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Teaching Bodies: Curriculum and Corporeality

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TEACHING BODIES: CURRICULUM AND CORPOREALITY

by

JULIE GARLEN MAUDLIN

(Under the Direction of John A. Weaver)

ABSTRACT

I began thinking about the topic of this dissertation at first in 2003 when I found

myself expecting a third child while teaching full-time and pursuing a doctoral degree,

and in earnest later that year at Bergamo, where I began to see a connection between my

own interest in desires and bodies as they relate to education and the work of several of

my colleagues. I began to think about the role of the body in the curriculum. Everyday

that we enter the classroom we bring our bodies and our desires along with us. We

educate and learn from gestating bodies, ill bodies, able and "dis"-abled bodies, bodies

that shape who we are as students and teachers. And yet, it seems that in many ways, the

body becomes unimportant, if not invisible, in the traditional classroom.

What I hope to accomplish with this dissertation, then, is to examine what I

perceive as the disembodiment of curriculum, and bring the body into the educational

practice and discourse in a way that is meaningful to the everyday practice of teachers

and relevant to the future of curriculum at large. This project is not an attempt to

reconceptualize physical education, although the binary we have constructed between

kinesthetic and academic education is relevant. This study is also not a rearticulation of

kinesthetic learning theory; the decision to utilize bodily movement as a way of helping

students internalize concepts might be considered an initiative to involve the body more

in the curriculum, but this study is more about what we do to, and from, and in our bodies

than with them. I want to understand in what ways the body and pedagogy are intertwined, to explore how the ways we have thought about the body have shaped how we are as students and teachers, and to imagine an "embodied" curriculum that reflects the ways that the postmodern, posthuman body and the curriculum act with/in, on and against one another.

INDEX WORDS: Curriculum, Corporeality, Teaching, Body, Text, Education.

TEACHING BODIES: CURRICULUM AND CORPOREALITY

by

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Georgia Southern University, Bachelor of Arts, 1998

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TEACHING BODIES: CURRICULUM AND CORPOREALITY

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to John Stokes Maudlin, who inspired me to explore

this topic, and in the memory of his namesake, Stokes C. Albritton.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1
WRITING ON THE BODY

What About the Body?

Why write about the body? One might wonder what brings a student of curriculum studies, pursuing not an M.D. but a doctorate in education, to study the relationship between curriculum and the body. Pinar et. al (1995) have suggested that scholars choose their research topics with "the promise of excitement not of prudence" and it was indeed this promise, this stirring that grew out of my own bodily experiences that led me to this study (p. 868).   This dissertation is about bodies; it is about a space where paradigms, bodies of knowledge, merge with the material bodies of teachers and students. It began when, in my last semester of doctoral coursework and my second year of teaching fourth and fifth graders at a non-traditional state-funded public charter school, I found myself expecting a third child. In the months leading up to that unexpected discovery, I had been plagued with intense headaches and bouts of overwhelming despair with each approaching menstrual cycle. I had never before experienced that kind of instability, an overpowering sense that my world was suddenly spinning out of control. Desperate to understand what I was experiencing, my husband probed me for some explanation. The only description that I could come up with was that I wanted to "paint the world black."   When these episodes occurred, not only was I not able to teach, but all I could do was retreat to my dark bedroom until the symptoms disappeared. In an effort to diagnose the cause of the problem, my obstetrician suggested I discontinue my oral contraceptives, and, in spite of alternative measures, it was only a matter of weeks before my old symptoms vanished and new ones appeared.

When I discovered that I would be adding another child to the three and five year olds I was already raising while teaching full-time and pursuing a doctoral degree, I faced several dilemmas, but after I had considered the exhausting logistics of adding gestating to my already lengthy Things To Do list, I started thinking about how this pregnancy, brought forth out of my own attempts to control my body's hormonal spiral, would impact me as a teacher and a researcher. How would I tell my nine and ten year old students that I was pregnant, and what would they think? How would I cope with the constant display of this incredibly public product of my sexuality? The pregnancy would change the way I felt, looked, and even thought. How would those changes be felt by my students? In many ways, my new corporeal reality called into question the performative, poststructural theory that had resonated so strongly with me as I wondered how to reconcile what I perceived as conflicting identities.

That year at Bergamo, the annual conference of the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing (JCT), I probed these issues further with a paper titled, "Where is the Love?," in which I explored the discourses of desire as they relate to education. As I sat in on the sessions of several of my colleagues that year, I heard one story after another that resonated with thoughts about education and the body: Marla Morris spoke about teaching through the ill body, Delease Wear talked about compassion in medical education, and Leigh Medders shared her personal experience of watching her young niece battle cancer. The more I heard, read, and talked about the body, the more I wanted to explore its impact on education and its role in shaping curriculum.

My curiosity intensified a few months after the birth of my son, John Stokes, when I began my new job as a fourth grade teacher in a rural public elementary school. I

was still feeling a little out of place in my new traditional setting when my homeroom students began to arrive with their parents for Open House. I was taken aback when one parent after another greeted me with an explanation of the medications their child took for attention deficit disorders. Eventually, I found out that seven (a full twenty-five percent) of the 26 homeroom students I would teach the last half of the school day had been diagnosed with attention deficit conditions. Two of those students had also been diagnosed with additional conditions, including oppositional defiant disorder. Having only worked with a few medicated students in my two years teaching in a university town only a hundred miles away, I had not anticipated this change, which fueled my thoughts about how the body has interacted with the curriculum. Working with these students brought new questions to mind, as I couldn't help feeling that their bodies had something to say about the state of education. What is it exactly that we are treating? What are our bodies trying to tell us about the ways that we have attempted to train them into submission?

One additional classroom experience contributed to the shaping of this dissertation just as I was attempting to organize my proposal. I found myself in the middle of a paradigm shift in the way that education has approached students with disabilities. Suddenly, "inclusion" had emerged anew from the 1980s as the "new" buzzword, and both special education and regular education teachers were scrambling to adjust to this new mindset. As I attended workshops to learn how to serve the needs of students with disabilities without "resourcing" them to a special education classroom, I began to think about how the students had come to be excluded in the first place. I wondered how our ideas about disabled bodies, bodies that some might refer to as

"abnormal," have shaped educational practice? I began to suspect that there might be more to the traditional exclusion model of educating disabled students than mere logistics.

Finally, I cannot omit one final experience that further ignited my thoughts as I was writing. In the fall of 2005, the health of my 89 year-old maternal grandfather, Stokes, began a slow but steady decline. He had been struggling with Parkinson's for more than a decade, and as I anticipated his looming death, I reflected on the way that our assumptions about illness and the body had constructed the last years of his life. Although he never explicitly discussed his illness, I knew that this proud, stern man who had for so long maintained such a tight rein on his actions and emotions, was ashamed of the bodily impulses that eventually left him virtually helpless. He took his last breath on Christmas Eve morning, and his death left me with all kinds of questions about bodies, and control, and stories, and illness.

All of these questions lead to the underlying theme of this dissertation, the role theories of the body and the body itself has had in shaping curriculum, and conversely, the role curriculum has had in shaping the body. To understand these interconnections, we as educators and students must recognize the ways we act on, in, and through the body. As O'Farrell et al (2000) observes, "The body is trained, shaped and toned to perfect tautness in minute detail at every turn and under every circumstance" (p. 1). Whether or not we are conscious of it, this training of the body occurs through a wide variety of educational practices, including those discussed here: standardized testing, the overuse of textbooks, and popular culture, among others.

Recently, academia has seen an upsurge of interest in what Rosemarie Garland-Thompson (2003) calls "body criticism." However, many critical studies fail to bridge the gap between the discursive and the material, and "overlook particular bodies embedded in specific situations" (Garland-Thompson, 2003). As Kathy Davis (1997) notes, "The body may be back but the new body theory is just as . . .disembodied as it ever was" (18). Thus, this dissertation seeks to answer the question, "What about the body?" Can the material body exist in the discursive complexities of postmodernism, and if so, where, and how?

As I began looking for insight into that question, I looked not to my own embodied experiences but to text. Instead of first asking, "What about *my* body?" I began reading everything I could find about theories of the body and embodiment. I knew when this project had begun for me, but I found myself at a loss when it came to articulating exactly what I was hoping to express in my writing. Having become so accustomed, as a product of a traditional text-based education, to remanding myself to text, it did not occur to me to begin my inquiry by first looking inward. Somewhere in the early stages of my dissertation, however, I came across Donna LeCourt's (2004) opening to *Identity matters: schooling the student body in academic discourse*. She said that her book

> began in stories of failure and frustration, from an attempt to better understand what was taking place in my classrooms and why I was so invested in the pedagogies that kept failing me. From practice, I was led to theory, but theory does not begin in the academy; it begins in everyday interactions and reactions. It

begins in autobiography. It becomes a search for understanding that everyday

realities or accepted ways of thinking cannot explain (p. 1).

When I read those words that I knew I must rethink the way that I was going about my

own "body project." I understood then that if I hoped to articulate a sense of thinking

about education through, and with, and in the body, I must begin by thinking through my

own muddled perceptions of what it means to live from the body.

My Body Autobiography

After that initial realization, I thought for a long time about when and how I began

to think about my body, and eventually the memories began to resurface. One of the first

things I can remember is that I disliked the word "nose." When I was three years old, I

was taking our Bassett Hound, Hushpuppy, down the front steps when I became

entangled in the leash and fell face-first on the hard brick. Fearing my nose might be

broken, my parents took me to the emergency room, and I remember feeling mortified at

having to lie on the table and have x-rays taken of my body and particularly my nose,

which I felt was private. Fortunately, there were no broken bones, but that experience

was implanted permanently in my memory.

I must have been about five when I started to wonder if I might be fat. It was

sometime after we moved back to the small South Georgia town where my mother had

grown up. She was in her early thirties then; she was thin and had long chestnut colored

hair. I admired her; she was tall and beautiful and seemed to wear a smile everywhere we

went. I remember waiting for her to finish her workouts at the Shape Shop, where all the

women seemed equally fit and trim. My dad was also tall and handsome with his dark

features and slim build. I thought he looked like Tom Selleck, who was starring in

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Magnum P.I. then. I remember shopping in health food stores, eating carob chip cookies, the pantries full of muscle shakes and diet supplements.

I was five when *Return of the Jedi* opened, and when we went to see it in the theater, I left with Carrie Fisher's image permanently imprinted in my mind. She was everything I hoped to become: smart, strong, and of course, impossibly skinny. Somewhere during this time, I began to think differently about my body, comparing myself to the images that circulated in my consciousness. Once I started kindergarten, I was fitted with glasses, and suddenly I found myself very conscious of being different from my friends. My sister, gangly and four years my senior, was just beginning an awkward pre-adolescent stage, and she was struggling to make friends in a new school. I don't remember ever consciously committing myself to being like the "in-crowd," but I had an intense desire to be liked, to escape the hurt and pain I saw in my sister's eyes.

I was probably about nine when I started to think about dieting. We have an old home video in which I am the first to proclaim proudly after Christmas dinner, "I'm going on a diet the first of the year!" Of course, I sneak back in a few minutes later to assure viewers that I am not *really* going on a diet – I certainly didn't want anyone to know that I really did think I was fat. I didn't think they would understand. Just before I turned ten, I convinced my parents that I was ready for contacts, and I remember feeling so relieved that I would no longer have to look like a "nerd." Then I developed breasts, which at first wasn't a problem, because bra-wearing had become the new trend for the fourth grade girls at my elementary school, although only a few of us actually needed one. But a few months later I started the fifth grade at the middle school where all the elementary schools merged. I found myself separated from my old friends, and I quickly

gravitated toward the "popular" girls I knew from the other schools, most of whom were flat-chested and thin, and I found myself feeling different once again. I wore tank-tops under my clothes all year to avoid having to wear a bra. It was that year that I most remember feeling that I was fat.

I remember being comforted by food. My father's mother, who lived just down the road from us, was a fantastic cook who equated food with love. She cooked for us because she loved us, and if you wanted her to know that you loved her, you'd better eat. With both sets of grandparents in town, we were always coming together to eat on Sundays, holidays, and birthdays, and huge Saturday morning breakfasts complete with biscuits, gravy, potatoes, ham, bacon and Coca-Cola were a family tradition. My grandmother had grown up with so little that to her, having a fleshy body was a sign of prosperity. She used to say to me fondly, "You're pleasantly plump."

By seventh grade, I had completely given up on two-piece bathing suits. My breasts had already grown to their adult size, and I was sharing my mom's 36C bras. I was intensely self-conscious about them. I remember a favorite pink name-brand sweatshirt I had bought with my own money that year – my protruding breasts left it hanging loosely at my waist and one day a boy asked if I was pregnant. I was mortified. I had never even kissed a boy! When I started my period in November that year, I was so embarrassed by it that I simply borrowed supplies from the bathroom and went to school without telling my mom, only to call her crying a few hours later. I couldn't come out and say what had happened, but she knew. Menstruation was something that was only talked about in euphemisms in my family. I quickly learned that issues of the body, of the flesh, whether of loathing or desire, were not something to be discussed.

By the time I got to high school, I had almost completely given up on desserts, and I progressed from packing my own healthy lunch (I **never** ate lunchroom food) to just drinking Slim-Fast. Of course, I still splurged now and then, but not without feeling guilty. I started thinking about my body almost all the time. I wasn't fat – I weighed 120 pounds – but that was fifteen or twenty pounds more than many of my friends. I was critical of anything I put on, wearing only clothes that I saw as flattering. I walked, ran, played tennis and soccer, and there was little time for eating with a tight schedule of honors classes and extracurricular activities. My body was gradually growing into my breasts, but they were still a source of embarrassment for me. I remember jokingly singing "working nine to five" during a soccer practice, and the entire co-ed team breaking out into laughter when my coach blurted, "Sing it, Dolly."

By the time I started college, I was a few inches taller and just ten pounds heavier, but I was headed for diet disaster. The first two quarters, I showed tremendous restraint thanks to the meager grocery budget enforced by my sister, who was my roommate that year. But by spring quarter, I had broken up with my hometown boyfriend of over three years and joined a sorority. Soon, I was enjoying restaurant food and pitchers of beer every night. It didn't take long for me to pack on 20 pounds, and find myself feeling completely miserable. That summer I exercised, worked two jobs, ate one meal a day, and quickly lost the weight and then some. When I got back to school in the fall, my sorority sisters went on endlessly about how great I looked. I remember thinking how awful I must have looked before I had lost weight.

Although I had definitely toyed with the idea of starving myself since I was young, my sophomore year of college was the first time that I ever let myself get carried

away. There were weeks when my entire intake consisted of a few small grilled chicken breasts. I would take cold medicine or dexatrim to help stave off the hunger pains. I was involved in one bad relationship after another just when I was in the middle of my first earth-shattering philosophy class, and all I wanted to do was starve away the uncertainty. Eventually, a friend intervened and I starting eating again, but indulging still remained out of the question. I existed on aerobics and about ten grams of fat a day for the rest of the year.

The next summer I started running, and I eased up on my dietary restrictions a little. A few months later, I started dating the man that would become my husband, and through our mutual love of food, relaxed those restrictions a little more. The next year, we got married. A month later, just after I started my senior year of college, I got pregnant with our first child. I was 21 years old.

My first pregnancy was a strange experience. I had grown up with these mixed messages about becoming a successful career-woman and being a good mother, but since I was just finishing up college, thoughts of a career were still in the background, and I was very much caught up in the whole notion of family and motherhood. I saw the pregnancy as an excuse to leave my old life of restraint behind, and I quickly began eight months of excessive indulgence. I gained 45 pounds, and although I was aware of how large I had become ("*great* with child," as one former professor noted), it wasn't as much of an issue for me.

