



## Resistance and discursive practice: Promoting advocacy in teacher undergraduate and graduate programmes

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### ABSTRACT

Building on previous work in the areas of resistance and discursive practice, we explore their interrelations, interactions, and possibilities for advocacy of/by and for diverse disabled students within the context of two teacher-preparation programs in the United States: Teachers College, and Michigan State University. Using these two approaches as examples, we propose a model of advocacy for teachers who have students with disabilities, as well as other diverse children and youth in their classrooms and schools. We conclude with some key recommendations for teachers to transform their practice and advocate for these students.

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Building on previous work in the areas of resistance (Gabel & Peters, 2004) and discursive practice (Reid & Valle, 2004), we explore their interrelations, interactions, and possibilities for advocacy of/by and for disabled students within the context of teacher-preparation programs in the United States (US).<sup>2</sup> Disabled students, as a frequently segregated sub-group in schools (either for part or all of the school day) reflect values and beliefs about the aims of education and society in general. It is important to examine the situation of disabled individuals as a marginalized group because responses to them will ultimately influence our responses to social justice and equal opportunity for all students.

In the context of current reform legislation at the federal level in the US, advocacy and resistance take on significance for teacher preparation in particular ways. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) mandates standardized testing for all kindergarten to grade 12 (K–12) students and requires these students to meet grade level expectations regardless of disability, race, language, or socio-

economic status. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) complements NCLB, including specific requirements for “highly qualified teachers” who can ensure that students with disabilities have access to and show progress in the general-education curriculum (i.e., through demonstrating proficiency on standardized tests).

While the explicit goal of both pieces of federal legislation is to reform schools in order to close the “achievement gap,” the process relies on standardization. In contrast, we argue that what is needed in order to transform schools is to create teachers as change agents who can work individually and collectively for liberatory practices in schools. Following a brief introduction to resistance theory and discursive practice, we provide examples of how these are utilized in two schools of education at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Using these examples, we then propose elements of a dialectical model of advocacy that emerges from these experiences. We conclude with some key recommendations for university programs as they pursue advocacy aimed at transforming practice.

### 1. Theories of resistance & discursive practice

Resistance has been defined as: “counter-hegemonic social attitudes, behaviour and actions aimed at weakening the classification among social categories which are directed against the dominant power(s) and against those who exercise it (them), having as its purpose its (their) redistribution in a more equitable way” (Sultana, 1989, p. 289). Essentially, resistance transgresses, disrupts and confronts larger forces; operates across individual and

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<sup>2</sup> We use the term *disabled* people throughout this article, rather than the more typical *people with disabilities*, to emphasize that disability oppression is a societal problem that exerts more negative pressures than any personal characteristic. Related to this notion, the term *dis/Ability vis-à-vis “disability”*, when it appears in this article is used to signify that the “dis” is both joined to and separated from “ability” and to foreground the otherwise obscured ground of “ability”, making the latter a figure of concern as well. The term is taken from Merrell and Anderson (2001), p. 268.

collective levels; is enacted through critical self-reflection coupled with action; and is contingent upon context. The first critical question to ask in relation to resistance is about how is power exercised. The answer leads to the question of status and its perception, for example, in terms of how disabled individuals view themselves and as they are viewed by entities of power. Essentially, resistance is targeted at the source of social control, and aims to equalize the distribution of power.

Discursive practice is a form of resistance, exercised by disability scholars, that targets hegemonic theories of disability and impairment. Its aim is to reformulate the discursive positionings that control and ultimately will transform practice. Discursive practices define the rules that control *both* what can be said (language) and done (practice), and constitute the means by which people become positioned in relations of power (Foucault, 1972). Historically, students labelled with a disability have been positioned as least powerful within the scientific, medical and psychological discourses of special education. In contrast, disability studies scholars have used discursive practice as an instrument to re-position students with disabilities in relations of power. They have attempted to accomplish this re-positioning by instantiating social/political discourses that challenge the historical, political, and economic contexts within which disability is constructed and reconstructed. Essentially, these scholars have produced a corpus of literature that turns the gaze from the individual as pathological, to institutional and structural pathologies within the organizational system of education itself (Brantlinger, 1997, 2004; Gallagher, 2004; Skrtic, 1995).

The social/political discourse of disability that has been developed by these scholars has made some inroads with regard to ideological as well as practical transformations related to the hegemonic discourse of (special) education. As an example, Peters, Klein, and Shadwick (1998) introduced critical reflection to students in a high-school English class. They encouraged these students' self-expression of experiencing learning disabilities in the school context through journal writing, poetry, and essays. As these students worked toward a critical understanding of their experiences of marginalization, watered-down curriculum, and low-expectations, they became eager to use these understandings to improve their school. They developed a manifesto directed at teachers and administrators, with recommendations for changes in school policy. Several of these recommendations were adopted, resulting in a more open and welcoming school environment, benefiting *all* students.

