Can We Talk? The Underdeveloped Dialogue Between Teacher Education and Disability Studies

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Abstract

Despite the possibility for mutual benefit, it seems that the fields of Disability Studies (DS) and teacher education have not communicated and collaborated in deep and meaningful ways. This exploratory study utilized an e-survey of 32 teacher education faculty members in the state of California to investigate how, if at all, teacher educators were utilizing DS in their curriculum. Results suggested that some teacher educators confuse DS with special education or rehabilitation. Furthermore, many teacher educators in general education teacher preparation programs indicated that disability issues were only covered in one course. The results of this study suggest the need for further meaningful collaboration and communication between the fields of DS and teacher education.

Keywords

Disability Studies, teacher education, higher education, teacher preparation

The emergence of Disability Studies (DS) in Education (DSE) has provided new ways of thinking about how we support students in schools who have been labeled as "disabled" or "abnormal" (Valle & Connor, 2011). The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the use of DS in teacher preparation programs in the state of California. Because DS as a field seeks to address the social oppression of labeling a person as "disabled," there are multiple benefits to introducing teachers and other school practitioners to the field of DS (Ashby, 2012). For example, teachers may begin to focus less on medical-based deficit views of students that place the "problem" on the student and focus more on the social and environmental barriers that inhibit the student from accessing the curriculum (Valle & Connor, 2011). However, there are many barriers that exist in incorporating DS into a teacher preparation curriculum (Ashby, 2012). For instance, DS advocates for inclusion of individuals with disabilities and views self-contained or segregated education as a form of social oppression (Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011). These views can run counter to practices presented in teacher preparation programs (Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008).

Not only may views rooted in DS run counter to perspectives introduced in teacher preparation programs, faculty in teacher preparation programs may not be aware of DS as a field. As practitioners in the field of teacher preparation with DS backgrounds, we found that many of our colleagues in both general education and special education teacher preparation programs were not only unaware of DS as a field but also frequently confused DSE as being synonymous with special education or rehabilitation. Given the significant impact that incorporating DS could have on teaching practices, we sought to explore teacher educators' understandings of DS and the use of DS in their respective teacher preparation programs, as well as in their own research.

What Is DS and How Is It Different From Special Education?

Just as "disability" itself stretches across a wide range of human experiences, DS is a field that stretches across a wide range of academic disciplines including sociology, art, media, history, law, economics, and medicine (Linton, 1998). DS views disability as a social, political, and cultural phenomenon (Goodley, 2012). In this study, we used Linton's (1998) definition of DS as our guide for analysis:

> Disability Studies reframes the study of disability by focusing on it as a social phenomenon, social construct, metaphor, and culture utilizing a minority group model. It examines ideas

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related to disability in all forms of cultural representations throughout history, and examines the policies and practices of all societies to understand the social, rather than the physical or psychological, determinants of the experience of disability. Disability Studies both emanates from and supports the Disability Rights Movement, which advocates for civil rights and self-determination. This focus shifts the emphasis from a prevention/treatment/remediation paradigm, to a social/cultural/political paradigm. This shift does not signify a denial of the presence of impairments, nor a rejection of the utility of intervention and treatment. Instead, Disability Studies has been developed to disentangle impairments from the myth, ideology, and stigma that influence social interaction and social policy. The scholarship challenges the idea that the economic and social statuses and the assigned roles of people with disabilities are inevitable outcomes of their condition. (p. 8)

One may elucidate a DS framework "in action" in a number of ways. For example, a person's "disability" is directly related to how disability is represented and defined in current society. Furthermore, disability and impairment are viewed as two distinct entities. An impairment represents a person's difference such as a person's inability to hear, while a disability elucidates the barriers society places on such a person. In other words, DS emphasizes social and attitudinal barriers rather than individual impairments. For instance, a person may have an impairment such as limited use of his or her legs, which may lead to use of a wheelchair. However, the person is not "disabled" until society begins to place barriers such as stairs and lack of ramps or elevators "in the way." If the person is in a place where there are ramps and everything is accessible when using a wheelchair, he or she may not be considered disabled. The focus is not on "fixing" the person's legs so that they may walk but rather on removing the barriers by creating ramps that would allow access. Thus, DS does not view a person's disability as something that needs to be fixed or cured. Rather, the focus shifts to removing the barriers that "create" the disability.