What was strange about that pregnancy was not so much the way I perceived my body, but the way I was perceived by others. Apparently, pregnant women were few and far between on college campuses, because I endured constant stares from the other

undergraduates as I walked across campus to my "Physical Education for People with Disabilities" class. It was embarrassing to walk across campus because I felt like such a spectacle. Hadn't they ever seen a pregnant woman before? Aside from the stares, once the pregnancy became visible, I noticed a marked difference in the way I was treated by the professors who did not know me before. They didn't call on me. I have always been an active participant in class discussions, the one student my professors could count on to have something to say about anything, but suddenly it was as if my intellect was being completely dismissed. I had to work to prove myself in order to be included in the discussions once again. The message that I received from that experience was that smart people do not have babies at 22.

Something else happened during this first pregnancy. I became accustomed, actually fond of, to the monthly, then bi-monthly, then weekly visits to my obstetrician. There was something so oddly comforting about having my body under constant care, something so satisfying about feeding and tending my body so ceremoniously, religiously. Although most of the time I couldn't bear to look at the scale when I was being weighed, somehow those frequent examinations helped me to validate my temporary and partial disregard for the cultural norms I had measured myself by for so long.

When I became pregnant with our second child at 24, I had already proven myself to my graduate school professors, which actually made it harder for me to tell them. I remember agonizing over having to make the announcement to my professors, who were, for the most part, male. They had high hopes for me, and I knew that they would, however subconsciously, write me off when they discovered I was expecting baby

number two. I finished my coursework and completed my oral comprehensive exams when I just about five months along, so I escaped having to teach the huge undergraduate classes while visibly pregnant, but I still had to endure the feeling that I was letting my professors down by choosing another baby over a Ph.D. program. Chris and I moved away from the college complex where we had been living, and I retreated into solitary thesis hours to finish out my pregnancy in relative privacy.

After my son was born, I began running again, finished my thesis, started the doctoral program and rediscovered the career-minded theorist that had been buried beneath all the layers of maternity dresses and nursing bras. Throughout most of those years, some of my fears about my bodily inadequacies were relieved by the sense that my body was not "my own," that my round belly and lingering fleshy, milk-filled breasts were serving a purpose, but once my body felt like mine again, the thoughts (Dexatrim dreams, I called them) returned. Running helped – it not only made me feel lean, it brought me peace at a time when my mind had begun filling up with the questions that stem from theory, and although I was more uncertain than ever about where I was headed professionally, my doctoral studies and later my position as a teacher-leader at the charter school reaffirmed my sense of self, my sense of being intelligent, strong, well. Although that longing to be thinner, leaner, was always in the back of mind, my body, no longer a spectacle, faded into the background for a while.

The first two years of the doctoral program were a time of great uncertainty to me. I became overwhelmed with possibilities at a time when many of my life's decisions had already been made. Sometimes the contradictions of being a wife, a mother, and a student of curriculum theory were too hard for me to consider, and so I pushed them into

the recesses of my mind. It should come as no surprise that they surfaced in the form of depression-ridden migraines, and you know what happens next.

My third pregnancy was the least physically complicated and the most mentally and emotionally overwhelming. Before I had offered my body freely to maternity, but now I felt betrayed. I had moved on from those days when the idealism of maternity consumed my every thought; I had started to realize the "me" that had been hiding for so long behind a desire for normalcy. Now I was forced to endure a painfully public pregnancy as both a teacher and a doctoral student. I knew that I would fall madly in love with the baby the minute that I saw him (I am a fool for babies, anyway) and that my instincts would take over, but my body spoke the disappointment and fear my lips wouldn't. Somewhere in the second trimester, the headaches returned and they were constant for weeks on end. By the third trimester, the headaches were replaced by frequent low blood-sugar episodes that left my heart racing from the adrenaline and made me feel weak and restless. I managed to defend my proposal somewhere around my eighth month, and I thought I would spend the last few weeks of my pregnancy working on my dissertation, but instead I just sat at home watching daytime television and feeling sorry for myself.

By the time I was induced at 39 weeks, I was looking forward to being "myself" again. I had lost about 25 of the 30 pounds I had gained just a week after my son was born. I started running again when he was three weeks old. A few months later, I began the new teaching job thirty miles away and found myself dealing with more stress than I could have expected. The blood-sugar episodes returned and I started having heart palpitations and anxiety attacks. I lived through that year in a sleepless daze.

This year, I started working as a school-based Instructional Coach, so the stress of lesson plans and classroom management has been replaced with the stress of school improvement plans and curriculum development. The blood sugar episodes disappeared when I left the classroom, and I have been running with more consistency lately, so the palpitations have decreased, but the last two years have still held a lot of uncertainty for me. I have left the support of my doctoral program colleagues, having moved back home just before the baby came, and now I am left to contemplate where I am headed once this dissertation is defended and bound.

I have been thinking about my body a lot more in these two years since I gave birth to John Stokes. I weigh myself every single day. I run to find clarity, but I still find myself feeling that I can't be thin enough to satisfy the uncertainty I felt as my 30th birthday approached and quickly faded into memory. Often, my obsessive thoughts have even kept me from writing this dissertation, leading me to spend precious hours planning and replanning my next diet and exercise plan instead. Even as I write to hopefully understand my own body beyond the discursive fiction it has become, I have become more steeped in my compulsive corporeality. It is such a constant theme for me that I know it must impact what I do and say, how I perform my role as mother, teacher, student, leader. At one point when I had committed myself to writing away every semi-quiet moment I could find, I became so completely immersed in this text that the discourse became nearly overwhelming, and its weight first gripped my throat like a vice and then settled into my bones. I went on this way for weeks, knowing that articulating these thoughts and casting them into the ether of academic discourse was the only way to dispel the immensity. And so, I am still steeped in questions of the body, of my body, of

the bodies of teachers and students, of the physical realities of "particular bodies in specific situations," of teaching bodies.

The Body in Theory

Exploring my own body autobiography helps explain where this study originates for me and allows me to situate *my* body within the complex framework of academic discourse. As a woman, a mother, someone whose physical body consumes my thoughts, I understand that for me, disembodied theory, complete detachment from my body, isn't a possibility. I understand that my popular-culture mediated reality and my confusions about what it means to be "an intellectual" have left me feeling distant and detached from any embodied reality. Thus, this question, "What about the body?," is one that is of particularly importance to me, but I hope to bring to light here why it is also a question of great significance for other educators and curriculum theorists.

While I will argue that the body (material, discursive, or otherwise) is largely absent from the school curriculum, it is not to say that it hasn't been a popular topic of academic discourse. On the contrary, the body has been discussed in a number of ways: "the discourse of the disruptive, transgressive body (erotics); . . . the discourse of the disciplined, governed body (Foucault's concern with technologies of the self or Bourdieu's concept of habitus); and . . . the discourse of the machine (the cyborgian body)" (Mission and Morgan, 2000, p. 92). Indeed, discussions have proliferated concerning the absent body, the regulated and docile body, the gendered body, and the classed, sexed and raced body. Peter McLaren (1988) expands on these discourses to provide some ways that the "body" has been defined: "The term "body" is a promiscuous term that ranges wildly from being understood as a warehouse of archaic instinctual

drives, to a cauldron of seething libidinal impulses, to a phallocentric economy waging

war on women, to a lump of perishable matter, to a fiction of discourse." (p. 57). As

these descriptions illustrate, the body has been important in our attempts to recognize

how and where we are situated in these various discourses, and has become particularly

significant in recent years not only in feminist and postmodern theories, but, as Pillow

(2000) notes, "also more broadly in social theory as a place from which to theorize,

analyze, practice and critically reconsider the construction and reproduction of

knowledge, power, class and culture" (p. 199).

Discussions of if, and how, and where "the" body fits into academic discourse,

including curriculum theory, is also of particular importance because of the vast

technological changes that have changed our concept of "humanness" and the ways we

relate to our bodies. Just as nature is not separate from culture, neither is technology.

Today, technology not is not only influenced and is influenced by culture, it *is* culture.

When we consider how our lives are, as Gray and Mentor (1995) note, intimately shaped

by machines, we understand that such a profound presence must impact our corporeal

subjectivities. In fact, technology has long affected the way we think about our bodies;

the body has often been reduced to a mere machine or a computer that takes in

information and delivers an automatic response, especially when the mind/body binary is

allowed to stand unchallenged. It was technological advances in machinery that

prompted the era of Taylorism, which found its way to educational practice and

discourses of the body. A post-human future, then, is not so much a future as it is a

present reality. As Cary Wolfe (1995) observes, "The moment is irredeemably post-

humanist because of the boundary breakdowns between animal and human, organism and machine, and the physical and the non-physical (p. 36).

These breakdowns have been widespread; not only has the pervasiveness of American mass media created a situation of sensory overload that forces our bodies to compete with digital stimulation, but science has brought about new ways of promoting longevity and "normalcy" through medication and a host of complicated biotechnical devices. Donna Haraway (1989) explains that the body has become " a biotechnical cyborg – an engineered communications device, and information generating and processing system, a technology for recognizing self and non-self (paradigmatically through the immune system), and a strategic assemblage of heterogeneous biotic components held together in a reproductive politics of genetic investment (p. 355). Such posthuman phenomena require us to consider with great urgency if, and how, and where the body figures into this emerging discourse as we invite the body back into the equation through the proliferation of biotechnical machines.

In my use of the word "body," then, I hope to evoke this multitude of discourses that engage this term. Here, I seek to discuss "the" body, these bodies, bodies of students and teachers, from a postmodern perspective of poststructuralism. While it is impossible to adequately define the paradigm of postmodernism, which has had implications across the disciplines, it is most closely associated with Lyotard's (1984) collapse of the metanarrative, overarching, unifying themes, in *The Postmodern Condition.* Postmodernism calls into question themes such as race, gender, and class, which seek to explain the nature of humanity. Postmodernism is seen as having grown

out of the modern era of progressive art, architecture, music and literature that occurred in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Postmodernism, then, can be perceived as a critique of the modernist "structures" that were thought to be based on some essential, natural truth and were used to formulate an understanding of how things "are." Thus, developed from the postmodern understanding of the absence of a fixed reality or a final, discernable meaning, poststructuralism asserted that the structures underlying texts or speech were not distinct and that a "real" or "true" structure could not be determined. As Baldwin et. al (2000) note, "Poststructuralism is more concerned with the way in which versions of the truth are produced in texts and through interpretation, which is always in dispute and can never be resolved" (p. 25). The works of Derrida (1976), Baudrillard (1994/1981), and Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987) exhibit these poststructuralist ideas with their characterizations of self-subverting texts, linguistic signs, and shifting, interconnected, interdependent subjectivities. As Poster (1990) explains, language structures, as they are understood by poststructuralism, "refer back upon themelves, subverting referentiality and thereby acting upon the subject and constituting it in new and disorienting ways" (p. 17). In this way, texts, inscribed in the language (signs) we used to express our thoughts, are always already unstable, corrupted by the gap that exists between the texts and language. Moreover, from a deconstructive perspective, we understand that all texts lack stable, autonomous meaning because our readings of them are inscribed in language that has no reliable correspondence to the author's intention. From this perspective, all-encompassing "grand" readings are problematized. As Poster (1990) explains, "Poststructuralists want to get beyond all forms of reductionist, totalizing interpretations

of texts. For them texts are not homogeneous, linear bodies of meaning; they are not expressions of authorial intention (p. 81).

It is difficult, if not impossible, to locate a single source of poststructural thought, but it has been described as a theoretical response to Structuralism, the postwar intellectual revolution brought on largely by Saussure's (1959/1916) linguistic theory of signs. In general, structuralism asserts that all phenomena are made up of a system of structures, and that the relationships between the different elements of these structures are more important than the individual elements that constitute the system. Both structuralism and poststructuralism share an intellectual history based on Freudian psychology, Marxism and the work of Saussure (1959/1916). Later, largely through the anthropological work of Lévi-Strauss (1966), the literary studies of Barthes (1973), the historical/philosophical approach of Foucault (1970), and the reinterpretation of Freud by Lacan (1977) and the reinterpretation of Marx by Althusser (1971), among other works, structuralism found its way into many other disciplines, including studies of popular culture. In philosophy, poststructuralism is linked to Delueze's (1962) re-reading of Nietzsche in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. However, as Peters (1999) notes, "poststructuralism cannot be simply reduced to a set of shared assumptions, a method, a theory, or even a school. It is best referred to as a *movement of thought* -- a complex skein of thought -- embodying different forms of critical practice. It is decidedly interdisciplinary and has many different but related strands" (p. 2).

Poststructuralism is vital to this exploration of the body, as it offers us ways to interrogate our attempts to locate "normalcy" through the languages of science, pathology, and neurobiology. As Weaver (2000) explains, poststructuralism "offers a

critical reading of how science is constructed and used sometimes to justify certain

policies, eliminate unwanted voices, and apologize for all its flaws and humanness in

order to shroud science behind a cloth of godlike importance and ability (p. 6). Here,

poststructuralism provides a lens through which we can destabilize some of the prevailing

narratives that have led us to dislocate the body from the school curriculum in a number

of ways. In theorizing the poststructural body, we can fix our gaze on the future and gain

insight into the ways that our images of the body are and will be impacted by our

language and our social existences, as well as how our language and social existences are

and will be impacted by our bodies. The poststructural body, then, is discursive; it is a

site of "information and practice, of regulation, power and resistance" (Pillow, 2000, p.

214). It is "inscriptive" body, the social organism upon which "social law, morality and

values are inscribed" (Grosz, 1995, p. 33). And yet, it is not only that, for it is also the

"lived body," the corporeal body, a site where physiological processes are in constant

states of function and breakdown. Postructuralism offers a paradigm that avoids

resurrecting a binary between inscribed and lived bodies, but allows these subject

positions to exist, if only in the complex system of the connections, gaps, "flows,"

interruptions, interactions and discontinuities that characterize our corporeal

subjectivities. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1983) describe the body as a

system of interconnected systems. As Lorraine (1999) explains, "The binary series is

linear in every direction because each flow-machine is connected to an interrupt-machine

and vice versa. That is, each flow-machine is always connected to another whose flow is

interrupted or partially drained off and vice versa in connective linear series where there

is always 'and . . .' 'and then . . .'" (p. 119). I borrow from Deleuze and Guattarri's

notions of processes and interconnected systems to examine the ongoing processes of the body and how they are connected to and interact with the processes of the educational machine, itself a series of interconnected systems.

Similarly, Serres (1997/1991), draws on poststructural understandings of the importance of the "and," the in-between spaces, and the relationships between the body and the mind. Serres offers the notion of a "third space" that exists somewhere between the dualism of mind and body and draws these elements into an intimate connection. He writes, "Body, muscles, nerves, direction and sensitivity, soul, brain and knowledge, all converge in this third place" (p. 10). Here, I seek to explore the "in-between spaces" that lie between the curriculum and the body, where the two converge, diverge, and otherwise interact to construct and organize educational practice and academic discourse.

In spite of these discourses, we still find ourselves wary of bringing the materiality of the body into academic discussions, perhaps because we do not want to be guilty of asserting any essential "body" that corresponds to an original, natural form. To do so would be to reify identity categories that we have already determined to be discursive fictions: race, class, and gender. As Davis (2002) observes, DNA research has completely undermined these identity categories; scientists have yet to identify any person as belonging to a specific race through DNA analysis or find a "gay" gene, and genetic gender is no longer a reliable indication of sexual preference. DNA, with its constantly shifting outcomes and limitless possibilities, supports the instability brought on by postmodernism. However, a recognition of this instability does not come without discomfort, and it is perhaps for this reason that we have tended to leave the body out of

our intellectual pursuits. Levy (2000) illustrates a "long history of avoiding the body" by citing Liz Stanley's (1997) discussion of the "missing person" of academic disciplines:

> The person missing is one who is complex and rounded, who is "raced" and classed and gendered, who has a body and emotions and engages in sensible thought, and who inhabits space and place and time, and a person who may be a man but can be pathetic and weak, or who may be a woman but can be confidently powerful. The disciplines are concerned with "bits" of social life, but even in their own terms what they choose to omit is considerable more than it need be (p. 83).