Transforming practice based on hegemonic ideologies takes time, and despite the literature promoting social/political discourses of disability, there are still many who adhere to science-based discourses. Consequently, transforming practice in ways that are resistant to science-based discourses—and at the same time responsive to this emerging discourse—is difficult and much more work needs to be focused on helping teachers conceive of and teach students labelled as disabled in more humane and emancipatory ways.

In the next section, we provide examples from two teacher-preparation programs that use an approach grounded in disability studies—one programmatic example at the graduate level (Teachers College, Columbia University), and one-course example at the undergraduate level (Michigan State University). We will use these examples to propose an advocacy model for teacher preparation within universities and colleges of education, with implications for teachers in classrooms.

## 2. Diverse learners in multi-cultural perspective: an undergraduate course at Michigan State University

In 2006, Michigan State University (MSU) College of Education initiated an effort to integrate experiences and knowledge of

educational practices concerning diversity throughout the courses in the teacher-preparation program, with disability as one of the thematic strands. The stimulus for this effort came from the realization that a one-course offering (especially in the early stages of teacher preparation) could not accomplish the depth and level of retention needed for substantial transformative impact on pre-service teachers. However, the experiences in the course described here provided a knowledge base to build on.

This course has been offered every semester since 1990. Originally enrolling 300 students at a time, it was a service course for undergraduate students throughout the university, and cross-listed as a foundational course for students intending to become either general-education teachers or special-education teachers. As a bi-product, it became an important recruiting ground for special-education teachers. The course replaced the traditional Special Education 101: Introduction to Disability—focusing instead on similarities and differences across the human spectrum of race, class, ability, ethnicity, sexual-orientation, gender, and religious/world belief systems.

This course has attracted students for several reasons (as documented in student evaluations of the course). First, the course is performance-based. The 2-h weekly interactive experiential lab sessions of no more than 20 students each have supplemented the more traditional weekly 2-h large lecture session with all 300 students. The lab sections not only provided opportunities to engage in practice, but also built strong communities of learners with respect and trust for divergent points of view. Second, the course content offers a cultural-general framework for understanding similarities and differences that is applicable to universal contexts—school being only one of them. Third, throughout the course, students have an opportunity to meet and have direct conversations with individuals from all walks of life and points of view. Fourth, students grow and develop their thinking through reflections on their experiences and knowledge acquisition in weekly dialogue journals with their lab instructor. Fifth, assessment is performance-based—culminating in a comprehensive portfolio submission (oral and written) in which students (small group and individual) demonstrate their learning through guided experiences and research. These experiences vary each semester, as they capitalize on community opportunities such as participation in city-wide Gay Pride Day or campus-wide Disability Awareness Week activities. Built-in to the course are ongoing opportunities and encouragement for debate and challenge—directed at themselves, at instructors, and at invited participants from the larger community. Overall, in course evaluations, students report that this course constitutes the first time that they have had many of these opportunities, and that they were life-changing—both in terms of how they think and in terms of what they do.

In terms of discursive practice, this course begins with a foundation in a culture-general framework that provides a common language and tool for thinking about how we are all the same. Two basic texts are provided. The first text provides a social/historical/political perspective on human diversity (Nieto & Bode, 2008). The second text provides a scientific-based medical model focused on disability as difference (Hardman, Drew, & Egan, 2002).<sup>3</sup> These two texts elicit a cognitive dissonance in students, from which they interrogate alternative perspectives, stereotypes and discrimination, particularly in terms of “white privilege”—which for many has been an uncontested domain.

<sup>3</sup> This text is no longer being used. It has been replaced with a text by Turnbull, Turnbull, and Wehmeyer (2007). While the Turnbull text does a better job of addressing diversity, it still uses a categorical approach to disabilities.

Using the culture-general framework, students begin to question their beliefs about disability (and other characteristics), and the stereotypes perpetuated in both discourse and images within traditional texts. For example, one such image in the Hardman et al.'s special-education text pictures a young female student at summer camp sitting in a wheelchair on a concrete walkway in front of a cabin. The caption under the picture asserts that even though this student has a severe disability, she is able to enjoy summer camp. The image evokes lively conversation in which students in the course use their culture-general framework to question whether solitary book reading as a stationary activity constitutes "enjoyment" of a summer camp, where the typical purpose is to interact with other children in various activities.

In this course, discursive practice naturally leads to multiple forms of resistance—both against hegemonic discourse and against traditional practice in schools. Students not only begin to "see" discrimination, but to resist it. During a recent semester, several students banded together to speak out at a public forum protesting police tactics that suppressed students' rights on campus. Many students voluntarily put in extra hours in support of activities that put them in direct contact with disabled children and youth, including the Special Olympics, and tutoring of special needs students. Students have also lent their support for Gay/Lesbian rights and against Gay/Lesbian harassment in local high schools. At the individual level, students report that they have ventured into personal relationships with others as a result of their changed perspectives—including dating individuals with disabilities and those from other cultural and racial backgrounds.

