ‘able’ or ‘disabled.’ As teacher education programs conceptualize disability as an oppressed position subject to discourse, teacher candidates can enter education with an attitude toward action” (p. 11).

To this end, teacher educators might start by questioning the traditional approach to disability and inverting our gaze to the production operation and maintenance of ableism (Campbell, 2009) in schools and society. Using social justice and anti-bias framework, we might position the issue of ability-based segregation in schools alongside other anti-oppression agendas. By doing this, we can prepare future educators to recognize all forms of marginalization in schools, invite them to consider their own role as allies and advocates for all students, and provide them with tools needed to create communities of belonging in schools. Perhaps, then, we can envision a future wherein, in the context of education, the concept of *inclusive* is implicit, and the descriptor, therefore, is redundant.

**References**

AERA. (2020). *Who we are*. American Educational Research Association. <https://www.aera.net/SIG143/Who-We-Are>

Baglieri, S. (2005, May 19-21). *Constructing the least restrictive environment: Teacher education and inclusion.* Paper presented at the 5th Annual Second City Conference in Disability Studies in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University. <https://docplayer.net/198669885-Susan-baglieri-education.html>

Baker, B. (2016). The hunt for disability: The new eugenics and the normalization of school children. In J. Allan & A. J. Artiles (Eds.), *World yearbook of education 2017: Assessment inequalities* (pp. 137-173). Routledge.

Bernstein, B. (1996). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique.* Taylor & Francis.

Berrigan, C. (1988, February). Integration in Italy: A dynamic movement. *TASH Newsletter*. (pp. 6-8).

Brantlinger, E. (2006a). The big glossies: How textbooks structure (special) education. In E. Brantlinger (Ed.), *Who benefits from special education?* (pp. 45-75). Routledge.

Brantlinger, E. (Ed.). (2006b). *Who benefits from special education?* *Remediating (fixing) other people’s children.* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 37 U.S. 483 (1954). <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/347/483/>

Campbell, F. (2009). *Contours of ableism: The production of disability and abledness*. Springer.

Chodorow, N. (1999). Homophobia: Analysis of “permissible” prejudice [CyberPsych Supported Group: https://cyberpsych.org/homophobia/]. *The Public Forum*. [www.cyberpsych.org/homophobia/noframes/chodorow.htm](http://www.cyberpsych.org/homophobia/noframes/chodorow.htm)

Connor, D. J., & Ferri, B. A. (2007). The conflict within: Resistance to inclusion and other paradoxes in special education. *Disability & Society, 22*(1), 63–77. doi:10.1080/09687590601056717

Connor, D. J., & Goldmansour, K. (2012). Doing the civil right thing: Supporting children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. *Occasional Paper Series, 2012*(28), 24-38. <https://educate.bankstreet.edu/occasional-paper-series/vol2012/iss28/3/>

Davis, L. J. (2002). *Bending over backwards: Disability, dismodernism & other difficult positions*. New York University Press.

Dolmage, J. T. (2017). *Academic ableism: Disability and higher education*. University of Michigan Press.

Education of all Handicapped Children Act, Pub. L. 94-142, 89 Stat. 773, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1401-1413. (1975). U.S. Government Publishing Office (2011). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2011-title20/html/USCODE-2011-title20-chap33-subchapI.htm>

Erevelles, N., Kanga, A., & Middleton, R. (2006). How does it feel to be a problem? Race, disability, and exclusion in educational policy. In E. Brantlinger (Ed.), *Who benefits from special education?* (pp. 91-114). Routledge.

Ferguson, D. (2004). The real challenge of inclusion: Confessions of a “rabid inclusionist.” In S. Danforth & S. D. Taff (Eds.), Crucial readings in special education (pp. 276-282). Pearson/Merrill/Prentice Hall.

Ferri, B. (2008). Inclusion in Italy: What happens when everyone belongs. In S. Gabel & S. Danforth (Eds.), *Disability and the politics of education: An international reader* (pp. 41-52). Peter Lang.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Herder & Herder.

Gabel, S. L., & Connor, D. J. (2009). Theorizing disability: Implications and applications for social justice in education. In W. Ayers, T. Quinn, & D. Stovall (Eds.), *Handbook of social justice in education* (pp. 395-417). Routledge.

Gabel, S. L., & Connor, D. J. (2014). *Teaching and disability.* Lawrence Erlbaum.