If, as Stanley asserts, we are guilty of excluding this complex body from our intellectual pursuits, then is it relevant to discuss the ancient question of the mind/body split. Since Descartes announced over 400 years ago, "I think, therefore I am," issues of the body have often been relegated to margins of issues of the mind. Unfortunately, in spite of the paradigm shifts brought on by postmodernism, this way of thinking still seems to find its way into educational practice. In the mind/body binary, the mind is privileged over the body so that the body becomes seemingly irrelevant in an educational context. The *intellectual* is privileged over the physical so that disembodiment in many ways becomes desirable. It is this kind of binary that leads us to view the body as a separate entity from its environment, the curriculum. However, this study explores our selves not as disembodied, abstracted individuals but as human beings in the context of bodies that are impacted by the converging determinants of biology and social construction. Toward that end, Shannon Sullivan (2001) borrows the term "transaction" from John Dewey and uses it "to indicate the dynamic, co-constitutive relationship of organisms and their

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environments" (p. 1). Sullivan (2001) explains how she extends this term to a non-dichotomous understanding of the body:

> The term "transaction" reflects a rejection of sharp dualisms between subject and object, and self and world, as well as a rejection of the atomistic, compartmentalized conceptions of the subject and self that often accompany such dualisms. The boundaries that delimit individual entities are permeable, not fixed, which means that organisms and their various environments – social, cultural, and political as well as physical – are constituted by their mutual influence and impact on each other. This co-constitutive process does not merely happen once to establish static entities that never change; because the relationship between organism and environment is dynamic and ongoing, both organism and environment are continually being remade by means of shifts and changes in the other. Thus "transaction" designates a process of mutual constitution that entails mutual transformation, including the possibility of significant change (p. 1).

The transactional body, like Delueze and Guattari's concept of flow-machines, is a dynamic body with permeable boundaries and is in a constant state of mutual influence with the context in which it is situated. Here the body and the curriculum are not independent entities but mutually influenced systems that are constantly being remade as they shift and change.

What I hope to accomplish with this dissertation, then, is a recognition that our bodies interact and intertwine with our pedagogies, and an understanding of how our interactions with the body in theory and the body in culture operate to exclude embodied knowledge from the curriculum. Here, I am writing on the discursive body, making my

own mark, examining what between and beyond the symbols and signs that we have ascribed to the flesh that mediates our relationships as teachers and students to the curricula that we deliver and consume. How do the body and the curriculum operate with, in, on and against one another? How have we sought to construct a disembodied curriculum and what purpose has that curriculum served? In the chapters that follow, I will explore these questions. First, I will examine the historical interaction between theories of the body, "desubstantialized" culture, and the development of educational environments characterized by sterile, controlled bodies. I will also explore here the ways that the disembodied curriculum has shaped our perceptions of "disability" and the development of special education. Next, I will engage the popular culture curriculum and investigate the implications of "disembodied" educational practice through the examination of social constructions of disability. Then, in order to demonstrate how the disembodied school curriculum operates with social constructions of bodily "normalcy" to construct disability, I will investigate the epidemic of attention deficit disorders as symptomatic of disembodied curricula. Finally, through the lens of disability studies, I will draw on Lennard Davis (2002) concept of "dismodernism" in an attempt to rethink and retheorize the postmodern, posthuman body through reflexive pedagogy. Here, I hope to bring light to ways that students and teachers can reimagine corporeality and liberate the body from the margins of educational discourse and classroom practice.

CHAPTER 2
BODIES IN THE MARGINS: A DISEMBODIED CURRICULUM

One night when I was developing the framework for this chapter, John, almost two, came toddling to the bedside where I was propped up on pillows with my laptop and stacks of books. He pushed aside my laptop so that he could climb onto the bed and into my arms. He smiled knowingly as lifted my t-shirt to reveal my bare stomach and gleefully announced, "Tummy!" Each of my three children has had their own way of seeking comfort from my body long after breast-feeding had ended: Taylor would always reach for an ear to manipulate in her little fingers, and James was most content when he was resting on my hip, but John, by far, has been the most sensual. He loves the feel of soft, bare skin against his hand or cheek, so this "tummy time" for him is a nightly ritual. On this night, he happened to realize that he did not have a "name" for my belly-button; he examined it curiously, and looked to me for an explanation. After a few tries, he could say "belly" (belly-button was just too many syllables) clearly, and then he began to examine his own. "John's belly, Mama's belly," he said, pointing back and forth, drawing the distinctions between us.

After a while, he pushed the books aside and curled up beside me, still touching my stomach with his two little feet, and drifted into dreams, leaving me to wonder if you really ever outgrow the need for that kind of closeness, the comfort of human skin, a knowing of the body. Why would such an act, which brought such pleasure when involving a toddler, seem awkward if initiated by an older child? Why is that we feel that as children grow into adults they must learn to distance themselves from that kind of knowing, to control those bodily impulses, to create distance? Why do so many

classrooms still seem quiet, tidy, sterile, impersonal? Why are our material bodies

relegated to the margins and footnotes of the "official" curriculum?

These questions circulated as I thought about why I believe the public school

curriculum and the educational practices it invites to be "disembodied." Let me begin by

discussing the word, "disembodied." The Oxford American Dictionary, conveniently

built into my laptop, defines it as: separated from or existing without the body, lacking

any obvious physical source. I think these definitions resonate with the way that I

perceive American school curriculum. When I first began to think about the relationship

between the body and the curriculum (I was reading *Anti-Oedipus* by Deleuze and

Guattari), I drew a cartoon of a school bus arriving to pick up a student, and the mother

meeting the bus holding only her child's brain. The sentiment of my cartoon came from

both my own experiences as an educator trying to deliver a standardized, impersonal

curriculum in a meaningful way and the messages I have received as a student and

scholar about the conflicts between the "material" world and the life of an intellectual.

Here I want to allow my definition of disembodiment to be considered in all its

multiplicities, and many of the numerous ways this word can be defined fit the qualities I

am trying to communicate: bodiless, incorporeal, discarnate, insubstantial, impalpable,

spectral, phantom, wraithlike.

I would like to describe here how three discourses, all of which merge at the site

of body, problematize embodied knowing, learning, and teaching. These three

discourses, not intended to be all-inclusive or mutually exclusive, all operate to create

"distance" from the body. The first discourse involves modernist assumptions about

schooling. In spite of the vast changes that have taken place in American society, culture

and technology in the last century, much of what is believed about the way teachers should teach and children should learn is based on outdated notions about bodies and curricula. These vast changes in culture and technology, particularly as they relate to children, are taken up in the second discourse, which engages the postmodern, digitally mediated realities of students. The third discourse is that of postmodern/ poststructural identity theory, which brings identity and the body itself into a (necessary) state of instability.

To say that the body is largely absent in the curriculum is not to say that the body isn't particularly prevalent elsewhere. In fact, with the proliferation of mass media characteristic of American life, the body is literally everywhere. Weight-loss clinics, products, books, plastic- surgery offices, advertisements, and reality television shows all loom large in public representations of the body. Every year, there's another diet craze, new information about what makes us fat, updated research about how fat and unhealthy we really are, and a few new additions to the list of celebrities with anorexia. What's more, we are constantly bombarded with pharmaceutical advertisements for all sorts of body enhancing drugs: anti-depressant, anti-anxiety, anti-inflammatory, and drugs that treat incontinence and erectile dysfunction. However, this overwhelming presence of popular body discourse does not mean that we really *understand* our bodies and their relationship to our experiences in the world any better than before. In fact, far from helping us to embrace embodied knowing, these particular representations all serve to reinforce a hegemonic notion of (largely unrealistic) bodily norms that leaves us all the more confused and unsatisfied with our material contexts. Moreover, the traditional educational environments in which many of our children find themselves offers them

neither a reliable outlet for interpreting these representations or a meaningful way of relating to the body at all outside of planned exercise and intermittent sex education instruction.

Postmodern Bodies

Before I discuss in detail the modern approaches to curriculum and educational practice that have contributed to a disembodied curriculum, I want to consider the postmodern/ theoretical and cultural contexts in which those processes currently operate. Postmodernism, with its "incredulity toward metanarratives" as Lyotard describes it, has problematized the notions of fixed unities, and so had destabilized identity and the notion that the body could exist distinct biological construct, separate from and unaffected by the cultural context in which its emerged. Postmodern thought across the disciplines allowed us to understand that being, identity, is not rooted in, inherent to, the body, but constructed through socio-cultural interactions. Thus, our bodies become texts, to be read, interpreted, shaped, and discursively constructed. As a text, situated within language and representation, the body as a simply a biological organism that is resistant to cultural influence does not exist.

The postmodern theorization of the body is important to this study because it is all about how those cultural influences have shaped our understanding of the body. The postmodern subject position recognizes the relationship between body and language, and thus, human experience. Thus, it would be antithetical for me to entertain any notion of resurrecting the body as distinctly biological, but I want to consider some of the ways that postmodern body can be problematic. With the rejection of a nature/culture binary, we remove the body from one side of a false dichotomy, and situate it within a complex,

fluid system, making it difficult to locate any substantive "self." If the body does not exist independently of culture, and we have to dissolve the notion that there is no distinct "nature," then we are no longer responsible for explaining how nature and culture work together, and we are left with the question of whether the body can really be said to "be" at all. As Peter McLaren (1988) points out, rarely in all the discourse of "bodies without organs, shadow bodies which are merely discursive fictions, or fractured bodies composed of solitary links along a signifying chain" do we ever find bodies and/or subjects "who bleed, who suffer, who feel pain, who possess the critical capacity to make political choices, and who have the moral courage to carry these choices out." (p. 57).

Here, I share Gail Weiss's (2003) sentiment about the predicament this ontological indifference creates: "While I, too, accept the notion that the body can and should be viewed as a text, I am also concerned about the ethical implications of such a position, implications that are rarely acknowledged and, for that very reason, all the more urgent to consider (p. 25). It is dangerous to assume that we could understand the body outside of our cultural contexts, but we also take a risk by totally eliminating *any* notion of the physical because we are left without a way to understand phenomena, such as illness and injury, which seem to *us* to *be* physical. Perhaps this could explain we have often failed to include disability in our criticisms of identity, because as, Holmes (2003) notes, "Disability reminds us of that which is most personal (and thus shameful) in the intellectual life, that which is not aesthetic or abstract. This same body is also what is least personal, most generically human – that which we in academia hope to surpass with distinctive and irreplaceable creations that usually celebrate our minds" (p. x)

However, if we are to maintain an "incredulity toward metanarratives" as Lyotard (1984) indicated, we must not allow postmodernism itself to become a nihilistic metanarrative by constructing the body as *either* a discursive fiction *or* a distinct biological organism. Even Derrida (1984), who announced the "death" of the subject, admits that it does, indeed, exist:

> I have never said that the subject should be dispensed with. Only that it should be deconstructed. To deconstruct the subject does not mean to deny its existence. There are subjects, operations, or effects of subjectivity. That is an incontrovertible fact. To acknowledge this does not mean, however, that the subject is what it says it is. The subject is not some meta-linguistic presence; it is always inscribed in language. My work does not, therefore, destroy the subject; it simply tries to resituate it (p. 125).

Similarly, if we intend to use postmodern/ poststructural knowledge as a connector rather than a divider, we can resituate the body without denying the physical existence of the flesh. We can see the body, as disability studies scholar Lennard Davis (1995) asserts, as "a way of organizing through the realm of the sense the variations and modalities of physical existence as they are embodied into being through a larger social/political Matrix" (p. 14). This understanding of the body allows us to talk about the body without erasing the significance of its physical substance. The body becomes, then, what McLaren's (1995) terms, the "point d'appui," the point at which we find the "dialectical reinitiation of meaning and desire" (p. 63). Lecourt (2004) puts it yet another way: "The body, that is, experiences and enacts culture as more than a discursive relation, but rather as a confluence of meaning, desire, and affect literally written into the flesh. We learn

our identities in discursive relations that mediate experience; we perceive our bodies in their material relation to the world via such discursively constructed identities (19). To understand the body in this way allows us to bring the body back into academic discourse in a way that is meaningful and creates a space in which we can begin to develop an embodied postmodern/ poststructural paradigm.

Digital Bodies

If our intellectual engagements with postmodernism have left us feeling theoretically "disembodied," then our immersion in the postmodern media age has had a similar effect culturally. A decade ago, Samuel Weber (1996) asserted that television was "the most detached type of vision and audition" because the spectator can "see things from places – and hence, from perspectives and points of view (and it is not trivial that these are often more than one) – where his or her body is not (and often never can be) situated" (p. 116). Weber suggests that television engages the senses in such a way that the body's sensory functions are not necessary. Such easily achieved and pervasive detachment from the situated body would not be possible without a medium that "becomes separation." Having grown up immersed in a television culture (cable came to the country when I was an adolescent and I have been hooked ever since), I can relate to this sense of detachment in working through my own confusions about how to relate to my body. I cannot perceive my body separately from the impossible images that have permeated my being since infancy, and I am frustrated when I cannot find the sensory satisfaction offered by television and film (the intensity of the music, the vibrant color, the satisfying resolutions) in my daily lived experiences. I can only imagine how

frustrated I might be if I were subjected to seven hours of the sensory-deprived traditional classroom environment.

If the detachment of television has changed the way we relate to our bodies, then our confusion about how and where to situate our physical bodies has been exacerbated by the new pervasiveness of the digital image. Weaver (2005) describes the omnipresence and significance of this new media:

> The digital image has entered into almost every aspect of our lives from the ways in which we entertain ourselves to enhancing our bodies, how we learn, and even how we die. Although computer generated, the digital images have entered into the very materiality of our bodies and the realms of our thinking and consciousness . . .While the world we live in has been transformed and while our bodies are reconfigured into the posthuman, curriculum theorists have barely taken notice (p. 79).

While the digital image remains in the margins of curriculum, as Weaver (2005) asserts, it is emerging as an integral part of the broader cultural curriculum that guides our understandings of how and where we, as subject-bodies, figure into the complex matrix of competing sensory stimulations. McClaren (1988) observes that the byproduct of what Aronowitz (1983) calls "visual culture" is "desubstantialized meaning," in which we find ourselves unable to "penetrate beyond the media-bloated surface of things, thereby dismissing concepts such as "society," "capitalism," and "history" which a not immediately present to the senses (p. 53).

The products of a desubstantialized culture are students like those that Marla Morris (2003) describes in her graduate-level Curriculum Studies course:

These presences, my students, embodied and troubled, haunted by a Southern

past, wish that I (queer-Jewish-carpetbagger) would teach methods, recipes, and

offer online, digital assignments. Their phantasies of erasing differences, erasing

difficulties of the face-to-face, erasing bodies dis(turbs) my pedagogical

sensibilities. Bodies matter. Their wish to disappear into cyberspace con-fuses

(p. 189).

Indeed, as Morris observes, bodies *do* matter, but they become obfuscated in the complex

visual, digital, desubstantialized media culture.

Absent Bodies

Thus, our children come to us, immersed in desubstantialized meaning and

prosthetic sensory overload, and we offer them neither a way to resubstantialize meaning

though embodied pedagogy *or* anything that meaningfully appeals to their need for

sensory stimulation. Instead, we offer a curriculum where the body is largely absent.

This absence persists not only in public school classrooms, but also in academic

institutions who prepare teachers for their roles as educators.   bell hooks (1994)

describes this absence in her own experience:

No one talked about the body in relation to teaching. What did one do with the

body in the classroom? Trying to remember the bodies of my professors, I find

myself unable to recall them, I hear voices, remember fragmented details, but

very few whole bodies. The public world of institutional learning was a site

where the body had to be erased, go unnoticed (pp. 191-192).