Short-term assessments conducted through pre- and post-test survey research indicate a substantial shift in attitude toward increased support for including disabled students in general-education classrooms (Biehl et al., 2008). Follow-up longitudinal survey research (Hunt, 2008) points to significant differences between those who have taken the course and those who have not. Most of those who have not experienced the Diverse Learners course request more categorical information on disability characteristics and express lack of knowledge as well as lack of confidence in teaching students with disabilities. By contrast, those who have experienced the Diverse Learners course, typically request information on differentiated and contingent instruction, and express more confidence and a commitment to including diverse students as a matter of course in their classrooms.

### 3. The Master's degree program at Teachers College

Teachers College (UC) at Columbia University is one of a shrinking number of institutions that continues a tradition<sup>4</sup> of offering a category-specific as well as more generalized masters' degrees in special education. The program in Learning dis/Abilities—we use this spelling to focus attention on ability and to alert applicants thumbing through the catalogue or perusing the website that this program is not business as usual—is the only one to infuse a disability studies perspective into the special-education certification program that meets Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) standards. In addition to saturating most coursework with a disability studies perspective, we also interweave a social justice discourse. Disability is an oppression based on Ableism (Hehir, 2002) that plays out in different ways depending on the person's race-ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual preference, and so forth. As a consequence, to promote resistance and insist on social justice,

we emphasize an approach to the study of disability that broadens the discourse by linking disability with these other identity categories and theories of eugenics (Baker, 2002) and focus on intersectionality (Apple, 1996; Collins, 1998; Knight & Chae, 2005).

In our introduction to learning dis/abilities, a program overview, we begin with a brief study of the science- and expert-based—or technical-rational—medical and information processing models. We begin here, because these are the perspectives that serve as the underlying discourse for special education and are most familiar to entering students. We examine this technical-rational literature with respect to definitions, prevalence figures, the nature of *deficits* related to learning delays in literacy and mathematics, the disproportionate representation of students of colour, and so forth. About the sixth week of the semester, through essays, poems, narratives, films, autobiographies, reports of ethnographic research (e.g., Collins, 2003), and a series of panel discussions with affluent and poor high-school students labelled as learning disabled and reading experts who trouble the predominant perspectives on literacy (and other content area) instruction for "these students," we begin to introduce contrasting, interdisciplinary, and typically unsettling discourses, those that challenge typical notions of intelligence<sup>5</sup> and include the voices of persons with disabilities that provide evidence for their preference to recast disability in sociocultural and socio-political terms. Including the voices of disabled people makes clear that they are disabled more by physical and social barriers that pathologise, infantilize, exclude, and impoverish them than they are by any physical or mental personal characteristics. We highlight the questions (a) whether it is better to presume that labelled learners are competent or incompetent and (b) what difference such assumptions make: "[W]hichever assumption is later demonstrated to have been incorrect, which assumption will have had the least dangerous impact on a student's education?" (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh, & Reid, 2005, p. 200). It is by asking our students to think about disability from the perspective of disabled persons that we hope to promote advocacy.

One purpose of this course is to disrupt the notion that there exists a "learning dis/abled person," to help students come to understand that learning dis/ability, like all disability, is a constructed category that shifts through time (Longmore & Umansky, 2001; Stiker, 2002) and across cultures and contexts (Artiles, 2003; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999).<sup>6</sup> A second major purpose is to help students explore how the medical and information processing models serve the interests of schools and to discover that competing discourses exist, articulated by disabled persons and

<sup>5</sup> To raise issues about intelligence tests and typical notions about intelligence that drive schooling, now retired Professor Lous Heshusius of York University once gave her class a short, mock IQ test. During the next class, she handed back to her students with an air of great legitimacy mock scores in sealed envelopes—all in the 1980–1990s range. The student responses were so severe that she decided not to use that tactic again (Deborah Gallagher, personal communication, October 13, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Professor Deborah Gallagher (personal communication, October 13, 2005) of Northern Iowa University has shared two tactics she uses to highlight the social construction of disability. In the first, she asks students a simple question that elicits a profound response: would they like themselves or their children to be called *retarded* and how is it that we use that label with other people's children? The second tactic involves asking students to write a profile, or description, of a hypothetical gifted student in some detail. She asks them, being careful not to use gendered pronouns, to give the child a name, to describe him or her, and to talk about the child's family, interests, and activities. She collects the profiles and then asks for a show of hands to indicate whether the students' gifted child was (a) female, (b) a member of a racial-ethnic minority, (c) disabled, or (d) working class or poor. Very few hands, if any, are raised. This activity gives her an opening to discuss with her class how the profile reflects the image of the gifted child they carry in their heads and how that image coincides with the group of students teachers often expect to be gifted.