DSE is based on DS principles and emerged from the field of DS. DSE applies the definition and framework of DS to the field of education (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012). DSE seeks to "promote the understanding of disability from a social model perspective" and to "challenge social, medical, and psychological models of disability as they relate to education" (American Educational Research Association [AERA], DSE, Special Interest Group [SIG], 2007). The impairment/disability dichotomy described earlier plays out in education in a number of ways and illustrates the social model perspective of disability. For example, in a school situation, a student may have an impairment such as dyslexia, but it is the barriers put in place that "disable" the student. If the student is provided with audiotexts that remove the barrier of printed text, then the student may no longer be "disabled." In short, the "problem" is located outside the person, and the surroundings (e.g., environment, materials, and goals) are viewed as the object of remediation.

Given the broadness of the field and the general view of disability, DSE scholars often stress that DSE is not rehabilitation, special education, or any other field involved with "fixing" or "curing" a disability (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012; Linton, 1998). In fact, the current representation of disability in education and rehabilitation is often contradictory to DS concepts (Connor et al., 2008; Linton, 1998). To illustrate this point, Valle and Connor (2011) describe how schools often view disability in medical terms that ultimately focuses on a "problem" that requires "fixing." First, a "problem" is identified in the student. Then, "professionals" diagnose the problem. Finally, they develop a "treatment" to "fix" that problem. The contradictory notions of "disability" represented in "traditional" special education and DSE exemplify the need for distinction between fields. However, there are many ways that these fields can work together and become more interdisciplinary.

Bridging the Discipline Divide

Historically, there has not been space for many fields or disciplines in higher education to collaborate with each other (Godemann, 2008). Although disciplines or fields in higher education have made some progress in bridging divides that exist among them (Godemann, 2008), there is still much work to be done. This is true for the fields of teacher education and DS (Ashby, 2012; Barton, 2003). As mentioned previously, DS is a distinct field that reaches across disciplines such as art, media, political science, and literature. It is often housed in Humanities departments at major universities. As teacher education is housed in the Social Sciences and in schools or colleges of education, these two fields are often not only physically separated on a campus but also separated by the "discipline" or "curriculum" divide (Linton, 1998). For example, although a handful of teacher preparation programs in the United States claim a DS focus, the overwhelming majority do not (Ashby, 2012). DS programs and education programs on a given campus may not collaborate in any way. Strengthening connections and bridging such a divide between DS and teacher preparation may contribute to communication and among fields.

Teacher Preparation Programs and DS

Previous research suggests that many teacher preparation programs could improve in equipping general and special education teachers with the tools to adequately address cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity in the classroom (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). Similarly, scholars in the field of teacher education posit that teacher preparation programs are also failing to adequately train future educators to address issues of disability and learning differences in the classroom (Ryndak & Kennedy, 2000). Consequently, teachers leave their preparation programs with limited views of issues related to disability, language, culture, and poverty as

they relate to students and their parents (Futrell, Gomez, & Bedden, 2003). DSE is a growing interdisciplinary field that grapples with the above challenges facing teachers and schools while situating disability within a social context (AERA, DSE, SIG, 2007). Thus, DSE appears to be a suitable platform for addressing some of these issues in teacher preparation.

Including DSE perspectives in both general education and special education teacher preparation programs and curricula may address some of the pressing concerns in teacher education related to preparing teachers to work with diverse groups of students (Ashby, 2012; Danforth & Gabel, 2006; Florian, Young, & Rouse, 2010; Young, 2011). Therefore, infusing DSE perspectives can enhance general education, special education, and blended teacher preparation programs. By encouraging current and future teachers to critically analyze issues related to disability, equity, and access, teacher educators better prepare them to work with students with disabilities and their families in ways that promote equity and social justice. Despite the benefits of including DSE in teacher preparation programs, its relevance for addressing such concerns is under-utilized in many forums (Baglieri, Valle, et al., 2011). Therefore, collaboration among the fields of general education, special education, and particularly DS and DSE can act as an essential next step in preparing teachers to work with groups of students with diverse cultures, languages, and abilities.