This erasure of the body from the institutional discourses of teaching and learning leaves

us with instructional practices and environments that are distant from the realities of the

body. Thomas Armstrong (1999) uses the example of the reclusive cashier, James Duffy, in James Joyce's (1914) short story *Dubliners* to introduce describe the way we tend to separate the body from issues we perceive to be "of the mind:"

> He meets a woman, has an intense intellectual affair with her, and then breaks off the relationship when she presses her hand against his cheek. As part of his description of Mr. Duffy, Joyce includes this rather curious line: "*He lived a little distance from his body.*" By this Joyce meant that the man lived in a mental prison divorced from any real contact with the sensory world. In a larger sense Joyce's character is a modern-day Everymind, an example of the split that has occurred in contemporary society between mental and physical faculties" (p. 77).

While I would not go so far as to say that we are all living in mental prisons divorced from contact with the sensory world, I will point out that, in learning theory, the body has been reduced to second-class status. For example, take the largely influential work of Jean Piaget. He posits that during the first two years of life, which he calls the sensory-motor stage, nearly all cognition occurs *through* the body: the infant relies on touch and taste to experience the world. Once these physical actions become internalized, cognitive development moves linearly through pre-operational (using symbols to represent objects), concrete (thinking abstractly and making judgments about observable phenomena), and formal operational (hypothesizing about abstract concepts and using deductive reasoning). Clearly, the goal is move away from the cognition that occurs through the body toward an abstract, disembodied understanding of the world. Piaget's structural analysis of cognitive development, which has profoundly impacted curriculum

development, privileges knowing through the mind over knowing through the body, and depicts embodied cognition as simplistic and infantile.

One can see the influence of Piaget's theories in many aspects of American culture, from the classic stereotype of the "dumb jock" to the social privileging of occupations in the humanities and sciences over the manual arts (Armstrong, 1999). Because we have so deeply internalized these structures of cognitive development, we also find it appropriate, if not necessary, to ensure that infants receive adequate sensory stimulation (specifically touching), but once we cross the invisible binary into "abstract" thinking, we believe we no longer "need" the body to learn. As we progress through the developmental stages of childhood, we are taught to control our bodies so that the "real" learning can take place.

As a result of this perceived need to distance ourselves from the body, we often bring the body into the classroom only in the sense that we must access the "brain" to train the "mind." These privileged disembodied subjectivities carry over into the classroom and influence pedagogical practice. We sterilize the curriculum and the classrooms to make them "clean" and "safe," distant from the realities of intermingling bodies because the body is problematic when it comes to both academic discussion as well as "proper" instruction. As Levy (2000) notes,

> The body is actively sexual or at least sensual. (It may also be maternal, pregnant, breast-feeding; in one way or another desirous, undisciplined, unruly, that is, bodily). "Embodiment" draws our attention to a connection between materiality and the psychic world, between social and cultural conditions and circumstances,

between desires and pleasures, as well as disappointments; thinking about and

through all this undermines "orderly" teacher-student relations (p. 83).

Confronting these messy relationships means that we risk opening ourselves up to the

sensual, to desires, to disorder, which don't fit in the devices and structures of control that

places the teacher/text at the center of instruction. Schools become not a Deleuzian

generative environment where everything functions at the same time amid hiatuses and

ruptures, but a controlled, sterile environment where bodies are necessary vehicles to

house the mental faculties.

Obedient Bodies

As it seems that the curriculum operates to dismiss the body part of the

educational process, it makes sense that bodies must be closely controlled in order to

ensure the continued obedience of the human body and the sterility of the educational

environment. In the post-Columbine era, the regulation and surveillance of bodies in

schools has become particularly prevalent (Webber, 2003). Middleton (1998) explains

that "Through Foucauldian lenses, power indeed shows up as 'capillary,' as it flows

through all parts of the school's 'corporate body.' All individuals channel power:

Students and teachers police each others' outward appearance, deportment, and behavior,

although it is the teacher who officially has power over the students" (p. 21). Similarly,

Sara Biklin (in Middleton, 1998) observes that "school rules regulate both students and

teachers. Teachers' bodies are regulated by the very restrictions they establish for the

children . . . adults' days [are] controlled by needing to be placed in a supervisory

position in relation to children" (p. 179).

Perhaps even more important and personally relevant to my experience as an

educator is the control mechanism of textualization. In spite of widespread rhetoric about

the need for "authentic assessment" and student-centered learning, we continue to use

text to distance ourselves from the body. Rather than completely ignoring the body, we

look beyond it by transferring into texts that can be studied and evaluated, controlled.

Foucault (1978) has used textualization to explain the regulation of sex in disciplinary

society, in which sex had to be studied and committed to writing in order to be properly

controlled. The same concept can be applied to the textualization of knowledge in the

school setting. Textualization, in the curricular sense, becomes a mechanism of creating

distance between knowledge and the body; the self must be written in order to be

disciplined, controlled. Hayes and Johnson (2003) explain:

> Textualization is one of the technologies of modern schooling. The process is put
>
> into place through the emergence of the self by means of a constant remanding of
>
> the self to the text (Fendler, 1993). In much of school curriculum, individuals
>
> submit their inner thoughts and views to written or spoken texts so that they
>
> become visible and accessible to the systems of control that evaluated and define
>
> school knowledge. . . The authored text exposes the self to the powers of
>
> surveillance and domination by opening the self for analysis, critique, and
>
> regulation within the system of schooling. (p. 147.)

There are many ways that the authored text emerges in schooling, including canonical

textbooks, teacher-directed writing, and, especially, testing, both teacher-constructed and

standardized.

With the current emphasis on standardized testing as a measure of school accountability and evidence of "learning," the impact of textualization is clear. The process of constant assessment and commission of the self to text begins as soon as the child enters the system and the texts that define them follow them throughout their school careers and on into adulthood. The narrow aspects of the self reflected on the tests can then be explored and the process of evaluation and categorization becomes perpetual. As Hayes and Johnson note, "The network of tests, assessments and judgments creates a paper trail that leads directly to the child. Once the child is tracked within this text there are many different forms of evaluation that can be made, and verdicts handed down." (p. 147.)

The textualization that has been exacerbated by the emphasis on testing and the texts of the school curriculum, as Foucault (1985) demonstrates, is not new. With the invention and proliferation of print, the bodies of authors could easily be "erased," creating a false objectivity. Michael Warner (1983) illustrates how the modern bourgeois public sphere claimed to have no relation to the body image at all:

> Public issues were depersonalized so that, in theory, any person would have the ability to offer an opinion about them and submit that opinion to the impersonal test of public debate without personal hazard. Yet the bourgeois public sphere continued to rely on features of certain bodies. Access to the public came in the whiteness and maleness that were then denied as forms of positivity, since the white male qua public person was only abstract rather than white and male (p 382, quoted in Grumet, 2003).

This way of thinking persists, and perhaps has even increased, in light of the stringent requirements of No Child Left Behind. William C. Rhodes (1995) asserts that, "we have been taught to be spectators, rather than constructors, of knowledge" (458). Rhodes aptly describes the modernist thought that has continued to dominate educational practice. This speaks particularly to the way we have viewed learning and teaching; students of all ages and disciplines have been taught to be the passive recipients of knowledge. We, in our modernists mindsets, have reified knowledge and used it to define who we are and, in turn, separate ourselves from other. In terms of the body, we have reified what we have perceived as "normal" and used it to categorize ourselves in terms of physical difference, and to write the body out of public education. Moreover, although the testing companies make an effort to create tests that are reflect a multicultural constituency, the depersonalized logical/analytical ways of knowing the tests are designed to measure on still based on white male intellectual ideals. Yet, the judgments and verdicts that can be made from these tests are virtually endless. Particularly in the case of Attention Deficit Disorders, the rise in the number of students who qualify as being "disabled" has often been attributed to the increase in medical "knowledge" about such disabilities, and this statement exemplifies the significance as well as the isolating potential of textualization: medical and educational professionals *do* have more knowledge about such conditions because of the rise in the pervasiveness and importance of testing that reveals only a narrow aspect of a student's being. The more we value one way of demonstrating knowledge through textualization, which seems to be the unfortunate result of increases in testing, the more "exceptional" students we will find. With such a model based on identifying deficiencies based on a very limited scope of understanding, rather than

knowing more about the students, we actually know less. We learn nothing about who the student is beyond these limited deficiencies, and the underlying message is that we are not interested in knowing.

As a result of the emphasis placed on standardized assessment, school reform advocacy groups like the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) encourage the utilization of data-analysis to make informed decisions about how to improve learning. This practice is highly effective in determining the deficiencies of students based on the narrow standards of the state curriculum, but it reifies the process of textualization and further distances our educational decisions at an institutional level from the immediate, lived realities of the students sitting in our classrooms. The concept of disembodiment through textualization may seem somewhat contradictory; as with Foucault's theory on the regulation of sex, the regulation of self occurs not through complete dismissal, but through persistent and pervasive, even medicalized, examination. Alan Block (1998) expands on this notion, observing that the school and the curriculum promote "incarceration by visibility" (p. 327). He explains: "In the school we are defined by what we know, which is always linked to written reports delimiting that knowledge, and increasingly, what we know is written by others. We are always to be found by our position on the well-traveled, well-lit and heavily-marked path which is the curriculum" (Block, 1998, p. 327). Because our students are transcribed into text, we can analyze their data and always know where they stand on the achievement continuum, which is based largely on linear assumptions about the way that children *should* develop distance from bodily cognition and move into "higher-level" ways of knowing the world. Just as each time my daughter visits the pediatrician, she is plotted into a chart based on

"normal" height and weight, students are carefully tracked based on the volume of the official curriculum that they can demonstrate knowledge of. Textualization is a technology operates to make student deficits more visible. This "visibility" offers us comfort in the form of a commodity, a thing, knowledge, but as Cohen and Weiss (2003) acknowledge, that visibility does not necessarily produce truth: "Poked, probed, sliced, prosthetically enhanced and surgically diminished, transplanted, and artificially stimulated, the body in contemporary culture is the volatile subject of both textual and material fascination. The explosion of technologies and methodologies that claim to give us better access to "the truth" of the body have made the body more visible and yet more elusive. (p. 1).

In addition to standardized testing, the pervasive reliance on textbooks contributes to the distancing that occurs through textualization. In spite of much discussion about the need for differentiation and "student-centered" learning, the booming school publishing industry is an indication that textbooks continue to dominate instruction in many classrooms. Textbooks are commonly utilized for students as young as first grade, and some simpler forms of textbooks are used as early as kindergarten. While there are many interesting and visually pleasing textbook series on the market, the overuse of textbooks is problematic because it accelerates the textualization process. Students must learn to relate to the world through the text; the curriculum "represents relations between students; rather than them forging their own relationship with each other, the curriculum mediates their relations for them" (Webber, 2003, p. 4). Young children are taught early on that worthy knowledge comes from beyond their own lived experiences, and that learning is not really about them, but about the text. Ayers (2001) expresses his

concerns about most textbooks, describing them as "limited in a thousand ways: uninteresting, irrelevant, written in a vapid, formulaic style, apparently by a committee of scholars intent on maximizing sales by offending no one," which resulted in "a kind of muzak for the mind – easy listening some of the time, an annoying background buzz much of the time, catchy but not substantive." (p. 85). The key word in Ayers' description is substantive: the textbooks have little substance, they are insubstantial, disembodied, removed from any obvious physical source, and they are often presented as the only way to acquire new information.

Those of us who have older children or have taught children older than 7 or 8 know that many, if not most, children find this way of acquiring new information boring. Learning through text is impersonal, sterile. Drawing on the work of Todd (1997), Hayes and Johnson (2003) observe, " Stripping pleasure and desire of all sorts from the school curriculum leaves school knowledge as one part of an interchangeable and normative apparatus. This is a disciplining of the body, a process of containing the excesses of the body by which pleasure and desire are produced" (pp. 152-153). In the town where I live and work, we have a state funded pre-kindergarten program that is housed in the old building where I attended Elementary School. When you visit the classrooms there, you see many wide-eyed children full of wonder, happy to be exploring and learning in an environment that is designed around their interests and realities. In my experience, I haven't known many preschoolers that said they hated school, and this is often the case for kindergarten. However, once children realize, through testing and grading and categorizing, what school is "really" about, there is a drastic decline in their enthusiasm.

Foucault (1985) explains that there is a purpose in the way we make education so unappealing:

It's quite an achievement the way teachers manage to make learning unpleasant, depressing, gray, unerotic! We need to understand how that serves the needs of society. Imagine what would happen if people got into as big a frenzy about learning as they do about sex. Crowds shoving and pushing at school doors! It would be a complete social disaster. You have to make learning so rebarbative if you want to restrict the number of people who have access to knowledge (p. 52).

The payoff that results from the categorization of textualization is two-fold: it allows us to privilege certain ways of knowing so that social status can be assigned, and it allows us to avoid the messy reality of such "frenzied" bodies. Certainly, we could not maintain the sterile, controlled school environments we are comfortable with if we allowed it to be so impassioned.

Although the school curriculum has successfully distanced itself from the body through texts, we have not yet discovered a way for students to be educated in a traditional classroom without bringing their bodies along. We are teaching bodies; we enter the classroom with our own corpo-realities (our teaching bodies) to teach bodies, each with their own set of needs, desires and interests. However, because the body is not "allowed" in the official curriculum, we must push those contexts into the margins in order to reveal the depersonalized canon. As Scheman (1997) explains, "The privileged are precisely those who are defined not by the meanings and uses of their bodies for others but by their ability either to control their bodies for their own ends or to seem to exist virtually bodilessly" (p. 351). Through the distancing of the educational process,

teachers and students must train themselves to keep their bodies at bay; there is no place

for the sensual, the pleasurable, the provocative. The successful teacher must train his or

her body in order to exemplify the posture of teacherly authority: "Not only must

teachers wear clothing considered appropriate, but they must also learn to control facial

expressions, to hold an authoritative stance in the classroom, and to remain decorous.

For most teachers, this bodily discipline becomes automatic" (Jones, 2003, p. 110).

The same type of bodily discipline is expected to become automatic for the

students as well, and if they cannot achieve a certain level of control, we recommend

them for further testing so that we can identify the cause of their perceived deficiency.

Franklin (2003) compares the disembodied educational process for all students to many

women's experience of initiation into adulthood: "a process of instruction during which

they learn that they must take themselves *out* of relationship (to their bodies and to

others) in order paradoxically to be *in* relationship. Be less to be more. Shut down to be

open. Attend but not to this context, this time and place, or these bodies" (p. 19).

In the context of textualization, in the architecture of control, we must shut down

our bodily needs, desires, and impulses to open our minds to learning. This negation of

the body leaves me to wonder, if, as Terry Eagleton asserts, "Aesthetics is born as a

discourse of the body," where in this impersonal, disembodied environment is art,

pleasure, passion? Hayes and Johnson (2003) lament, in a sentiment that has been

expressed by Peter Applebaum (1995) and Alan Block (1998), "The poetic, the

embodied, the momentary, the emotional, and the pleasurable have been all but purged

from how we think of school knowledge." If our hope is to prepare students for a future

that holds no promise of poetry, then the curriculum serves us well. We comfort

ourselves with the belief that we are safely and generically delivering the essential skills, the cultural capital, that will lead them to become productive citizens. However, we fail to treat children "as persons with stories to tell and unrealized potentials to be nurtured. In the guise of preparing children for a better future, we defend ourselves against knowledge of their current lives that might be painful of disconcerting" (Silin, 2003, p. 14).

Unruly Bodies

There is another, more sinister, spawn of the intertwined discourses of textualization and bodily discipline. If we have constructed the school as a place where the body must be in a strict state of discipline, what outlet do we offer to those whose bodies represent to us instability, uncertainty, disorder? By constructing a category of normalcy that is based not only a limited view of intelligence but a necessary capability of bodily restraint, we can differentiate those who can meet those standards (the able) from those who cannot (the dis-abled). Thus, we must come to understand that we, as educators, administrators, schools, systems, so on, *construct* disability. It is not the physical makeup of our students that render them disabled but the standards by which we judge them capable of learning. The category of "disabled" is certainly not new, but it has fluctuated greatly throughout history. The issue of ability first came into play when American education was in its infancy, and the primary goal was to develop a labor market. As Ng (2003), explains:

> In the development of a progressively elaborated and differentiated labor market, skills needed in the production process are formalized. Education is a major mechanism through which people acquire skills, which they sell in exchange for

wages in the labor market. In standardizing training for paid employment, those

whose learning does not fit into the standardized classroom format are seen as

problematic. Again, we see how something that originates in the social process

becomes a person's personal attributes. (p. 211).