<sup>4</sup> Teachers College was the site of the first Council for Exceptional Children chapter and the first Masters' Degree program in learning disabilities, then referred to as neurological impairment.

their allies, even if those discourses are marginalized. A third goal is to help them understand that how they as teachers conceive of “learning dis/abilities” determines how they will perceive, assess, and instruct students and evaluate the ideological and structural aspects of American schooling in general (Brantlinger, 2004, 2005, 2006).

Students are usually resistant, surprised that we do not take a deficit approach to disability, that we promote inclusive education as a civil right (as wanting as many included classrooms still are), and that we as a faculty do not believe that there is a distinction between theory and practice. They want to argue that students must fit schools and societal expectations, and that modifying instruction to eliminate barriers to learning does not accomplish the ends of the legislation (e.g., IDEA, NCLB) that guides their practice. Students later report that the most powerful assignments in this course, because they enable them to reflect deeply and challenge their own thinking, include a series of short papers in which they explore the *consequences* of each of these various discourses for disabled students and their families, *not* for efficient schooling.

“dis/Ability in Context,” a disability studies course that draws on interdisciplinary scholarship and ways of knowing, covers the historical, legal, cultural, and social experiences and representations of people across the full range of disability categories. The course is open to all students, so that pre-service and in-service, elementary and middle- and high-school, special and general-education teachers study together, sometimes in level-focused groups and sometimes as a whole. The life contexts addressed include family/caregivers, employment, and independent living as well as lifespan transitions. The purpose of this course is to offer an opportunity for critical analysis and self-reflection around disability and related issues. Ferri (2006) describes a useful group of instructional activities that she uses in a similar course.

Among the major projects we require is a disability-in-action presentation. It includes one of three student-selected options: (a) interviewing a person or parent of a person with a dis/ability to listen to the voices of those who live with disability and to profile the various contexts within which that disability is framed, (b) reviewing a building or other space with an eye to determining the physical and attitudinal barriers to access, or (c) adapting a unit to include disability awareness (e.g., an adapted unit might include a critical analysis of the cultural, legal, or social history or popular, artistic, or literary representations of persons with disabilities at any level of schooling).

From the students’ perspectives, a somewhat more practically oriented course that is also open to all students addresses reasons for and methods to differentiate instruction in inclusive classrooms for diverse learners. Under the term *diverse*, we include all learners—those who excel, those who perform at grade level, and those who experience delays; males and females; the affluent, middle class, and poor; and students of all races, ethnicities, and religious persuasions. We do not limit *diverse* to children and youth who are labelled disabled or from nondominant cultures, as many of our mostly White, middle- and upper-class, female students and the American inclusion literature typically do.

The purpose of the course is not only to promote and model differentiated instruction, but also to foster collaborative problem-solving between educators and students’ families, while allowing the students enrolled to link their own experience in a differentiated setting to the historical contexts, shifting beliefs, and subsequent educational theories that have led to increased emphasis on inclusive, collaboratively planned education. One of the central concepts interrogated in this course is normalcy (Garland, 1995, 1997). We want students to understand that normal and abnormal are mutually defining and artificial categories and that identity is so

complex, mutable, and contextual that there is no possible way to divide people into such categories. Our primary purpose here is to reduce fear and alienation—“I don’t know how to teach these students.”—and to enlist the general-education teachers as advocates for all learners.

To enable all teachers to address the needs of all students, we include a three-session lab on assistive instructional technology and universal design. Among the primary assignments is to develop a unit plan for any grade level and content area, describe the students who will participate, and write two in-depth lessons plans that include specific accommodations and modifications. The students also submit an analytic reaction paper that describes the benefits, drawbacks, and potential ways to re-customize their unit.

To give flesh to the social model of disability, in the fall students who major in our program take a course grounded in Vygotskian theory that focuses on providing access to the general-education curriculum through students’ strengths and group learning experiences. We define learning not as mastery, but as appropriation and growth into a socially defined discourse (Torres-Velasquez, 1999, 2000). This approach emphasizes the centrality of the learners’ cultural and economic environments in their learning and the ways that disability labels function as often debilitating, essentialising lenses. The idea of the zone of proximal development further highlights the importance of teaching’s leading development and the necessity of contingent teaching (i.e., designing lessons on the basis of ongoing, careful student evaluation and teaching accordingly).

Two major projects include (a) an in-depth self-reflection about what teachers’ own race, class, gender, ability status, and so forth mean for the attitudes, understandings, and conceptions of knowledge and deportment they bring to their teaching and (b) an eight-lesson, implemented,<sup>7</sup> differentiated, and contingent teaching unit. Students must evaluate learners’ daily and plan and re-plan instruction accordingly. They begin with a week-long observation in a variety of school and community contexts and, to make the report manageable, *observe* one labelled student’s social skills, reading, oral language, and content-area performances (no testing is permitted). They then write a set of differentiated, constructivist daily lesson plans for the class unit. On the first and last days, they must record, transcribe, and study the student’s classroom dialogue to see whether by day eight some evidence of growth into the instructional discourse is evident. On each of the eight instructional days, the students collect additional data on their teaching using two strategies of their choice. Most select analysis of learners’ work samples, anecdotal records, field notes, student conferences, structured observations, or sociograms, depending on their instructional goals. They submit a detailed report that also includes a day-by-day, narrative diary that examines what they did; how the class, but especially the student of interest, responded; and how, on the basis of the data they collected, they then modified their instruction.