DS and Applications in Education Practice

The field of DSE directly applies to best practices in the field of education. Specifically, DSE provides the "why" to the "how" of strategies such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiated instruction that increase access to general education curriculum and contexts for students with disabilities. For example, teachers may learn about Universal Design for Learning, but may not have developed a theoretical framework that is related to *why* creating such lessons is so important for students with disabilities and other marginalized groups. DSE provides a theoretical framework that situates access to general education curriculum and contexts not as simply "best practice" but a basic civil right for students with disabilities and other marginalized groups of students in schools (Connor et al., 2008).

In addition to providing a theoretical foundation for high access strategies, DS supports educators in preparing and teaching lessons related to disability awareness and understanding of disability that go beyond a "disability awareness" day or week. As Ferguson (2006) suggests, it is not enough to conduct one "disability awareness" activity or include one person with a disability (e.g., Helen Keller) into the curriculum. Rather, we must "infuse" disability and DS into the general curriculum. Ferguson provides a number of reasons teachers should embed disability-related topics and discussion

into the general curriculum, including the ability to celebrate disability as difference and to educate students about the history of the disability rights movements and the framework of access as a civil right.

Examples of infusing disability and DS into the curriculum include use of first person accounts of living with a disability in a high school language arts course that includes both students with and without disabilities (Ware, 2001), and using film to teach the social context of disability (Connor & Bejoian, 2006). In each case, such curriculum is used to question dominant narratives of disability. For example, when using films such as "Million Dollar Baby," students may explore the narrative of choosing death over life with a disability (Connor & Bejoian, 2006). This allows teachers and their students to examine and question their own assumptions about disability. Such examples described above all come from DSE scholars involved in teacher preparation programs. We surmise that inclusion of more DSE approaches in teacher education will support the use of such curriculum development and implementation in schools.

Just as with curriculum development and implementation involving disability and UDL. DSE informs the "why" and "how" of inclusive educational practices (Connor et al., 2008). DSE presumes that access to inclusive educational settings is not only what is best for students but also a civil right (Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011). DSE scholars highlight the oppressive and harmful nature of separate and segregated environments (Baglieri, Bejoian, et al., 2011), and DSE provides teachers with a way to discuss the presumptive right of inclusive education with their colleagues and administrators (Florian et al., 2010).

As Davis (1997) suggests, DSE is both "a field of inquiry" and a "political activity" (p. 10). Essentially, teachers with a DSE framework are well prepared to enact changes (however small) in their schools that are rooted in civil rights and acceptance of difference and diversity, and that counteract the narrative that children must be "normal" to participate in a general education setting (Peters & Reid, 2009). They have the language, theory, and knowledge of disability history to be able to explain why inclusive opportunities are so important for both students with and without disabilities. They can articulate the intersectionality between disability, language, race, and gender. Moreover, they are well equipped to work for social justice in their schools.

The Context: Teacher Education in California

As with many general education and special education teacher preparation programs across the country, California takes a "siloed" approach to teacher preparation. Despite calls for certification that emphasizes preparing educators to teach all students and then allowing teachers to choose a specialization (e.g., bilingual education, special education; Darling-Hammond, 2006), California maintains very separate systems

for certification of special education and general education teachers. From the onset of the implementation of special education supports and services in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a number of scholars and practitioners have critiqued the separation of special education and general education in K-12 and higher education (Dunn, 1968). With such critiques came warnings that establishing these separate systems would result in the establishment of "us" and "them," "normal" and "abnormal." These binaries have certainly come to fruition. They clearly shape our "siloed" approach to teacher preparation. Many general education teacher preparation programs only require one special education course. In these courses, educators may simply be provided an overview of various disability categories. However, this may not prepare them to teach students with disabilities. For example, one of the largest and most highly rated K-8 general education teacher preparation programs in the state only requires one course associated with "exceptional learners." Thus, there are very few opportunities to introduce curriculum for supporting students with disabilities, let alone introduce DS concepts to general education teacher candidates.