When we standardize the assessment of students into a very limited way of learning and

knowing, we set ourselves up for exceptions, those that do not fit the model we have

idealized through mandated texts and high-stakes testing. In doing so, we see an

increased need for what we call "special education," for our "exceptional children," the

exceptions to the standards we have set.

Special education, like "disability" itself, is not new, but as standards for what

counts as "learning" have become more stringent, those categories have grown to include

more exceptions. In fact, as Foucault (1970) explains in *The Order of Things*, the

structures of control and bodily discipline were established long before standardized

assessment became an issue, so in the early history of American education, students with

disabilities were easily identified as those that might disrupt the otherwise orderly

learning environment. Furthermore, if early aim of schools was to produce workers,

anyone who couldn't or shouldn't perform the jobs the market had to offer (including for

some time women, of course) didn't belong there. During the early 20th century, some

states passed laws requiring that schools create "special" classes for the "disciplinary"

and "backward," but it was not until the 1970s that mentally and physically handicapped

students were included in regular classrooms (Spring, 2001).

With the growth of standardized curricula and later, standardized assessment,

came the proliferation of "labels," or specific categories of disability. These terms

evolved from "Crippled," "Deaf," "Subnormal," "Prevocational" and "Mentally Retarded," to more the more politically correct versions we now employ: Hearing-Impaired, Learning-Disabled, Emotional-Behavioral Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, Other Health-Impaired. Again, we see the "incarceration of visibility" inherent in the textualization of the deficits presented by these students: we perceive that by labeling their deficiencies, we know more about how to "teach" them to respond in the way that is idealized by the standardized assessment. Ayers (2001) disagrees, as do I, that the "truths" revealed by labels are illusive: "Labels are limiting. They offer a single lens concentrated on a specific deficit when what we need are multiple ways of seeing a child's ever-changing strengths. All the categories are upside down – they conceal more than they reveal. They are abstract, when we need is immediate and concrete" (p. 29). What we need is to know who our students are, their desires, their interests, their curiosities, how they express themselves, how they perceive themselves, what they bring to the learning experience. Unfortunately, the message we send, particularly to these "exceptional" students, is that those aspects of their being are unimportant. In fact, students in special education often perform well in areas of life outside the standard classroom, which supports the assertion that disability is, indeed, socially constructed. For Ng (2003) the construction of disability is particular to the textualized, standardized school environment:

> Instead of treating students' abilities as given, therefore, we need to interrogate how they arise in the social organization of the school. We need to analyze how labeling students as having special needs based on perceptions about their abilities, seen to be their personal attributes rather than socially produced

properties, is consequential, not only for their schooling experience, but for their eventual participation in the labor market (p. 212).

This should force us to question the norm on which the "otherness" of these characteristics are based. If we look carefully at the disproportionate numbers of students with disabilities who have already been "othered" based on their race or socioeconomic status, we can see where the majority of our "exceptions" fall. The pathological categories we have used to label students are "socially constructed scales used to measure socially powerless children according to educational criteria that just happen to characterize the designers of the scales as superior" (Rhodes 1995, 460). If we truly accepted the notion of democracy, we would understand the bigotry behind the categorization of students based on standardized assessment. At some point, perhaps when we became a "Nation At-Risk," we realized how many students were not successful in the traditional educational model, but instead of interrogating the tradition and questioning the elitist norms on which those traditions were based, we began to aggressively classify those who had different learning needs. Perhaps if we had called that reality into question, we might have taken steps to change our approach to education instead of turning to pathology to isolate and "treat" the underachievers along with the physically disabled students we had already excluded.

I have brought up the issue of special education here because I believe that it is most symptomatic of the disembodied curriculum, of our desire to shun the complex issues of difference that surround the vast continuum of humanness. I believe that thinking through issues of the body's place in the curriculum requires us to interrogate disability, to own the injustices we have wrought because of our desires for the neatness

and order of controlled educational environments. As Holmes (2003) suggests, disability

is not something that we want to confront, it makes visible that which will not be

disappeared: the body and its sensations and needs, not all of which involve *jouissance*, at

least not in the relatively limited terms imagined by non-disabled culture. Disability also

makes visible that which must disappear, despite our best efforts: the body that is

impermanent and will die (p. x). Rather than face these uncertainties, we have, for much

of the history of American education marginalized these "others" who did not meet our

standards; disorderly, disadvantaged, discarded, disabled. These injustices have not gone

entirely unnoticed: On December 13, 1993, the cover of *U.S. News and World Report*

touted the headline: SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL – How Special Education Programs

are Cheating Our Children and Costing Taxpayers Billions Each Year." The article was

published at a time when the public was taking notice of the continued failure of special

education programs across the country to demonstrate any meaningful progress. Such

outspoken concern over the effectiveness of special education has led to some

reorganization in special education, particularly an emphasis on including special

education students in the regular classroom. The inclusion of special education students

rests on the premise that these students should not be denied access to the appropriate

grade-level curriculum their peers receive and that they should be guaranteed, as federal

law now mandates, the "least restrictive" environment possible. However, this solution

still overlooks the underlying issue of otherness when it comes to teaching and learning.

A child who was removed from a "regular" education classroom because she could not

learn the material the way it was being taught is not going to "magically" learn the

material just because she is placed back in with peers her age if the same preconceived

notions about disability and otherness exist. We think we can "normalize" her disability

through inclusion, but she will continue to be denied access to the cultural currency her

school has to offer as long as a "one-size fits all" approach is perpetuated.

In recent years, theories of multiple intelligences, advocated primarily by Gardner

(1983) and Thomas Armstrong (1999) have helped to decentralize the "sit and get"

approach that dominated instruction for so long. In fact, as Georgia has begun the

process of adopting its new performance standards, "differentiation" according to

learning style, interest and readiness has been emphasized. However, in many cases, "sit

and get" has simply become "sit/stand/dance/sing/draw or write and get." In other words,

we have found different ways for students to internalize the information that we are

passing down to them, but the underlying perception of how we learn, the need to remand

ourselves to the text, has remained unchanged.

In the disembodied curriculum, we have placed development, issues of the body,

in a one category and the transmission of information in another. We have clung to the

passive model of education, a model that requires us to disconnect our minds from our

bodies in order to be informed, shut down to be open. Cummins (2003) aptly describes

what is missing in this approach, a pedagogy of indifference where embodied,

meaningful learning is concerned:

> Nowhere in this anemic instructional vision is there room for really connecting at
>
> a human level with culturally diverse students; consigned to irrelevance also is
>
> any notion of affirming students' identities, and challenging coercive power
>
> structures, by activating what they already know about the world and mobilizing
>
> the intellectual and linguistic tools they use to make sense of their worlds. This

kind of programming reduces instruction to a technical exercise. No role is envisaged for teachers or students to invest their identities (affect, intellect, and imagination) in the teaching/learning process (p. 56).

As I have detailed here, and as Cummins makes clear, the human element of embodied teaching and learning is largely missing from the standardized curricula, sterilized and often segregated classrooms, and impersonal instructional methods that characterize American education. The disembodiment of curriculum has not only left us confused about where our own bodily realities fit within the architecture of control but has also reified the persistent devaluing of those embodied and "disabled" knowing. At what point will our isolation bring us to resurrect the body in the curriculum? When will we have the courage to rethink the body's role in our subjectivities, to re-imagine "normal?" Bringing our bodies out of the margins of our academic identities and into the foreground will challenge us to think through the one identity category that no one chooses. Martha Stoddard Holmes (2003) provides an example of the difficulties we face in confronting questions of the body. She found that "[t]rying to work out the relationships between disabled bodies and non-disabled ones made my students feel vulnerable because it was literally unimagined territory. They imagined they would date and marry a non-disabled person who would stay that way; they imagined they would always be non-disabled. (Holmes, 2003, viii). We need to broaden our imaginations and embrace the instability of the disabled/ able continuum if we hope to make education more meaningful, more personal. Toward that end, as teachers, students and scholars, we need "more situated, theoretically nuanced analyses of bodies and feelings that honor their social, inter-subjective and historical status and engage our actual lives in our feeling bodies"

(Holmes, p. xi, 2003). With this project, I, in my temporarily-able body, join many

impassioned, embodied inquiries of those who have preceded me into the field of

disability studies in attempting to meet that need.

CHAPTER 3
LIFE GOES ON:
DISABILITY, CURRICULUM AND POPULAR CULTURE

It seems to me that it was quite by accident that I stumbled upon the realm of disability studies while writing my doctoral dissertation on the relationships between curriculum and the body. I think doctoral students, hoping to find a niche for themselves within their respective fields, are always on the lookout for new directions in theory, new ways of understanding and articulating our own insights into scholarship. As I began reading, I became intrigued by what Lennard Davis (1995) calls the "strange and really unaccountable silence" about the issue of disability in academic discourse. Davis writes:

> The silence is stranger, too, since so much of the left criticism has devoted itself
> to the issue of the body, of the social construction of sexuality and gender.
> Alternative bodies people this discourse: gay, lesbian, hermaphrodite, criminal,
> medical, and so on. But lurking behind these images of transgression and
> deviance is a much more transgressive and deviant figure: the disabled body (p.
> 5).

As I pondered my own understanding of that "transgressive and deviant figure" and became immersed in the literature of disability studies, I have found myself feeling as though I might have, at least for a time, found a theoretical home that makes sense to me. I find here theorists asking questions that resonate with my own confusions, questions like those Martha Stoddard Holmes (2003) asks in her opening to *Fictions of Affliction:*

> What kind of bodies are represented as feeling bodies – stocked with pain,
> sympathy, disgust, desire, and laughter, not just blood, organs, tissues, nerves, and
> muscles? Why, and in what contexts, do we read our won or others' physical

bodies as slates on which feelings are writ large, or as markers in an emotional

landscape? What cultural texts inform those readings, what intelligence guides

them, and what power do they wield (and for whom)? (p. vii).

These are the questions I seek to stir through an analysis of popular culture.

But let me be completely honest about why I am writing about disability.

I am obsessed with my body. I weigh myself every day (sometimes twice). I

examine my body in the mirror most mornings, but not before mentally preparing myself

for disappointment. I spend hours reading up on different diets and meticulously

planning meals. I can't not think about my body. But sometimes the ridiculousness of

my obsession occurs to me when I realize how closely my body reflects the physical

norms of American society: five feet six inches, 36/30/36, 126 pounds, with a million

parts, limbs, organs, cells, almost perfectly in place. That's when the what-ifs come into

play. What if suddenly I find myself inhabiting a body that in some way doesn't live up

to society's expectations? I am extremely near-sighted, and I used to have nightmares

about waking up in the middle of the night to find that I had gone blind. One of my

biggest fears throughout my life has been disfigurement by burning. Every time a joint

aches or a bump appears, I rush to the internet to check my symptoms for signs of some

dreaded disease.

So, regardless of how accepting I have become of other's differences in my own

experience, I have to admit that bodily norms have clearly had a profound affect on both

my perceptions of bodies and my physical body itself. These are the norms of an ableist

culture, a society that has allowed disabilities and disfigurements to be read as other,

strange, or in Freud's (1963) term, "uncanny." Freud (1963) says "this uncanny is in

reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become, alienated from it only through the process of repression" (p. 240). Perhaps then, our perceptions of disabled bodies can be traced to our own fears about the degeneration of our own bodies through disease, accident, or aging. For me, interrogating how our (or perhaps I should say *my*) culture of ableism has constructed disability forces me to confront these fears and confusions I have about bodily normalcy.

At 30, I think it's time that I come to terms with the conceptual turmoil that has dominated most of my lived experience. Why look to popular culture? Davis (1995) says "Disability is a specular moment. The power of the gaze is to control, limit and patrol how the person is brought to the fore. Accompanying the gaze are a welter of powerful emotional responses. These responses can include horror, fear, pity, compassion and avoidance" (p. 12). For me, the significance of popular culture is "specular," because here we are afforded a (almost) guiltless gaze, because in my mind are the indelible images of the impossibly thin, seductive women that years of avid television watching and magazine reading have left behind. And if my immersion in popular media can speak volumes about my own desires for normalcy, it must have something important to say about my perceptions of disability. Furthermore, if we take seriously the profound presence of popular culture in American society, then we must accept that the media that we engage in shapes our assumptions about disability.

I want to explore popular, particularly cinematic, representations of disability because, as Giroux and Simon (1989) note, "Popular culture represents a significant pedagogical site that raises important questions about the relevance of everyday life, student voice, and the investments of meaning and pleasure that structure and anchor the

why and how of learning (p. 5). I believe that popular culture raises particularly relevant questions about the way that we have constructed disability and excluded bodies from the curriculum based on this otherness. As Daspit (2000) asserts, "Curricular appropriation of popular culture may assist in reorganizing the prevailing narratives that schooling has perpetuated" (p. 165). Here, I appropriate popular culture to investigate how representations of disability have assisted in *organizing* prevailing narratives of disability in educational settings and offer critical readings of some particular texts in at attempt to reorganize those narratives.

Writing Disabled Bodies

In order to understand how perceptions of disability have operated to impact our collective decisions regarding education environments, we must further investigate the ways the popular culture has "written" the disabled body. Norden points out the significance of popular representations, particularly films, have operated to construct and objectify disability (1994):

> By encouraging audience members to perceive the world depicted in the moves, and by implication the world in general, from this perspective and thus associate themselves with able-bodied characters, this strategy has a two-fold effect: it enhances the disabled characters' isolation and "Otherness" by reducing them to objectifications of pity, fear, scorn, etc. – in short, objects of spectacle – as a means of pandering to the needs of the able-bodied majority, and it contributes to a sense of isolation and self-loathing among audience members with disabilities (p. 1).

I believe that the narratives of isolation and otherness highlighted by Norden offer insight into the way have organized a disembodied school curriculum that allows the exclusion of particular bodies based on the assignment of disability. My intention here is not to apologize for or justify my own bodily egoism or to evoke sympathy for people with disabilities by exposing and examining the ways American popular culture has conceptualized disability in sometimes subtle and particularly damaging ways. Rather, I look to gain insight into the culturally and historically situated bodies of the differently-abled by investigating contemporary popular culture (specifically, films and television) with the same question Holmes (2003) asked of Victorian literature: "What are the longer-term effects of the coding of all of our bodies – through the recurrent stories that shape our social relations – as bodies instructed to feel in limited ways?" (p. vii). Here, those "longer-term" effects include the individual and collective perceptions of disability through the embedded curriculum of popular culture as well as the development of the official curriculum that has dominated education in the 20th century and has excluded disabled students in multiple ways.

Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc (2002) observe that when it comes to analyzing the media, the challenge is "to write about out own multiple (and often contradictory) involvements, participations, engagements, and identifications with popular culture – without denying, rationalizing, and distorting them. The best cultural critics speak as "insiders" as well as "outsiders" (p. 7). It is difficult to write about disabled bodies and representations of disabled bodies without inadvertently engaging the same pathologies and voyeurisms in which those representations were constructed because, as Snyder and Mitchell (2001) observe, there is no "sensual and sensory language to theorize the body

itself" (p. 381). Even the term itself, "disability," a term which itself constructs a binary between the able and "dis" able, does not adequately represent the continuum of physical and/or mental abilities that can be discussed. However, I attempt to meet that challenge by writing as a participant in the social construction of disability (through my internalization of bodily norms) and both a consumer and a critic of cultural representations of disability (which can encompass a vast continuum of physical and/or mental ability), in order to better understand those involvements, participations, engagements, and identifications from the perspective of the able-bodied.