On course evaluations, students report that this project together with the course in differentiating instruction helps them to re-envision the labelled student they observe so closely, seeing him or her as more complex and capable, while coming to understand that contingent, differentiated, and constructivist teaching are not only possible, but productive alternatives to the more typically advocated one-to-one instruction, stand-up teacher, and drill and practice (See also Brantlinger, 2005; Gallagher, 2005). In fact, they have the observational data to convince themselves. An important understanding that often derives from this assignment is that “It’s

<sup>7</sup> Our students are in classrooms either as in-service interns or student teachers both fall and spring semesters.

not the student.” Students begin to believe that instructional practices can and should be modified to ensure that all students learn.

In the spring in a course on ethics, we study critical pedagogy to add in a very conscious way a political perspective to students’ understandings of sociocultural and intersectional influences on learning. The students study ideologically based and institutionalized aspects of discrimination and hegemony in light of history, culture, special-education legislation, school contexts, and social attitudes and practices, with particular emphasis on the overrepresentation and more likely segregation of minority students in special education (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Losen & Orfield, 2002). Although the enrolment averages 25, we run the class as a seminar with groups of students taking the lead most weeks. The professor(s)<sup>8</sup> lead the initial classes and use the last half-hour of each student-led class as a time to engage students in discussions that clarify, enhance, or expand the topics for that class period: most often that amounts to promoting deeper analyses as well as syntheses across topics, texts, and courses. Throughout the course, we emphasize Foucault’s (1980) notion of power as shifting and enacted, circulating, and tension-derived as well as tension-producing and repeatedly question the association between power and knowledge.

Some major assignments include (a) a step-by-step school-change plan on a topic of the students’ choice (e.g., adopting a critical perspective to teaching, breaking the silence about death for elementary students who live with death daily in their communities, attracting parents to high-school back-to-school night), (b) an in-depth analysis of the power dynamics within one school (i.e., the power exerted by legislation, disability categories and labels, curriculum and text books, teachers and administrators, parents and learners, assistants, community mores, current economic conditions, funding practices, media events, etc.), (c) the re-writing of a content-area instructional unit in literacy, science, social studies or mathematics to eliminate discrimination and include transformative teaching, and (d) a personal reflection on and comparison of each student’s thinking as s/he entered the program and the understandings with which each leaves. This latter assignment provides feedback to faculty on the effectiveness of the program. From course evaluations, most students report that the program has been life altering, that they have become committed to transformative teaching and to personally interrogating and challenging disabling school and public attitudes and practices—as one student recently said, “Once you know, you cannot unknown.” However, there are always a few who, even at the end, cling to the safety of technical-rational models.

The final set of courses into which a disability studies perspective is infused is either an in-service internship for which we supervise working teachers on the job or student teaching. The first semester specifically addresses providing access to the general-education curriculum and the second developmental instruction in content areas where learners are experiencing difficulties and concomitant delays. These in-school experiences are supplemented by a weekly, 2-h seminar in which we teach holistic, constructivist teaching practices in mathematics, social studies, and science—additional coursework addresses formal assessment,<sup>9</sup> teaching English language learners, multisensory and balanced teaching of reading,

readers and writers workshops, and content-area reading. Also addressed in this 2-h seminar is community building, the writing of lesson plans and IEPs, legislation, and an emphasis on contingent instruction. Pre-service and practicing teachers, that is, student teachers and interns, take the seminars together and carry out group and individual projects in their classrooms, which they critique in the seminar.

Overall, the usual program texts—media presentations, textbooks, instructional materials, tests, and articles—are supplemented with first-person narratives—poems, autobiographies, essays, and fictional accounts—written primarily by parents, teachers, and persons with disabilities. It is apparent from the projects described earlier that there are also many instances where we require students to generate their own knowledge through reflections and first-hand experiences, such as interviews, observations, data collection and analysis, journal keeping, and so forth. Throughout the program, we question the strict hold of positivist science on the field of special education and encourage students to consider the importance of subjective, lived experience.

As with any performance-based program, ours is continually undergoing revision. The program described here was in place during the 2005–2006 academic year, along with a small MA in Disability Studies in Education that required considerable interdisciplinary coursework. The department is moving toward a program in Inclusive Education, and changes occurred in 2007 when the program was integrated with the elementary education program.