Gallavan, N. P. (2000). Multicultural education at the academy: Teacher educators’ challenges, conflicts, and coping skills. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *33*(3), 5-11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1066568000330302>

Goodley, D. (2011). *Disability studies: An interdisciplinary introduction*. Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-618X.2011.01272.x>

Hahn, H. (1997). Advertising the acceptably employable image. In L. Davis (Ed.), *The disability studies reader,* (pp. 172–186). Routledge.

Hansen, J. H. (2012). Limits to inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *16*(1), 89-98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603111003671632>

Harry, B., & Klingner, J. K. (2006). *Why are so many minority children in special education?:* *Understanding race and disability in schools.* Teachers College Press.

Hehir, T. (2005). *New directions in special education: Eliminating ableism in policy and practice*. Harvard University Press.

[IDEIA]. (2004). Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 - H.R.1350. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/house-bill/1350>

Kalyanpur, M., Harry, B., & Skrtic, T. (2000). Equity and advocacy expectations of culturally diverse families’ participation in special education. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 47*(2), 119-136. DOI: [10.1080/713671106](https://www.researchgate.net/deref/http%3A//dx.doi.org/10.1080/713671106)

Lalvani, P. (2012). Parents’ participation in special education in the context of implicit educational ideologies and socioeconomic privilege. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental* *Disabilities, 47*(4), 474–486.

Lalvani, P. (2013). Privilege, compromise, or social justice: Teachers’ conceptualizations of inclusive education. *Disability & Society*, *28*(1), 14-27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2012.692028>

Lalvani, P. (2017). Gatekeepers of normalcy: The disablement of families in the master narratives of psychology. In M. Rembis (Ed.), *Disability domesticity*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Lalvani, P., Broderick, A., Fine, M., Jacobowitz, T., & Michelli, N. (2015). Teacher education, ~~in~~exclusion and the implicit ideologies of *separate but equal*: An invitation to a dialogue. *Education, Citizenship, and Social Justice, 10*(2),168-183.

Lalvani, P., & Hale, C. (2015). Squeaky wheels, mothers from hell, and CEOs of the IEP: Parents, privilege, and the “fight” for inclusive education. *Understanding and Dismantling Privilege, 5*(2), 21–41. DOI: [10.1177/0731948717698828](https://www.researchgate.net/deref/http%3A//dx.doi.org/10.1177/0731948717698828)

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197915583935>

Lester, J. N., & Nusbaum, E. A. (2018). “Reclaiming” disability in critical qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 24*(1), 3–7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417727761>

Losen, D. J., & Orfield, G. (2002). *Racial inequity in special education*. Harvard Education Press.

Linton, S. (1998). *Claiming disability: Knowledge and identity*. New York University Press.

Ong-Dean, C. (2009). *Distinguishing disability: Parents, privilege, and special education.* University of Chicago Press.

Rauscher, L., & McClintock, M. (1997). Ableism curriculum design. In M. Adams, L. Bell, & P. Griffin (Eds.), *Teaching for diversity and social justice* (pp. 198-229). Routledge.

Sarason, S. (1990). *The predictable failure of educational reform: Can we change course before it's too late?* Jossey Bass.

Skrtic, T. (1991). The special education paradox: Equity as the way to excellence. *The Harvard Educational Review*, *61*(2), 148–206.

Slee, R. (2001). Social justice and the changing directions in educational research: The case of inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *5*(2-3), 167-177.

Slee, R. (2011). *The irregular school: Exclusion, schooling and inclusive education*. Routledge.

Slee, R. (2019). Belonging in an age of exclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 23*(9), 909-922. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1602366>

Slee, R., Corcoran, T., & Best, M. (2019). Disability studies in education: Building platforms to reclaim disability and recognise disablement. *Journal of Disability Studies in Education,* 1-11. DOI:[10.1163/25888803-00101002](https://doi.org/10.1163/25888803-00101002)

Taylor, S. J. (1988). Caught in the continuum: A critical analysis of the principle of the least restrictive environment. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps,13*(1), 41-53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/154079698801300105>

UNESCO. (2017). *A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education*. UNESCO. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002482/248254e.pdf>

Ware, L. (2005). Many possible futures, many different directions: Merging critical special education and disability studies. In S. L. Gabel (Ed.), Disability studies in education: Readings in theory and method (pp. 103-124). Peter Lang.

Young, K. (2008). “I don't think I'm the right person for that”: Theoretical and institutional questions about a combined credential program. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *28*(4).