Let me begin by highlighting an example of the contradictions posed by contemporary representations of disability. When I began to think about the ways that people with disabilities had been portrayed in my own experience of popular culture, I thought of Corky. In the television series, *Life Goes On*, which aired on ABC from 1989 to 1993, the lovable lead character, teenager Corky Thatcher, was "mainstreamed" into a regular school with his sympathetic "normal" peers. The actor who played Corky, Chris Burke, emerged not long after the mainstreaming "movement" had taken hold. Burke also had Down's syndrome, a relative first for American television, and a subject of considerable media coverage. Although Corky marked an important milestone for representations of the disabled, he might not be the first image that comes to mind for most Americans, but for me, Down's Syndrome loomed ever present in my understanding of disability. Corky reminded me of my older twin cousins, who lived just down the road from my childhood home. He also brought to mind the teenager my best friend's mother, an interpreter for the hearing-impaired and an advocate for those who our society categorized "special," had informally adopted as part of her family. While the

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show presented Corky as a disabled person living the "normal" life of a teenager, it perpetuated notions of the disabled as pitiful and innocent. It also minimized the stigma that still characterized the experience of students with Down's Syndrome and other diagnoses that deemed them "disabled."

The series was not unlike many other contemporary films, television series, and popular comic strips, explored in this chapter, which often seemed to portray disability in a positive light but carried an underlying message about the "otherness" of the disabled. More importantly, the series served to deemphasize in the public consciousness the (often grim) "reality" of living as a student with disabilities. While the able-bodied community heralded the series as a positive exemplar of the inclusive American sitcom, millions of real American students with Down's Syndrome and a host of other disabilities spent their days in the isolation of special education "resource" rooms. While the relative popularity of *Life Goes On* seems to express a certain mindset about the need for an inclusive curriculum, the history of American education tells another story entirely, and the "dark past" of "special" education leaves little uncertainty that disabled bodies have been purposefully excluded from the curriculum.

Before I discuss other popular representations of disability, I want to situate these images within a broader understanding of the social experiences of people with disabilities. Like Jenkins, Richardson, and Shattuc (2002), I view these popular texts "not as discrete entities that stand alone but instead exist in relation to a broad range of other discourses, placing media production and consumption within a vast social and cultural configuration of competing voices and positions" (p. 17). Therefore, it is important that we recognize the exclusion of people with disabilities from "mainstream"

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society (particularly education) for what it was and, in some cases, still is: purposeful and appalling. It is well-known that for nearly a century, the needs of students with disabilities were overlooked or ignored by public schools, relegated to the margins, isolated. I don't need to retell the history of institutionalization here; you are undoubtedly aware of the way that disabled children, particularly those whose physical abnormalities were accompanied by intellectual ones, were relegated to the margins of society, cast away, imprisoned. But let Winzer's (1993) collection of statistics from her comprehensive study of the history of Special Education serve to remind us:

> In 1966 in the United States the per capita cost for mentally retarded persons in residential settings was less than five dollars a day (Holburn, 1990). Writers presented horrifying illustrated descriptions of conditions in institutions for mentally retarded person and juvenile delinquents (Blatt and Kaplan, 1960; Rivera, 1972; Vail, 1966). Photographs showed poorly clothed or naked residents, residents in solitary rooms, and large, loudly day rooms smeared with excrement on walls, floors and even ceilings (Zigler, Hoddap, and Edison, 1990). These "poignant exposes revealed the frequent tragedies in the human condition" (Sparr and Smith, 1990), p. 95). Blatt described institutions for the mentally retarded as a "land of the living dead" (Blatt and Kaplan, 1960, p. v). (Winzer 1993, p. 378)

Such disturbing images have characterized the "treatment" of students with disabilities for much of the history of public education. In fact, in spite of the mandate for inclusion put forth by the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, it is really only in the last decade that we have seen a significant shift toward fully including

students with disabilities in the regular classroom and providing for them the same opportunities that "normal" children are entitled to. By the early 1990s, when *Life Goes On* was reassuring Americans that special education students could take active roles in mainstream society, there was nothing that could really be deemed "integration," in the language of the Civil rights movement. Winzer (1993) recognizes a paradigm shift was (and I would argue is still) necessary before significant changes could take place, observing that "the ability of a society to provide services to help special people required not only the technical and scientific skills to do so, but also a social philosophy that recognized exceptionality as a human condition, not simplistically as deviance, dependence, or delinquency (p. 365)." Yet, as Winzer (1993) concludes her study, writing just over a decade ago, we find that her concept of changed social philosophy reflects humane changes in policy but still embodies the same ideas about the need to rehabilitate the disabled toward normalcy:

> The current philosophy underlying special education rejects the idea of merely caring for or maintaining persons with disabilities or simply helping them to adjust. Instead, it stresses corrections and prevention and adheres to the notion that all children have the right to learn in the educational environment most suited to their academic and social needs (p. 383).

Unfortunately, the educational environment that is most often deemed "most suited" to their needs is a separate "special" environment that further stigmatizes these students, and the notion of "correction and prevention," still highly applicable to the "treatment" of children with disabilities, perpetuates the hegemony of able-bodied culture. These ideas resonate in what Eli Clare (2001) identifies as four paradigms of

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disability that have dominated popular perception: the medical, charity, supercrip, and moral models. Clare's (2001) terms represent the prevailing ways that able-bodied American society has responded to disability. The "medical" model presents disability as a pathological condition that must be treated or cured through medical technology so that the person can live a "normal" life; the new ABC reality show "Miracle Workers," in which patients with serious medical conditions receive expensive "life-changing" medical procedures for free, is good evidence of the prevalence of this assumption. In the tradition of the long-running Jerry Lewis Telethon, the "charity" model emphasizes the need to eradicate disabling conditions through generous giving by others. The "supercrip" model depicts the person with a disability as heroic and courageous for becoming successful or simply living *in spite of* his or her condition (think Helen Keller, F.D.R, Ray Charles, etc.) and the "moral" model, by Clare's definition, associates disability with moral weakness or depravity (which corresponds with Martin Norden's (1994) "Obsessive Avenger," an embittered character seeking revenge). I would add that the "moral" model might also include the aggrandizement of the individual to a higher moral plane based on his or her disability, as in the staple characters described by Norden (1994), the "Sweet Innocent" and the "Saintly Sage."

From my own analysis of popular media, I would add what I will call the "spectacle" model, in which the disabled body is viewed as exotic or grotesque, which brings to mind various media that conflate the "otherness" of disability with "horror." This model is closely tied to another representation, the "comic" model, in which disabling conditions are depicted humorously. In recent years, this model has been popularized by syndicated comic artists like Gahan Wilson, whose dark images of half-

dead, macabre, grotesque "monsters" of all sorts (very reminiscent of early horror films), have appeared in the *New Yorker* and other popular periodicals for decades. The cartoons of John Callahan, a quadriplegic who became known for his controversial "cripple humor" cartoons, and *The Far Side* creator Gary Larson, whose fictional realm is occupied entirely by bulging-eyed, big-nosed, bespectacled, misshapen, and often clueless characters, have also sparked heated debates about their comic representations of disability.

These categories, indicative of some of the most common assumptions about disability, are not all-inclusive and, as Clare (2001) is quick to note, they intersect and overlap, but they can give us some idea of the multiple ways that disability is conceptualized through contemporary popular culture. They can also help us understand how these narratives operate to define disability in these popular media. Holmes (2003) observes that they "teach us that disability is "alien, terrifying, tragic; that it transforms your life in overwhelmingly negative ways; and that it is normal to feel horrified, relieved, and inspired, all from a safe distance, when we encounter disability (Holmes, 2003, p. ix.). Here, I want to revisit some disability films that, for me, have most horrified, relieved and inspired my understanding of what it means to be disabled.

Disability in Film and Television

Let me begin by briefly describing the historical context that preceded the making of these recent films. As we will see, disability has been and continues to be big business when it comes to the film industry; as Davis (2002) notes, three of the academy award nominated films of 1997 - *Shine, The English Patient,* and *Slingblade* – were all disability films. Not long after films emerged as a medium in America, filmmakers

began capitalizing on the comic model to release a number of short silent films that featured disabled characters. As Safran (1998) notes, "Many early movies used disabilities to heighten the effect of slapstick comedies and melodramas, and frequently presented the stereotypes of victim or villain, or as seeking revenge for their disability" (p. 468). In fact, the first short film depicting physical disability, Thomas Edison's 50-second film, *The Fake Beggar*, appeared in 1898 (Norden, 1994). The early titles speak for themselves: *The Legless Runner* (1907), *The Invalid's Adventure* (1907), and *Don't Pull My Leg* (1908). An indication of the popularity of this genre, during this era of the early development of the film industry, the famed D.W. Griffith directed no less than 14 films featuring physical and/or sensory impairments (Safran, 1998).

As the American film industry matured and the general public became more sensitive toward the body-altering injuries sustained by soldiers in World War I, the medical model became the most popular mode of filmic representations of disability. A barrage of "curability" film, including *The Silent Voice* (1915), *Stella Maris* (1918)*, The Miracle Man* (1919), *Big Little Person* (1919) and *The Shock* (1923), all of which featured miraculous recoveries, typify the films of this period. The medical model, which insists that the body be "fixed" in order to restore it to its "normal" state, is perhaps the most pervasive, considering the pathologization of disability:

> Briefly, the medicalization of disability casts human variation as deviance from the norm, as pathological condition, as deficit, and significantly, as an individual burden and personal tragedy. Society, in agreeing to assign medical meaning to disability, colludes to keep the issue within the purview of the medical establishment, to keep it a personal matter and "treat" the condition and the

person with the condition rather than "treating" the social processes and policies

that construct disabled people's lives (Linton, 1998, p. 11).

In spite of the popularity of the medical representations of disability during this time,

some films emerged that expressed underlying messages about the association between

disability and depravity, such as *Flesh and Blood* (1922), in which the main character

disguises himself as a disabled beggar, *The Blackbird* (1926), whose main character is an

underworld gang leader posing as a disabled Bishop, and *The Unknown* (1927), which

features a armless "freak" show "fake" whose deceit results in the amputation of both his

arms.

Silent film actor Lon Chaney, who played the main characters in each of these

three films and a host of others, was well-known for his portrayal of strange, disfigured,

and disabled (or seemingly disabled) characters, and it was he who portrayed the title

characters in the first film versions of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) and *The*

Phantom of the Opera (1925), perhaps two of the most well-known representations of

disfigurement. The popularity of these films signaled a gradual shift from a subtle,

underlying association of disability with immorality to brazen depictions of disability as

spectacle. With this shift came the emergence of horror films such as *Frankenstein*

(1931) and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr.* Hyde (1931) and *Freaks* (1932). In general, the films of

the early decades of the twentieth century helped to construct disability in terms of

dependence and deviance:

> Moviemakers would have their audiences believe that helplessness and
>
> dependency on ablebodied people were the norms for physically disabled people,
>
> and that if they weren't cured, or at the very least kept dependent, they were

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dangerous deviants. If in the movies disabled characters showed their worthiness through some combination of good deeds, innocence, spirituality, and a general long-suffering life, and weren't elderly, they would probably return to the mainstream world – their ultimate "reward," as it were – through a cure (Norden, 1994, p. 105-106).

The World War II era ushered in more sensitive portrayals, reminiscent of both the "medical" and "supercrip" trends in response to the growing number of disabled veterans: *Pride of the Marines (1945) and Bright Victory (1951*) both featured characters blinded in service. In *The Best Years of Our Lives (1946)* veteran Harold Russell, whose hands had been replaced by metal hooks, portrayed himself. Another well-known film, Fred Zinnemann's *The Men (1950),* depicted veterans who had become paraplegics (Norden, 1994). These films tended to be hopeful depictions of people coming to terms with their disabilities, relying also on the assumptions that disability is overcome through the selfless giving (charity) of others (in most cases, beautiful women). Other later "feel-good" films, including *Interrupted Melody* (1955)*,* the true story of opera singer Marjorie Lawrence overcoming polio, and *Sunrise at Campobello* (1960)*,* which chronicled Franklin D. Roosevelt's polio "triumph," followed this medical/ supercrip model. The story of Helen Keller, *The Miracle Worker* (1962), which details how Keller miraculously manages to overcome multiple disabilities to eke out some semblance of a "normal" existence, is yet another example.

In contrast, the long Vietnam era sparked its own collection of disability depictions, but these films had a decidedly different tone. The well-known Stanley Kubrick film, *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), with its unforgettable portrayal of the maniacal

wheelchair-bound Dr. with the mechanical arm, was among the first of many anti-war themed films. By relating these images of disability to the controversial Vietnam conflict, these films offered a subtle moral message: both *Johnny Got His Gun* (1971) and *Coming Home* (1978), as well as the later *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), offered grim depictions of physical disability and an anti-war message. In response to the increased number of soldiers experiencing "psychological" casualties as a result of the war, the post-Vietnam era saw a flood of films that addressed mental disabilities in frightening and macabre portrayals, including *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), *Taxi Driver* (1976), *The Other Side of Hell* (1978), *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979).

Interestingly enough, films with disability themes rarely featured children with disabilities, and it wasn't until the civil rights era was well underway that people with disabilities were consistently depicted as living independently in "mainstream" society in films like *Tell Me That You Love Me Junie Moon* (1970), in which a woman disfigured by burns ventures out into society with her two disabled friends. This period also saw a resurgence of "disabled hero" themes with films such as *The Other Side of the Mountain* (1975), in which a champion skier comes to terms with paralysis.

It was also during this era that people with disabilities began to make their way onto the small screen. In the years that preceded the civil rights era, as television established itself as the new medium for the masses, Chester Goode, the loyal deputy on the first nine seasons of *Gunsmoke* (1955-1975) was only noteworthy representation of disability. In 1967, we saw the first character with a disability in a title role in the Wheelchair dependent detective, Robert T. Ironside in *Ironside* (1967-1975). A few

years later, he was joined by James Fransiscus, a blind insurance investigator on *Longstreet* (1971-1972). Each of these characters ascribe to "supercrip" assumptions about disability, and it is interesting to note that none of these three popular characters suffered from a congenital condition, but received the injuries that led to their disabilities at the hands of others.

Similarly, former astronaut Steve Austin, *The Six Million Dollar Man* (1974-1978) became disabled as a result of a spaceship crash, but was able to obtain superhuman qualities by being rebuilt as a cyborg. The popular series spawned a spin-off involving his former love-interest, Jaime Sommers, in *The Bionic Woman* (1976-1978). Sommers' body was also rebuilt after a near-fatal sky-diving accident. Perhaps the only congenitally disabled recurring character was the blind chief Engineer Lt. Geordi LaForge, who appeared in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994) and subsequent films. LaForge's disabililty was "corrected" through technology; he wore a futuristic device called a V.I.S.O.R. (Visual Instrument and Sensory Organ Replacement), which enabled him to see a broader range of electromagnetic radiation than most humans, but he eventually received ocular implants that allowed him to discontinue the use of the device and regain a "normal" appearance. These development of these characters primarily about medical assumptions about disability; they imply that the characters' quality of life would have suffered if not for the ability-enhancing technology that transformed them into bionic superheroes.

Beyond these few enduring characters, there have been a few other notable roles actually portrayed by actors with disabilities, including Chris Burke and Marlee Matlin, who, after winning an Oscar for her role in *Children of a Lesser God*, joined the TV

series *Picket Fences* (1992-1996). In general, however, people with disabilities have been largely underrepresented on television. While the ongoing debate over the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 moved disability rights further into the public consciousness, this shift was not reflected in the television industry, and this continues to be the case. The two noteworthy characters currently appearing in successful series, Dr. David Robbins on the CBS drama, *CSI*, and Dr. Gregory House on the Fox series, *House*, both walk with a limp and use a cane. While the disability of Dr. David Robbins (played by Robert David Hall, an actual double amputee) is not significant to the story line, the disabling injury of Dr. House is a major part of the conflict involving this embittered physician, who suffers from chronic pain. Considering the vast numbers of Americans who have disabilities, which Davis (2002) estimates to be 15 to 20 percent of the population even *without* the baby boomers, two doctors with canes grossly minimizes the presence of people with disabilities in our country.