These two approaches—one at the graduate programmatic level, and one at the undergraduate course level—contain some common characteristics that distinguish them from more traditional science-based teacher-preparation approaches:

1. they both offer a strong foundation in knowledge of counter-hegemonic discourses as well as discursive practice;
2. they both purposely and systematically seek to trouble hegemonic notions of disability and normality within a general framework of difference that is inclusive of the human spectrum;
3. they both stress ongoing and continuous critical analysis and self-reflection;
4. they both pay attention to context and the environment: historical, legal, cultural, social;
5. they are both performance-based programs that focus on applications of knowledge to practice, within which they offer multiple opportunities for experiential learning— affective knowledge and cognitive knowledge are dialectically related;
6. they are action-oriented and stress empowerment at both the individual and collective levels.

Our analysis of these common strengths provides a basis for a proposed advocacy model of teacher preparation that transforms these strengths into an explicit process.

#### 4. Toward an advocacy model for teacher preparation

The above examples are uniquely positioned to take resistance and discursive practice beyond academic argument to the invention and application of new discourse *practices*. The logical next step involves utilizing disability studies perspectives as an instrument for advocacy that formulates resistance and discursive practice as both strategy and tactic.

The advocacy model (Fig. 1 below), incorporates discursive practice found in the first three characteristics through focus on disturbing traditional scientific positivist knowledge and hegemonic ideology (top left circle). This knowledge/ideology interacts

<sup>8</sup> Typically, there is an advanced doctoral student acting as teaching assistant.

<sup>9</sup> In her assessment course, Professor Valerie Owens (personal communication, October 13, 2005) at National-Louis University infuses a disability studies perspective by helping her students understand that labels and rankings perpetuated by tests are social constructions that often result in dire consequences for learners. She notes that her students are out there arguing with school psychologists.

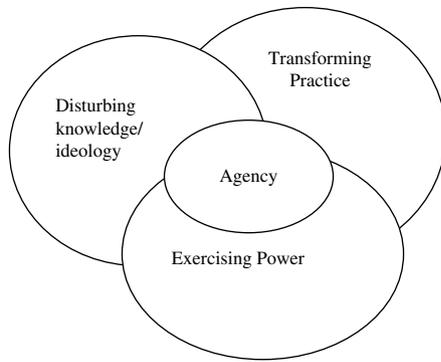


Fig. 1. An advocacy model for teacher preparation.

with the fourth and fifth characteristics to transform practice (the circle on the right). Both of these circles interact with exercising power (the bottom circle) contained in the sixth characteristic. All three circles exist in a dialectical relationship aimed at systematic change. Specifically, power exists only as it is *exercised*, using both strategies and tactics for simultaneous transformation of ideologies, structures, and practices.

This model of teacher preparation places agency at the centre. Agency involves both individual and collective advocacy. Advocacy cannot be accomplished without a culture of critical reflection and a deep understanding of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses. A counter-hegemonic discourse emerges from the cognitive dissonance generated from Disturbing Knowledge. Disturbing Knowledge is necessary for Transforming Practice. Practice cannot be transformed without both a deep understanding of discourses and strategic work on the Exercising Power aimed at societal issues of justice and equity. Without the three centers working together around individual and collective Agency, all three are almost inevitably isolated, sporadic and ephemeral in the changes that they attempt.

In this model, advocacy essentially involves acting individually and collectively to effect social justice through equity in teaching and learning in schools. Difficult and complex, it requires the simultaneous transformation of all factors that mitigate social justice and equity. Advocacy builds on a foundation of knowledge and self-awareness. Advocacy is directly linked to action, and is constituted through purposeful and critical reflection, often fostered through dialogues with other people and/or texts. Advocacy-in-action is both tactical and strategic; that is, it focuses on the immediate (i.e., day-to-day classroom teaching) as well as the indirect/larger issues connected to social justice and equity concerning teaching and learning in schools (e.g., school funding issues). Advocacy is both an end (produces results) and a means (tool or instrument) for social justice and equity. Specifically, advocates are both instruments of change (noun/subject), and effect change through advocacy (verb/object).

For teachers and students to become effective advocates, teacher-preparation programs must advance the notion that advocacy is multi-centred. The first centre involves agency: both individual and collective. The second centre involves a three-pronged approach to understanding the ways in which advocacy is exercised: as counter-hegemonic narratives to dominant ideologies, structures and practices. The third centre involves understanding the dialectical nature of knowledge, reflection and action inherent in transforming the prevailing ideologies, structures and practices.

Because it is difficult, complex, and multi-centred, cultivating teachers as advocates and building advocacy-in-action may best be

accomplished, when possible, by the kind of developmental approach we outline here (see also Peters, 1999). But, certainly, there are many alternative routes to advocacy and the kinds of personal changes and collective actions we describe here.