Theoretical Framework

This research is situated in Deming's (1993) theory of "profound knowledge." Based on this theoretical framework, if faculty in higher education in fields both inside and outside of teacher education and DS are to begin to initiate change, they must have a "profound knowledge" of the entity or interdependent systems they seek to change. Specifically, "the system of profound knowledge includes an appreciation for a system, knowledge about variation, theory of knowledge, and psychology" (Deming, 1993). In this research, we focus particularly on the "appreciation for the system" and the "psychology" to understand the current systems (teacher preparation and DS) and people's feelings toward or about the current systems.

The "appreciation of the system" involves understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of entities within the system (Stevens, 2010). In this case, the interdependent systems are DS and teacher education. Therefore, we focus on understanding the interconnectedness of DS and teacher education programs. In addition, Deming asserts that the "psychology" relates to the vision and understandings of those within this system. Thus, we seek to explore the vision and understandings faculty members have in regard to DS, as understanding may be the first step in future communication and collaboration.

We are seeking to gain more information about the current understanding of these systems in higher education to provide a platform for possible transformation of these systems. Dobyns and Crawford-Mason (1994) suggest that we must be able to change what we believe to change how with think. Furthermore, we must change how we think to change what we do. Therefore, we must first find out what faculty members think and believe about the current system to make meaningful changes.

Research Questions

Given the need to explore how faculty members understand and apply DS in their practice, we established the following three research questions:

> **Research Question 1:** How do faculty members define DS?
> **Research Question 2:** Are there differences in how faculty members in general education and special education teacher preparation programs define DS?
> **Research Question 3:** How (if at all) do faculty members apply DS in their teacher education curriculum/courses?

Method

Participants and Survey Description

An e-survey was developed, piloted, revised, and then published online through the Survey Monkey website. The e-survey was developed by two university faculty members and one doctoral student. All those who developed the survey have a significant background in DS. The researchers then sent the survey to two faculty members who have expertise in DS, and three doctoral students with limited DS experience, who were either special or general education teachers. The faculty members and doctoral students all provided feedback on the survey. The researchers revised the survey based on the feedback and then published the survey on Survey Monkey. The survey includes questions related to the participant's current teacher preparation program and knowledge and use of DS (see the appendix for survey questions).

The researchers sent the anonymous survey to full-time general education and special education faculty members at major teacher education programs throughout the state of California ($n = 122$). We included all programs at public and private universities within the state. We did not include "alternative licensure" programs such as Teach for America. The survey was sent out twice, with approximately 1 month separating the first and second attempts. At the time of this proposal, of the 122 individuals who received the email, 40 responded. This resulted in a return rate of approximately 32%. Of those 40 who responded, only 32 identified themselves as faculty members. Thus, those 32 participants were used in the study. Of the 32 respondents, 50% ($n = 16$) were general education faculty, 22% ($n = 7$) were special education faculty, and 28% ($n = 9$) identified as faculty in both programs (see Table 1).

Analysis

How faculty members define DS. The researchers established definition criteria for DS based on definitions by prominent scholars in the field (Goodley, 2012; Linton, 1998; see Table 2). Two researchers then evaluated each definition and noted whether it fit the established criteria. We then compared our scores. If we disagreed on any one definition, we asked the third researcher to evaluate the definition.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Data and Survey Summary.

| | | Use of DS | | Definition of DS aligns with |
	Total *N* (%)	Yes	No	definition of DS scholars
General education	16 (50%)	12 (75%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)
Special education	7 (22%)	5 (71%)	2 (29%)	3 (42%)
Both (general education and special education)	9 (28%)	6 (66%)	3 (34%)	3 (34%)

Note. DS = Disability Studies.

Table 2. Disability Studies Definition Criteria Protocol.