While disabled characters remain largely absent from television, films have continued to draw on the standard assumptions about disability in the numerous representations that have appeared since the 1980s. One of the most memorable images from my childhood was that of *The Elephant Man* (1980), with its grotesque representation of disfigurement and underlying message about charity. Since that time, a myriad of motion pictures have depicted a wide range of disabilities: autism in *Rain Man* (1988) and *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* (1993), AIDS in *Philadelphia* (1993), blindness in *At First Sight* (1997) and *Ray* (2004), disfigurement in *The English Patient* (1993), *The Man Without a Face* (1993) and *Vanilla Sky* (2001), cancer in *One True Thing* (1998) and *Stepmom* (1998), congenital physical conditions in *Simon Birch* (1998) and *The Mighty*

(1998) and learning disabilities in *Sling Blade* (1996) and I *Am Sam* (2001), and the list could continue on for several pages. The depictions of people with disabilities in these films are as varied as the conditions they address, ranging from asexual innocence to angry bitterness to deviant immorality, and while many of them attempt to do justice to disability in their realistic representations, most still seem to embody one or more of the traditional assumptions about disability.

Edward Scissorhands

Within this group of contemporary disability films are two figures that loom large in the collective cultural consciousness and in my personal mental inventory of disability representations. The first is *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), which might easily be regarded as the Generation X's Frankenstein with a sensitive, comic twist. This Tim Burton film was released just as I preparing to enter the cruel, strange world of high school, a time when adolescent fears of isolation and "otherness" were reaching their zenith. Perhaps it was both this timeliness and later, the film's enduring presence on TBS, that made the images of Edward's garden-shear hands, sunken eyes, and wiry mess of black hair so unforgettable. As an "artificial" person, Scissorhands may not, on first glance, appear to portray traditional notions of disability, but as Enns and Smit (2001) point out, disability does not have an easily recognized, coherent form. Rather, the disability is defined in relation to what is perceived as a lack of human potential, so that the category of disability becomes a distorted reflection of what society considers "normal" and "human." Scissorhands certainly provides a telling reflection of assumptions about humanity and normalcy. Edward is the creation of an ambitious inventor who died before he could craft hands to replace the set of rotating scissors. He

exists happily in complete isolation in the Gothic mansion belonging to his creator, but

his problems begin when Peg Boggs stops by on an Avon sales call. Boggs takes pity on

him and brings him home with her to 1950s Suburbia. At first, Edward finds himself

subject to the fearful and curious scrutiny of the neighborhood, but his shrub and hair-

cutting talents quickly elevate him to celebrity status. However, Edward's experience in

mainstream society soon takes a negative turn; his love for Peg's daughter, Kim, is

unrequited, and an accident in which he unintentionally harms another person is

interpreted as a malicious act, forcing him to return to exile indefinitely.

Norden (1994), in his comprehensive history of physical disability in films, gives

American film the moniker, "Cinema of Isolation," because more often than not,

characters with disabilities are set apart, portrayed as outsiders. This is certainly true of

Edward Scissorhands and many of the other films mentioned here. *Edward Scissorhands*

also embodies a number of other traditional assumptions about disabled bodies and what

it means to be "normal." Peg feels sorry for Edward, and it is her charity that brings him

into Suburbia, based on Burton's own childhood Burbank, which he describes as

"disembodied" (Ansen, 1991). Edward quickly becomes a spectacle, a "freak" to be

studied by the curious eyes of the "normal" people, but his unique talents make him a

hero (supercrip). However, Edward, longing so much to touch, to engage in normalcy, is

unable to control his disability, and his weakness is interpreted by society as depravity.

Caroline Thompson, the screenwriter for the film, says of Burton's character in

Newsweek, "It's the perfect metaphor for how many of us feel. It's more than feeling like

an outsider, it's feeling dangerous . . . yearning to touch and knowing when you do, you

destroy" (Ansen, 1991). In the end, we are left wondering if he would have been better off left in isolation, where society felt he really "belonged" in the first place.

In my initial readings of this film, I perceived primarily the pain and isolation that accompanied Edward's otherness, and those feelings appealed to my own insecurities about navigating the murky waters between what I have understood as the isolation of intellectualism and the attachment to mainstream cultural norms. However, I think that *Edward Scissorhands* holds some important insights into the way we construct disability and how those constructions operate in an environment that is similar to Burton's disembodied Suburbia, namely, the school. The neighborhood of neatly situated, tackily decorated tract homes is not unlike the sterile classroom, with its neatly-lined desks and pre-fabricated posters. Edward, with his childlike uncertainty, unsteady gait, black attire, and complicated appendages, stands out monstrously against this backdrop of repressed tidiness. Like Edward, students with disabilities, particularly *perceived* physical and mental differences, complicate the "tidy" environment of the "regular" classroom. Like Edward's human hosts, we are fearful and suspicious of "others" who cannot control their minds and bodies the way that the able do; we may "tolerate" those that are different but, like Edward's friends, our apparent friendship may only be a mask for our underlying fear and misunderstanding. Edward is truly "disabled" in the Suburban environment, with its numerous physical and social barriers. From Edward's demise we learn that having the appearance of accepting difference is not the same as embracing difference and changing the fabric of society to allow for those differences.

Burton, himself a self-proclaimed alienated artist, clearly has something to say about the way American society responds to difference, with his construction of "an

uneasy sense that the surface gregariousness of middle-class life can quickly turn threatening" (Ansen, 1991, p. 58). Yet, the viewing audience is left to accept Edward's fate and to understand physical difference as "alien, terrifying, tragic," to assume that those who fail to embrace the nuances of disembodied normalcy (in which bodily entanglements are kept at a safe distance), those whose differences are beyond their control, should be kept in isolation. We comfort ourselves with the assumption that students with disabilities are better off not being exposed to the selfishness, maliciousness, and fearfulness of mainstream society.

Forrest Gump

Another unforgettable character, *Forrest Gump* (1994), shares Scissorhands' naiveté about the brutish qualities of mainstream society, but his narrative follows a somewhat different path. This huge box-office hit centers on the life of a mildly mentally (and in the beginning, physically) disabled Alabama man who wanders innocently through the major historical events of the 60s and 70s and inadvertently finds personal and financial success. Like Edward, Forrest embodies more than one of the traditional assumptions about people with disabilities. When we first meet Forrest, we find that, in keeping with the "medical" model of disability, he must endure painful leg braces in order to straighten his legs and allow for a "normal" appearance. The braces, in turn, are an outwardly visible sign of his disabilities and cause him to become a spectacle, an object of ridicule by cruel children and adults alike. Nevertheless, Forrest is blissfully unaware of the malice and disgust with which he is regarded, and in contrast to Scissorhands, whose lack of understanding and restraint results in questionable moralilty, Gump is morally elevated as a result of his simplicity, the archetype of Norden's (1994)

"Sweet Innnocent." Unlike Scissorhands, who eyes are inevitably opened to the cruelty of humanity, Forrest remains oblivious to reality, and the other characters go to great length to protect his child-like "purity"; his mother even sleeps with the school superintendent to keep him in a regular classroom. Her desperate act emphasizes her desire to maintain Forrest's persona of normalcy, whatever the cost. In fact, while Forrest is viewed as the epitome of a "good" person because he lacks the ability to impose judgment on others, he never has to make any moral choices like those faced by other characters in the film. Like Peg, it is primarily a mainstream mother-figure, Jenny, who offers charity in the form of friendship, and like Edward, it is Forrest's special "talents" (in this case, his knack for running and ping-pong) that propel him into celebrity (supercrip) status. Forrest also falls in love in the film, and although his childlike adoration for Jenny offers none of the complexities of "normal" adult relationships, he does eventually (although somewhat inadvertently, consummate his relationship with her, resulting in a child (who, incidentally does not share Forrest's disability).

Isolation and Inclusion

When juxtaposed, these two characters construct a telling binary between two major issues in special education: isolation and inclusion. The message that these two films seem to offer is that the inclusion of people with disabilities into mainstream society can work if those people have an outwardly "normal" appearance, are innocent and asexual, require no adaptations, and pose no threat to our own insecurities about ourselves. The two characters, both framed as outsiders, are radically different in the ways that they navigate mainstream society. Edward is acutely aware of the fact that the scissors make him different, and his awareness only further inhibits him from engaging in

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appropriate social interactions. He also engages in purposeful moral choices, although those choices only lead him to discover the pain of betrayal and deceit, and result in his loss of innocence. Once corrupted, he is no longer "good" in the eyes of the Suburbanites and must return to isolation.

In comparison, *Forrest Gump* certainly seems to convey the more positive message about accepting difference, but that acceptance comes with a price. In Forrest's case, the success of his mainstream experiences seem to hinge on the fact that although Forrest admits that he is "not a smart man," he believes his mother when she insisted, "You're no different than anybody else is." In that sense, Forrest is as ignorant about his own uniqueness as he is the larger social context in which he is living. He need not be concerned with the potential obstacles faced by people with mental disabilities because he manages to float easily through life like the metaphorical feather (an important aspect of the film's imagery). Forrest becomes accepted, even celebrated, by mainstream society, but the messages that he embodies are potentially regressive ones. Forrest, parroting his mother, espouses the belief that "You have to do the best with what God gave you" and the ever-famous "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get." This leaves the viewer to assume that when it comes to those who society has deemed disabled, apparently the best you can do is throw yourself into society, pretend you're no different, and hope for the best, and maybe, like Forrest, you will be rewarded with fame and fortune.

Examined together, these two films offer important insight into current issues surrounding the education of students with disabilities. Since the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 specified that students with disabilities should be

educated with their non-disabled peers "to the maximum extent appropriate," public school systems have slowly moved away from the traditional segregated model toward integrating those students classroom versions of Edward's Suburbia, complete with their own disembodied repressiveness and long-standing norms. The passage of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which Congressional amendments renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997, added to the urgency of what widely became known as "inclusion." According to the most recent statistics released by the U.S Department of Education (2003), nearly half of all students with disabilities (46.5 percent of more than 5 million students) are being educated in the regular classroom for most of the school day (79 percent or greater).

The issues that have risen from this shift are highlighted in the characters of Scissorhands and Gump. Like the Suburbanites, many educators are fearful of the bodily entanglements that often accompany students with disabilities. They want to keep the instructional and social norms they are comfortable with in place.   Consider the perspective on the inclusion of disabilities expressed in a *New York Times Magazine* article:

> On children's television, the kid in the wheelchair has become a kind of mascot, beloved by all his gang. But imagine a real-life classroom where all of the children are nondisabled except the one who drools uncontrollably, who hears voices or can't read a simple sentence when everyone else can. Diversity is a noble ideal. But many disabled children would be marginalized and ridiculed in the mainstream . . .(Staples, 1999, quoted in Smith and Kozleski, 2005).

The character of Edward Scissorhands seems to uphold this regressive outlook on disability, the idea that some students are just better off in the Gothic mansions of separate facilities and isolated resource rooms. We use the marginalization and ridicule of students who are "different" as an excuse to keep them at a distance, which keeps us from mussing up our tidy educational environments with something as vilified as human saliva.

If *Edward Scissorhands* symbolizes what is "right" about isolation, then *Forrest Gump* represents what is wrong with inclusion, not the concept itself, but our misconceptions about what it means to be inclusive. Thanks in large part to the persistence of his mother, Forrest participated fully in mainstream society, and he was readily accepted once he left behind the vestiges of perceivable physical disability. Aside from the sacrifices of his mother, no special accommodations were required of American society in order for Forrest to drift through a blissfully ordinary life. Just as Forrest was embraced by society, we as educators are somewhat more likely to accept students whose disabilities do not force us to confront our own bodily inadequacies, students who can otherwise be perceived as "normal." In fact, despite his IQ of 75, Gump was heralded by fans of the film as representative of the "ordinary" person. Perhaps more importantly, Forrest's experience would leave us to believe that if we simply allow students access to the mainstream environment of the general education classroom and tell them, as Forrest's dear Mama told him, "You're the same as everybody else. You are no different," then the students, not realizing that they *are* different, will be successful and everyone will be happy. Unfortunately, it seems that this perspective has characterized "inclusion" in many cases; the constitution of general education classes have changed

with the addition of students with disabilities but the instructional and interpersonal norms have remained the same (Baglieri and Knopf, 2004). We may have removed the logistical barriers that prevented students with disabilities from accessing the curriculum, but the socially constructed assumptions about disability, reflected in our popular media, have remained intact.

These memorable film characters, along with the larger cinematic context from which they emerged provide us with some understanding of how such popular culture texts have written the disabled body out of and into educational practice. Norden (1994) notes that "As powerful cultural tools, the movies have played a major role in perpetuating mainstream society's regard for people with disabilities, and more than not the images borne in those movies have differed sharply from the realities of the physically disabled experience. (p. 1). As Holmes (2003) notes, these narratives teach us that it's okay to feel horrified, relieved or inspired, whether we encounter disability in films or in our everyday lives. As Holmes (2003) observes, the "objection here is not with any of these feelings, per se, but with the fact that there are so few others suggested by the textual and visual narratives that train us how to picture, talk about, and enact the relationships to our own and others' bodies shaped by the able-disabled binary" (Holmes, 2003, p. ix). In the case of the films discussed here, the representations of disability have become a part of the broader cultural system; these films provide a safe space in which we can explore our bodily fears from a safe distance. As Ryan and Kellner (1988) note, they play an important role in shaping social reality, in this case, the able-disabled binary:

> Films transcode the discourses (the forms, figures, and representations) of social
> life into cinematic narrative. Rather than reflect a reality external to the film

medium, films execute a transfer from one discursive field to another. As a result,

films themselves become a part of that broader cultural system of representations

that construct social reality. That construction occurs in part through the

internalization of representations (pp. 12-13).

Thus, the process through which we construct the "otherness" of disability occurs

through simultaneous acts of construction and internalization.

Films featuring people with disabilities have not only shaped social reality, but

the economy of the film industry as well. In contrast to the Oscar buzz that has been

generated over numerous portrayals of disability (most recently *Million Dollar Baby*

(2004), *Ray* (2004), *The Hours* (2002), *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), *I am Sam* (2001)),

primetime television hasn't exerted a great deal of effort to feature actors or characters

with disabilities. As Davis (1994) notes, "although considerable effort has been expended

on the part of activists, legislators, and scholars, disability is still a largely ignored and

marginalized area. Every week, films and television programs are made containing the

most egregious stereotypes of people with disabilities, and hardly anyone notices"

(Davis, p. 159). In fact, with a little online research, one can find a lengthy list of

television shows that have addressed disabilities in some way, and discover that few

characters are in leading roles, and many of them are single, impoverished, oppressed, or

worse, fodder for comedy skits. For the most part television has not successfully created

many memorable characters that can be seen as ordinary people with human needs.

Life Goes On

This brings us back to Corky. Looking back on the history of film and television

portrayals of disability, *Life Goes On* seems to stand out as a marginally successful

attempt to disable "otherness" through a lead role. Although the series, with its upbeat

theme song and saccharine tone, was not entirely practical when it came to the realities of

mainstreaming in America, it did portray some of the social challenges Corky faced in his

interactions as a student, and later, a husband. Yet, the title of the series *Life Goes On*

suggests a theme much like *Forrest Gump*: You do the best with what God gave you.