When they enter a graduate or undergraduate teacher-preparation program, pre-service, and even many in-service, teachers typically lack self-awareness: they are unfamiliar with the concept of ableism and have unconsciously internalized and/or left unexamined ablest stereotypes and ablest discrimination. In this case, the teacher-preparation program may profitably focus at the individual level (first centre of advocacy) and on ideology (one part of the three-pronged second centre of advocacy) to begin the dialectical process of gaining knowledge, engaging in reflection and considering and implementing action (the third centre).

The teacher-preparation program begins this process by building a culture of *critical self-reflection* in order to uncover and challenge *ablest assumptions* that underlie stereotypes and discrimination. This focus on critical self-reflection and challenging assumptions at the individual level typically leads to a *cognitive dissonance* particularly in pre-service teachers, but sometimes also in in-service teachers, between their established beliefs and new critical awareness. In most cases and over time, this cognitive dissonance leads to a new self-awareness at the individual level that promotes questioning, and new beliefs/concepts about dis/Ability begin to emerge. Now, advocates can build on their newly attained knowledge and reflect on that knowledge to produce a new *dis/Ability awareness*. While the focus is on the *individual* as agent of change through new awareness, this awareness is provoked, developed, and affirmed through discursive dialogue within a community of learners, that is, in courses in which the teachers participate. This awareness constitutes an essential foundation for introducing an exploration of the contexts within which individual teachers should understand and develop/expand this new dis/Ability awareness.

As the teacher is introduced to historical, cultural, legal, economic, and social representations of disability (as described in the MSU and TC examples), the individual-level cognitive dissonance begins to move away from fear and alienation toward an integrated knowledge of the interconnectedness of individuals and the ways in which awareness/beliefs are exercised through behaviour. Teachers are introduced to and asked to reflect on ablest barriers—the institutional structures and practices that are underpinned by predominant ideologies. They begin to move away from the self to understanding others through life-space interviews of individuals with dis/Abilities, and through purposeful examination of school environments and their effects on these individuals. Interrogating contextual knowledge expands the focus from “Who am I?” (my beliefs) to “What are the barriers that militate against realizing who I am (and who others are)?” (i.e., structure and practice factors). Reflecting on this knowledge produces dis/Ability awareness that is now oriented toward the politics of exclusion and the realization of the contexts that need to change in order to effect social justice and equity at the school and classroom levels.

Moving to a still wider and even more politicized conception of context (what Freire (1998) has called “reading the world”), teachers are asked to build on their knowledge of barriers—historical, cultural, legal, economic and social—to examine structures and practices with an eye toward both tactics and strategies for change. The collective nature of the first centre now gains more prominence, as teachers begin to work collectively to conduct in-depth analyses of the power dynamics in schools and classrooms. Their emerging status as advocates (who we are), and understandings of advocacy (the need to remove barriers) expands outward to developing tactics for social justice and equity.

Advocacy-in-action, or praxis, becomes more concrete, encouraging multiple opportunities for application of both self-awareness and context knowledge to adaptation of instruction and engagement in social justice-oriented projects within the classroom curriculum and school culture. The Teachers College approach exemplified advocacy-in-action in the description of the internship year.

At this point, teachers often begin to recognize the need to target the larger contexts influencing teaching and learning in schools. They build on their ideological awareness, knowledge of contexts, and action-oriented tactics to focus on community dynamics, state- and federal-level legal parameters, and other issues of economic and social justice. The descriptions provided of the Teachers' College ethics course exemplify the ways these issues are addressed. Specifically, the culture of critical self-reflection, the community-building within the teacher-preparation program, now expand outward to a culture of coalition-building that includes potential allies— parents, dis/Abled individuals and students of all ages and different backgrounds, professionals, policy-makers, and others. Coalitions work for social justice and equity through the same dialectical process of knowledge, reflection, and action, but within the larger societal contexts and toward long-range goals at the collective level for the benefit of *all* students.

Throughout this process, resistance and discursive practice are ubiquitous. Teachers may, for example, engage their students and their families in district-wide community projects designed to promote, let's say, building accessibility. Such a project would require that teachers first engage their own students in the series of processes we noted above. They would need to promote both self-reflection on Ableism and dis/ability awareness so that both disabled and nondisabled students in their classes, and later in other teachers' classes, come to identify the presence of and see the injustice of physical barriers. The students would need to be sufficiently motivated to enlist their parents and other members of the community as well as school administrators in the effort to convince the school board to allocate funds to eliminate such physical barriers.

A necessary, but far less ambitious, project might be to advocate for politically correct, or what we would call "just plain correct," language usage. Many students now call others "fag" or "retard" in the school grounds and hallways with impunity. Although racial and gender epitaphs are now unacceptable in our culture, slurs related to dis/ability and homosexuality are still "fair game" (Smith & Erevelles, 2004). Teachers and students, through the kinds of change-oriented activities we have described, might mount a school- or community-wide campaign to help their own cultural groups become aware of the ways that such language perpetuates negative representations of and attitudes toward disabled persons and thereby disadvantages them in our society. Speaking out

consistently against such oppression is the only way to make unthinking students and community members aware. A simple, resistive comment that provokes users of denigrating language to realize the harm they are doing by engaging in such discursive practices might be enough.