Components of definition	Includes at least one or more (yes/no) Add notes if necessary
Social model of disability: Recognizes disability as a social phenomenon. Does not place disability within the individual.	
Disability: historical, social, political, and cultural aspects of disability	
Ableism	
Focus on inclusive education, differentiated instruction, and barrier removal: Does not focus on deficits or reference a clinical or diagnosis/cure. Focuses on societal influences related to schooling and instruction.	

Note. Definition criteria derived from the work of both Linton (1998) and Goodley (2012).

Differences in definition of DS and incorporating DS into and across programs. To find out more about how (if at all) definitions differed among faculty members in general education and those in special education, we used descriptive quantitative analysis, a one-sample *t* test between percentages, as well as basic qualitative inductive analyses (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We first compared the number of faculty members in each category (those who identified themselves as faculty in general education vs. those who identified themselves as faculty in special education or faculty in both special education and general education) who provided a correct definition of DS with those who did not. In addition, we compared the percentage of faculty members who indicated that DS should be used in teacher education curriculum. Finally, we then identified themes using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and then compared themes across the groups to look for similarities or differences among the definitions. We conducted a similar analysis to find out more about how (if at all) faculty members were incorporating DS into their programs. We coded the data using basic inductive analysis and identified themes using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once categories were determined, we used selective coding to locate specific statements that correlated with the categories (Charmaz, 2010; Creswell, 2007).

Results

Defining DS

When asked whether they used DS in their curriculum, 72% (*n* = 23) of the participants indicated using DS in some way. However, only 10 of the participants (31% of the entire participant population) provided a definition of DS that closely resembled DS in any way. For example, participants whose response was consistent with DS included definitions such as

> Interdisciplinary field of scholarship that examines the life experiences of disabled persons and the social and political meanings about disability generated in society. The field has an advocacy orientation that pursues greater access and participation for disabled persons.

Additional responses that met the criteria for closely relating to DS concepts were, "The investigation of the impact of disabilities: on the person with the disability, significant others to that person, society in general, discrimination issues, self-efficacy, historical perspectives, and all other aspects of the persons [*sic*] life," and "Understands disability as a social construction. Looks at disability from a political lens."

Conversely, some of the participants who indicated they used DS in their teacher preparation program included descriptions that were not clearly related to DS. For example, participants defined DS in education as "Learning about the disabilities covered under the Individuals with Disabilties Education Act (IDEA) and understanding how to best meet the students' needs in the classroom," "studies relating to symptoms and 'presentation' of disabilities," and "a specific curriculum discussing all disabilities and how they can be addressed in school and public life." Another participant implied a "mistrust" of DS, stating, "The title sounds like 'educationalese' for a new course or branch of public education. Sorry—clearly skeptical of the intent of this new 'Disability Studies' approach." These responses suggest a

clear misunderstanding of (and at times, contradiction to) the concepts or "big ideas" in DS .

As we began to explore the data in further detail, we identified themes within the definitions. For example, six faculty members in both special education and general education mentioned a connection to the "social model" or social perspectives. Other faculty members defined DS as being solely related to instructional practices or a specific curriculum. In addition, a number of faculty members included definitions that suggested "symptoms" or a medical approach to disability. These themes provide some information related to the general understanding (or misunderstanding) of DS.

Social perspectives. A number of participants defined DS by describing varied or multiple perspectives. For example, a faculty member who taught in a general education teacher preparation program defined DS as "the investigation of the impact of disabilities: on a person with the disability, significant others to that person, society in general, discrimination issues, self-efficacy, historical perspectives, and all other aspects of a person's life." Similarly, a faculty member in a special education teacher preparation program defined DS as, "The study of how disability is represented in society through different perspectives." Another participant indicated a strong understanding of the social model when stating that DS is

> a stance that examines the social construction of dis/ability, explores the marginalization and disempowerment of people who are characterized as disabled, mentally ill, infirm, etc., and provides alternative perspectives that challenge the typical view of dis/ability and raise awareness of ableism.

These definitions show some understanding of the "social model" or social factors related to one's understanding of the disability. This understanding is central to the field of DS.