## 5. Conclusion: the work that lies ahead

In this article, we have built on our previous work in resistance theory and discursive practice to elaborate how pre-service and in-service teachers might be cultivated as advocates through their undergraduate and graduate teacher-preparation programs. Although a sociopolitical discourse that counters the hegemonic, technical-rational discourse of (special) education has been adopted by many scholars, students entering teacher-preparation programs are seldom aware of this perspective. Transforming the prevalent discourses based on these hegemonic ideologies takes time, because they are so enmeshed in our national psyche, legislation, school procedures, and daily classroom practices.

Consequently, we have shared two university-based approaches to transforming practice in ways that are both resistant to science-based discourses and responsive to disability studies discourses. These approaches share six commonalities: they intentionally (a) trouble prevailing ideas about disability and normalcy; (b) interrogate the historical, legal, cultural, and social contexts of contemporary education; (c) offer alternative representations through strong grounding in counter-hegemonic narratives; (d) include learning experiences designed to position affective and cognitive knowledge in a dialectical relationship; (e) stress continual reflection; and (f) promote both individual and collective advocacy. In our model for advocacy, we have outlined at some length how our programs address these components and have offered these two examples as potentially transformative projects in which empowered teachers and students might engage.

These programs and projects are resistant in that they work against widespread conceptions of disability and diversity in education to distribute power in more equitable ways. As a strategy of resistance, they foster counter-hegemonic understandings and employ discursive (re-)positionings aimed at changing both what can be said and what can be done and by whom. By challenging technical-rational approaches to education, they open up unprecedented spaces for new dialogues and social action based on subjectivity, the localization of power, and personal responsibility and empowerment. Bringing personal responsibility home in turn presses the need for collective action through solidarity (Young, 2000).

However, it is important to recognize that attempts to transform schools cannot take place through teacher-preparation programs or courses alone. Two other reform contexts influence what happens in schools: societal reform and disability/diversity reform as depicted in Fig. 2 below.

The proposed advocacy model, based on principles of inclusive education and disability studies, must be part of a larger societal reform in response to inequity and exclusion. In turn, disability/diversity reform must challenge the pervasive view of e.g., disability as a personal tragedy rather than as a social construction. These three areas of reform, depicted in Fig. 2 above, must be addressed together. If the interaction is only partial, then teacher preparation for Inclusive Education cannot be achieved. For example, as long as disability/diversity reform is not seen as part of social reform, then the primacy of the medical/deficit model of special education remains. If school reform frames itself without reference to social inequity or disability/diversity reform, then the practice of inclusive education focuses on the 'typical' student and leaves unchallenged the educational structures and assumptions

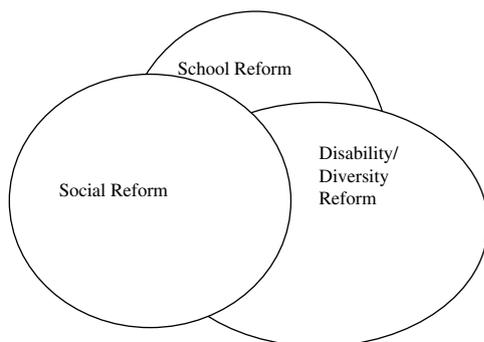


Fig. 2. A disability rights in education model for inclusive education.

that have led to segregated programs. Finally, if social reform initiatives fail to interact with school and disability/diversity reform, then the rhetoric of equality and participation quickly becomes a divisive reminder of the 'us and them' polarities that led to segregation and discrimination in the first place.<sup>10</sup> In combination, with the proposed advocacy model of teacher preparation, school reform will have a better chance of success.

For teachers, advocating for students and promoting change "requires taking tremendous risks, including the charge of being 'out-of-compliance' with school regulations and decisions" (Levin, 1998, p. 164). Yet, with too many students, and especially disabled students, failing or dropping out of school, a major shift in thinking and acting is needed. As Levin points out (Levin, 1998, p. 162), teachers essentially have two choices. The first is to accept the status quo, and the second is to challenge the status quo through stepping outside of conventional boundaries. Preparing teachers as risk-takers and advocates who can step outside conventional boundaries is the ultimate goal of the approaches to pre-service teacher preparation described in this article. For practicing teachers, opportunities will manifest themselves in the day-to-day tasks that they undertake with individual children and youth, in classrooms, in schools, and in the larger community. It is hoped that the examples of disability given in these two university approaches have made a contribution to the goal of equity and opportunity for all students, and for the teachers dedicated to their students' success.

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<sup>10</sup> Adapted from Peters, Johnstone, and Ferguson (2005).