Sole focus on instruction or instructional strategies. Some of the definitions of DS focused entirely on instructional strategies for students with disabilities, suggesting that DS was synonymous with some sort of method of instruction or curriculum. For instance, faculty members in general education provided such definitions as, "providing instruction on special education eligibility criteria, instructional strategies that are interventions to support purposeful learning in seminars and in modules," and "learning about the disabilities covered under IDEA and understanding how to best meet the students' needs in the classroom." Another faculty member described a program at her university that focused on providing teachers with strategies to work with students with disabilities: "I would not describe what we do in the School of Education as "Disability Studies." We have developed a program to prepare teachers to teach students with special needs. This can range from working with gifted and talented students (not considered a disability) to students with severe

physical and cognitive disorders." These definitions represent a relative misunderstanding of DS in that DS does not focus solely on instructional strategies or the law. It is often considered a much larger field that attends to social and political factors that influence "disability."

Inability and symptoms. A theme that ran across definitions from all groups of faculty members related to the "inability" of a person, or "symptoms" presented by that individual that situated the definition of DS within a "medical model" framework. For example, a special education faculty member defined DS as "the study of how being unable to do something impacts academic and other work . . . ." Another general education faculty member defined DS as "studies related to symptoms and 'presentation' of disabilities . . . ." A special education faculty member also focused on limitations when stating, "an area of study that examines the existence of conditions that impede day to day functioning and processes by which individuals can enjoy living in the mainstream." These definitions do not agree with DS in that they focus on the medical model and view disability as "inability" or impediment.

Comparison related to faculty program focus. We conducted an analysis to compare themes and trends across groups of faculty members: those teaching solely in general education programs and those teaching in special education or both general education and special education. We found no significant differences in terms of correct versus incorrect definitions in each group, $t(31) = 0.542$, $p = .592$. In terms of differences between groups regarding definitions related to DS, four out of 16 (25%) of general education faculty, three out of seven (42%) of special education faculty, and three out of nine (34%) of those who identified as "both" were able to define DS correctly.

We did not find any striking differences across the groups. For instance, we found that participants in both groups equated DS with special education or rehabilitation. The groups also shared the other themes mentioned above including focus on social factors, attention to instructional strategies, and aligning DS with the medical model or placing the problem within the individual.

Incorporating DS Into the Curriculum

Participants were asked to describe how they included DS into the curriculum. Many of the participants indicated they included "Disability Studies" into their curriculum because they had one course that all students were required to take such as a course titled "learners with diverse needs" or "exceptional learners." For example, participants stated, "We have one foundations of special Ed. I teach this class and include history, law, IEPs, and a disability research project. This assignment covers definitions, descriptions, resources available, and accommodations for a general Ed classroom,"

"Our credential program requires a course called Collaboration for Inclusive Schooling. This course provides a brief overview of the different categories of disabilities, collaboration/inclusion strategies, and basic mandated process for special education including IEPs," and "In the general teaching and learning course, we discuss IDEA and handicapping conditions as well as modeling Individualized Education Progams (IEPs) and Student Study Teams (SSTs)." These responses not only suggest a misunderstanding in regard to the definition of DS, but they also suggest that disability issues in general, not just DS concepts, are not being covered in much depth in general education teacher preparation programs.

Other participants responded more broadly and their responses suggested a perception that DS was synonymous with special education. For example, "In both the Single and Multiple Subject Programs students take a special populations course. Additionally, single subject candidates are required to do extensive fieldwork in a special education classroom," "Students are required to adapt lessons for all student abilities. Students also learn about IDEA and their responsibility to teach all students. They explore Response to Intervention, Student Study Teams, IEP's, differentiation in lesson delivery and assessment, and meeting the needs of all students," and "EDSP [Education Specialist]/Mild Moderate standards are embedded in all of our credential programs."

Discussion

A Clear Definition of DS in All Teacher Education Programs

Although some faculty in general education and special education were aware of DS, many were not. Furthermore, many seemed to hold the misunderstanding that DS was synonymous with special education or rehabilitation. It seems that more conversations across disciplines are needed so that both understand each other more deeply. Having these conversations and deeper discussion across fields may help set the stage for more meaningful collaboration and positive change (Deming, 1993).

The results of this study suggesting that there are no differences between general education and special education faculty in terms of understanding of DS support the assumption that these conversations should be held across teacher preparation programs. Bridging this curriculum divide (Linton, 1998) across all teacher preparation programs and DS could help support an increase in the development of teachers who are prepared to reach diverse groups of students (Ryndak & Kennedy, 2000). All teachers require better preparation in working with diverse groups of students (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). Thus, this should not be simply a special education issue but an issue for all teachers as they enter increasingly diverse and inclusive classrooms.

A possibility for bridging such a divide is to approach disability as another form of human diversity and include it in the discussion of racial, language, and gender diversity by highlighting how disability intersects with these other markers of difference and diversity. For example, the National Council on Disability recently published a report that suggests that racially biased special education practices play a significant role in supporting the school-to-prison pipeline for students of color. Ferguson (2006) explains how deeply disability is interconnected with race, language, and gender:

> Understanding the history of racism in our society inevitably involves an understanding of how the dominant culture portrays people as inferior. For centuries, one of the ways to justify discrimination against people of color has been to portray them as less able than the white race . . . Since being judged to be mentally retarded has always been viewed as one of the most undesirable outcomes, it has naturally been one of the preferred labels applied to minority groups to explain inequalities in educational outcomes. (p. 5)

This recognition of the intersectionality of disability opens the door for collaboration with teacher educators who are focused on social justice issues related to race, language, and gender.

Infusing DS in Mainstream Curriculum and Scholarship

When considering the results of this study that suggest that issues related to disability are only covered in one class for teachers receiving a general education certification, it is not surprising to hear that many educators are not prepared to teach diverse groups of students in schools (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). At the very least, the one course that addresses special education and disability issues can be taught from a DS perspective. This would provide teachers with at least some knowledge of DS and how it can be applied in their daily practice. Ideally, disability would be addressed in numerous courses across the curriculum so that teacher educators are prepared to work with students with disabilities regardless of the grade level and content area.

Infusing DS in meaningful and authentic ways across the curriculum and into a variety of classes could help promote teacher readiness for reaching diverse groups of students (Ashby, 2012; Danforth & Gabel, 2006; Florian et al., 2010; Young, 2011). This includes not only students with disabilities but also students with a variety of "differences" related to race, gender, and socioeconomic status. We may want to begin to look at the practices of faculty in dual-license or "inclusive" teacher preparation programs to assess how these faculty members are incorporating disability across the curriculum. For example, Ashby (2012) indicates that the teacher preparation at Syracuse University supports co-taught classes that are focused on both content (e.g., social studies) and creating access for students with diverse learning needs. Furthermore, teacher educators can begin to

review their own programs to assess how issues of disability may fit into a variety of courses.

Faculty members may find it difficult to infuse DS across the curriculum due to a number of institutional and attitudinal barriers. Hence, they may be limited to the one "special education/disability" course described by many of the participants in the study. These courses may be designed based on DSE perspectives. If so, the course should be clearly defined using DS resources. For example, texts geared toward teacher educators with a DSE perspective such as those by Baglieri and Shapiro (2012) and Gabel and Connor (2014), respectively, would be appropriate choices as foundational texts.

Another reason we expect that the field of DS has gotten limited exposure in the field of special education in particular is the resistance to DS expressed by some scholars in the field (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2012). DSE scholars have been critical of many "traditional" special education practices that promote segregated settings for students with disabilities. As a result, scholars in the field of special education have been wary of DSE (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2012). Consequently, DSE may not be included in many mainstream special education journals. If academic journals are more accepting of DSE viewpoints and perspectives and are willing to publish more scholarship in this area, the broader field of special education would have more access to such ideas.

Limitations

This study fills an open space in the contemporary literature on teacher education and the use/understanding of the field of DS in teacher education programs. Yet there are certainly limitations that must be recognized. These limitations include size and geographic location of sample, and online survey methodology. First, we must acknowledge that the size of the sample is relatively small. Furthermore, we limited our survey just to the state of California. Therefore, generalizability becomes a significant limitation. In addition, online survey methods also have inherent limitations. Lefever, Dal, and Matthiasdottir (2007) found limitations to conducting research using online survey methods. These included faulty email addresses and lack of willingness of individuals to participate. In this study, it is possible the faculty email addresses were not current or that faculty members were too busy or simply uninterested in completing the survey. Thus, our sample may be skewed as those who were only interested in the topic chose to take the survey.

Conclusion

The preliminary results of this study suggest that there appears to be some confusion among teacher educators regarding the theoretical approaches related to, and definition of, DS. It seems that some teacher educators thought DS was special education or instructional strategies for students

with disabilities. In addition, many participants indicated that disability issues in general were limited to one course, which in and of itself is cause for concern. Furthermore, very few respondents were able to clearly articulate how DS was incorporated throughout their curriculum.

There is not only a divide between fields that must be addressed but also a lack of attention to disability in all of teacher education. The current landscape of teacher preparation still separates the teachers of "normal" students with the teachers of "special students." If we are to move forward with infusing DS into the teacher education curriculum in meaningful and authentic ways, we must continue to insist on conversations with teacher education as a whole and with engaging subfields of teacher education (e.g., secondary education, elementary education, early childhood education). Connecting with such subfields that are traditionally considered outside the realm of "special education" is exactly was is needed to move the conversation to a place where disability is considered essential in the larger conversations around diversity and difference.

It seems as if the field of DSE has not collaborated or communicated with the field of teacher education to the extent that it could make a noticeable impact on the perceptions and practices of many teacher educators in this study. This lack of communication has not been due to lack of effort on the part of DS scholars to begin a dialogue with teacher education and/or special education practitioners and scholars. In fact, in their article "Beyond the Far too Incessant Schism: Special Education and the Social Model of Disability," which describes the divide between special education and DS concepts, Gallagher, Connor, and Ferri (2014) indicate that no traditional special education journal would publish the article. Although some progress has been made such as the publication of textbooks related to teaching students with disabilities that are framed from a DS perspective (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012; Gabel & Connor, 2014), the results from this study clearly indicate the need for more cross-disciplinary collaboration with the field of teacher education and with teacher educators. It is important to understand what teacher educators think about disability, and how they define and apply DS. When we find out where these misconceptions and misunderstandings lie, we can then begin to address them and create more opportunities for collaboration and communication among the respective fields.

To respond to the divide between fields and the related misunderstandings and misconceptions, the question "can we talk?" must be revisited, with an understanding that fields do not always have to agree to develop an open dialogue. In fact, we may be able to use the understandings of various perspectives as way to move beyond such a divide (Cosier & Ashby, 2016; Gallagher et al., 2014). Even diminutive conversations set the groundwork for deeper and more meaningful dialogue related to how disability is portrayed and discussed in teacher education. In fact, these conversations are essential in supporting the needed shift in understandings of disability in teacher education.

Appendix

Survey Questions

a. Are you a faculty member in a teacher preparation program? (Y or N)
b. Are you involved in a general education or special education teacher preparation program? (Choose One: General Education, Special Education, Both)
c. Have you heard of Disability Studies? (Y or N)
d. Whether you answered yes or no to the previous question, how do/would you define Disability Studies? (Open-ended)
e. Provide a brief description of how you define disability. (Open-ended)
f. Within your teacher preparation program, is Disability Studies part of the curriculum? (Y or N)
g. If yes, how do you incorporate Disability Studies into the curriculum? (Open-ended)
h. In your own research and scholarly engagement, do you incorporate Disability Studies? (Y or N)
i. If yes, what are some ways that you incorporate Disability Studies into your research and scholarly engagement? (Open-ended)
j. Do you think that Disability Studies should be incorporated into teacher preparation programs? Why or why not? (Open-ended)
k. Please provide your email or physical address if you would like to receive a copy of the article(s) and/or report(s) from this research.

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