Life goes on *in spite of* being different. And in Corky's case, life largely went on without

him as the show shifted the primary focus to the titillating storyline involving the

characters portrayed by Kelly Martin and Chad Lowe. This is what we say when we have

to face tragedy: life goes on, because it has to, because there are some things that are

beyond our control.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, a prolific writer in disability studies, says, "We

want to redefine, to re-imagine, disability – not make it go away. But also not have it

remain with its stigmatic force. So we want it to go away in a way that *we* want it to go

away." (Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in Brueggemann et. Al, 2005, p. 13). Similarly, I

want to redefine, re-imagine this *Life Goes On* portrayal of disability. For as long as we

maintain the *"in spite of,"* the able-disable binary persists. To say that life goes on in

spite of being different implies that it is a tragedy to be overcome, like the death of a

loved one. Sometimes being different is tragic, but it is not inherent to the body of the

person who falls short of what society calls "normal;" it is in the specular gaze, the

socially constructed perceptions that have been reified overtime. To say that life goes on

is to say that our lives are beyond our control, and certainly there are things that a single

body cannot change, but we need to recognize the power we have to construct disability.

We have to recognize that "disability" actually has more to do with the way we have

constructed "our" society based on what works for the able. Chris Burke, like his

character, was imbued with self-confidence, bolstered by supportive parents and

professional success, which carried him through the complexities of mainstream life,

while *Forrest Gump* was satisfied simply believing he was "no different and being

unaware of the oppression that formed the context of his experiences (the Civil Rights

Movement, Vietnam), but expecting people with disabilities simply to believe in

themselves requires no effort on our part. As with the example of inclusion, we cannot

simply open the door and expect equality to magically materialize. We have to change

the way we think: about difference, about disabilities, about bodies.

Before we can expect to see genuine change in the way that we approach the

education of those whose minds and bodies do not conform to standards of normalcy, we

have to begin thinking differently about disability; we must question the hegemony of the

normal and begin to see ourselves as being "differently abled." In all our rhetoric about

equality, about tolerance and acceptance, we might think that to do so would not require a

conceptual leap. But Davis (1994) tells us otherwise: we have only begun to rethink the

disabled body; in cultural studies we have romanticized transgressive bodies, but disabled

bodies have not yet begun to participate in "the erotics of power, in the power of the

erotic, in economies of transgression . . . There has been no rhetoric tied to prostheses,

wheelchairs, colostomy bags, cane or leg braces" (p.158).

Engaging Cultural Bodies

Thus, when it comes to interpreting and engaging in popular culture, we need to

bring disability more fully into our critical pedagogies. We have a responsibility as

members and educators of a vast audience to interrogate representations of disability and

seek out the ways they operate to shape our social and educational realities. As Stump (2002) poignantly notes,

> There is far too much fear, hatred, and misery in this world, much of which is brought about by a lack of understanding and sympathy for people or groups of people who are different from ourselves. It is important that we, as the motion picture audience, become literate filmgoers, able to recognize even the subtlest projection of discrimination or prejudice in the films we watch and react to accordingly (p. 2002).

It is easy to allow films or television shows to wash over us and validate our own sense of normalcy, but interrogating our own readings, seeking multiple readings in order to deconstruct normalcy is a challenge. As Daspit and Weaver (2000) explain, "It means we purposely seek out those voices that do not fit our world view or our readings of popular culture texts (xix). Davis (1994) asserts that we can bring these multiple readings into the classroom by

> highlighting narratives, lyrics, and representations of disability in literature courses, teaching the politics of disability in courses that deal with social and political issues, making conscious efforts to include people with disabilities in the media, and so on. Important as well would be the attempt to teach disability across the curriculum so that this subject does not remain ghettoized in special courses. This aspect of inclusion involves a reshaping of symbolic cultural productions and ideology (p. 159).

If we imagine a reconceptualization of disability, it must involve this reshaping of the symbolic ideology represented by popular culture. The initiation of these multiple

readings should not occur because we feel sorry for people who are challenged by our models of mental and/or physical normalcy, but because whether or not we like to admit it, "ability" is situational, transient, and artificial. Instead of hypostatizing normalcy through traditional interpretations of disability, we need to resituate our readings in terms of the continuum of human ability.

Although I am now "able" in terms of the barriers I face in my life, constructions of normalcy have profoundly shaped my thoughts, my actions, my body. I have to assume that my immersion in the competing media of films, television, music, magazines, literature, and the World Wide Web has something to do with my bodily neuroses, so the desire to rewrite normalcy is personal for me. I have engaged, still engage, in "body-centric thinking" that reflects a culture constructed by the able, for the able, a paradigm that needs shifting. However, to overturn the hegemony of the normal, to rethink the body, does not mean erasing difference. As Brenda Brueggmann (2005) says, "I think somehow our social goal is not to erase disability, not even to normalize it, but somehow to make it just one of the many aspects of who we are" (p. 15). This is what *Life Goes On* represents for me. Life does not go on in spite of difference. Life *is* difference.

CHAPTER 4
THE BODY BITES BACK:
THE A.D.D. EPIDEMIC

Let me begin by telling you how this chapter was written. First of all, not one word of was transferred from my brain, where it had been circulating intermittently for two years, until two weeks before it had to be finished. Once the writing process began for this and every chapter, this is basically how it happens: Turn music on, read, quote, write, turn music off, click on high-speed internet browser, check email, reply to email, read, quote, write conclusion I just thought of, turn music back on (different genre), rearrange quotes, check a reference online, add a reference I forgot, read text message, reply to text message, snack, read, think, take deep breaths to slow racing heart (stress), quote, write, answer cell phone, reorganize articles, go home, fix coffee, fix snack for children, change music, think, imagine screenplay to accompany music, cry, write introduction I just thought of, music off, check online account balance, drag books and laptop to bed, turn television on, check weather online, read, quote, write, turn television off, turn music back on, rearrange more quotes, read, fall asleep. And as if the electronic distractions aren't enough to disrupt my hyper-stimulated writing sessions, I have to constantly filter all the responsibilities of full-time work and motherhood that appear like unwanted pop-ups waiting for a response (What about the laundry? When is that project due for work? Wasn't there something you were supposed to sign and send back to school? When does your morning duty start?). Perhaps, then, one can see that my interest in attention deficit, like the other issues of the body I am exploring here, is personal.

As an adult, I can relate to many of the characteristics physicians use to diagnose what is often referred to as ADD; I am highly visual, a perfectionist, easily distracted, a chronic procrastinator, easily frustrated by mundane tasks, and my brain seems to be working overtime even in my sleep. So, I undertook this exploration of what is officially known now as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) partly because I hope to better understand my own apparent neuroses. More importantly, however, I want to understand what the future might hold for those who may share the diagnosis of the medicated children who entered my classroom each day, children whose deep confusion about their bodies glistened in their questioning eyes. Children diagnosed with ADHD are bodies in the margins of a standardized curriculum, and I believe that this condition illustrates the complexities of transactional human bodies and some of the problems that can arise from a disembodied curriculum.

First, what is ADHD and how has it come to be a fixture of American life? ADHD has been described in many ways by various medical "experts," but I want to begin with *Wired* writer Evan Schwartz's (1994) description best because it captures so vividly my daily experience living as a distracted adult in an information-saturated society:

> Anxious to avoid boredom, those afflicted are constantly scanning their environment, searching for all things captivating. They may read lots of books, but they finish few. They misplace things and require constant reminders. They are risk takers, thrill seekers, and, often, caffeine addicts. They are news junkies and channel-clicker/cable-surfers. In conversation, they often detour into parenthetical tangents, never returning to the main point. On the Net, they can't

help getting lost in cyberspace for hours . . . They juggle too many projects and are chronically late. But when something grabs their full attention, they can launch into hyperfocus marathons that last well into the night ("Interrupt-Driven, June 1994).

Indeed, Schwartz might be describing almost any postmodern American who operates from within the complex network of hyper-connectivity. Indeed, this "interrupt-driven" state, as Schwartz calls it, has emerged as a uniquely (although not exclusively) American phenomenon. ADHD expert Edward Hallowell, author of a bestseller called *Driven to Distraction*, actually heralds the condition as "a riveting new metaphor for our cultural milieu" (1997), while Schwartz (1994) himself has dubbed it both the "Yuppie Flu of the 90's and the "official brain syndrome of the information age."

While some adults have sought medical treatment for this condition as awareness of ADHD in children has increased, it seems that most "wired" adults accept this constant state of distraction as little more than a sign of the times. The numbers of adults diagnosed with ADHD still remains fairly small as compared to the ever-increasing population of school-aged children who have been labeled with the condition. Perhaps it easy for adults, many of whom have grown accustomed to the daily distractions of multi-tasking, to entertain these glib indications of the prevalence of ADHD, but the realities of our children are not as laughable. Each day, millions of students who were once resistant to our attempts at colonizing them now begin their morning with a pill so that they can languish in compliance. Over time, these children come to understand that there is something wrong with them, that "normalcy," however it may be constructed, must be

maintained at all costs. What are these bodies, the bodies we are teaching each day, trying to teach us?

The Pathology of ADHD

What the medical community has taught us is that ADHD is a mental disorder, a deficiency, an abnormal state that can be a great inconvenience in a traditional classroom setting. The "official" definition of ADD/ADHD in the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV) describes the symptoms of the conditions in as they are expressed through patterns in lack of motor control, impulsivity, and difficulties in organizing and focusing. Although the figures vary somewhat depending on the source, it is clear that the condition is neither isolated nor uncommon. Currently, the U.S. Department of Education (2005) estimates that between 3 and 5 percent of children have ADHD, which accounts for about 2 million children in the United States. The estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2006), which accounts for all children ages 4 to 17, is higher: 8 percent or about 4.4 million. Whatever the exact number may be these disquieting figures make it clear that "epidemic" is an apt description of what has been deemed a "neurobiological disorder."

When and where and how ADHD "began" has been debated among various groups. In an effort to "legitimize" the condition by writing it into medical history, many articles and web sites advocating for those diagnosed with the condition have pointed to the poetry of Dr. Heinrich Hoffman, a physician who wrote books on medicine and psychiatry, and began writing children's poetry for his own young son. Hoffman compiled a series of poems he wrote about children and their characteristics into a collection that featured "The Story of Fidgety Philip," who can't sit still in his chair at

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dinner and eventually turns the chair over, taking the tablecloth and everything on top of it with him.   Although this short depiction describes only one of the characteristics said to define the condition – hyperactivity – ADHD advocates have heralded the story as an "accurate" depiction of a child with the disorder.

Advocates also point to a series of lectures to the Royal College of Physicians in England, published by Sir George F. Still (1902), in which he described a group of children with behavioral problems that he attributed to a genetic dysfunction, as proof that the condition existed largely unrecognized before its sudden explosion in the late 1980s and early 1990s.   Another precedent was set when the term "organic drivenness" was coined in the 1930s and physician Charles Bradley prescribed Benzadrine to control hyperactivity (Diller, 1998, Armstrong, 1995). In the 1950s, the term "minimal brain dysfunction" was used to describe a variety of symptoms related to brain injury, which included "excessive restlessness" (Armstrong, 1995). However, it wasn't until 1980 that the American Psychiatric Association recognized the disorder, which, according to Armstrong (1995), has gone through 25 name changes in the past century. It first began to permeate the public consciousness after the publication of Barbara Ingersoll's *Your Hyperactive Child*, in which she suggested a drug regimen as a suitable treatment for hyperactivity. In 1993, Peter Kramer, in *Listening to Prozac*, coined the term "cosmetic pharmacology," which signaled the marked shift toward treating non-debilitating "neurobiological" disorders with psychotropic medications. Then, in 1994, Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey unveiled *Driven to Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder from Childhood to Adulthood*, which opened with the

words, "Once you catch on to what this syndrome is all about, you'll see it everywhere."
(p. 3)

Hallowell's almost giddy depiction of ADD and his willing endorsement of Ritalin sparked a debate about the over-diagnosis and treatment of a largely unsubstantiated condition. Multiple-intelligence scholar Thomas Armstrong (1995) added his contribution with *The Myth of the ADD Child*, in which he questioned scientific claims and what he called the "pathologizing" of normal children. Others followed: Physician Lawrence H. Diller (1998) with *Running on Ritalin* and Richard DeGrandpre's (1999) *Ritalin Nation: Rapid-Fire Culture and the Transformation of Human Consciousness.* In the wake of these publications, Washington writer Mary Eberstadt bluntly asked in *Policy Review* the question that was lingering in the minds of many:

> How has it come to pass that in *fin-de-siecle* America, where every child from preschool onward can recite the "anti-drug" catechism by heart, millions of middle-and upper-middle class children are being legally drugged with a substance so similar to cocaine that, as one journalist accurately summarized the science, "it takes a chemist to tell the difference"? (p. 24).

In 1991, the U.S. Department of Education qualified children diagnosed with ADD as eligible for special education services, and as awareness of the condition increased, the debate over using stimulants like Ritalin to treat Attention Deficit Disorder garnered considerable attention. Just when the advocacy group Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) had petitioned the DEA to make the drug more readily available by changing its classification as a Schedule II drug, it was revealed on television that the group had received $900,000 in undisclosed funds from

the Ritalin giant Ciby-Geigy (now Novartis). Although the DEA denied the request, the

production of Ritalin continued to soar, increasing by 400 percent from 1990 to 1995

alone, resulting in an abundance of the drug, 90 percent of which is consumed in the

United States (Eberhardt 1999). With the increased availability of psychotropic

medication came a new era of accommodations: the 1990s also saw the emergence of

ADD-based requests for extra time on college and graduate level standardized tests,

including the SAT, LSAT, and the MCAT (Diller 1998). In 1999, the Equal Employment

Opportunities Commission (EEOC) also issued guidelines for accommodating employees

diagnosed with the condition.

     In spite of the rapid mobilization of the medical community to treat the condition,

no consensus could be reached about how to diagnose it. While many physicians,

including Hallowell (1994) have observed that like many conditions, ADHD tends to run

in families, diagnosis of the condition continues to be highly subjective, based on

behaviors documented by teachers such as fidgeting, distractedness, impatience, blurting,

disorganization, not listening, etc.   In 1998, the National Institutes of Health organized a

conference with hundreds of participants and a panel of doctors and educators, but no

agreement could be made on how to diagnose the disorder (Eberstadt, 1999). Although

much research has been conducted in an effort to find a genetic predisposition for the

condition or link the diagnosis of ADHD to some significant difference in brain function,

numerous studies have yet to produce any substantive evidence. The most commonly

cited evidence for ADHD as a physiological condition is a 1990 study, conducted by

Alan Zametkin at National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), which appeared in *New

England Journal of Medicine*. Zametkin found a difference in the rates of glucose

metabolism, but as Diller (1998) observes, a series of later studies failed to confirm the original findings. DeGrandpre (1999) also points out other methodological problems: the participants were adults (rather than children, who constitute the majority of those with ADHD), there was connection made between the metabolism difference and the outward behaviors of the subjects, and the study did not take into account other factors that could have influenced metabolism differences, such as the smaller number of males in the control group. Nevertheless, as Diller (1998) notes, the belief that ADD is a neurological condition prevails not only among advocacy groups like CHADD but medical researchers and university faculty as well.

Constructing Normalcy

ADHD provides an important example of the way that education is operating to define "normalcy" in terms of how the *body* responds to the curriculum and the methods used to impart it. This *pathological* stratification goes beyond Apple's (1995) assertion that schools "maintain privilege in cultural ways by taking the form and content of the culture and knowledge of powerful groups and defining it as legitimate knowledge to be preserved and passed on . . .They teach norms, values, dispositions, and culture that contribute to the ideological hegemony of dominant groups (p. 38). With the adoption of state-mandated curricula across the nation in the wake of No Child Left Behind, the progressive question of whose knowledge is of most worth is nearly moot, but the aggressive labeling that is taking place in schools today is not simply operating to privilege the "standards" as legitimate knowledge; it is constructing norms and values about the way we learn and about how our embodied knowledge fits (or does not fit) into the curriculum. Although I expand on Apple's (1995) understanding of the role of

schools in reproducing "legitimate" knowledge, his explanation of deviance still fits: "One might say here that deviance is "earned" by the deviant, since the overt and hidden curriculum, the social relations of the classroom, and the categories by which educators organize, evaluate, and give meaning to the activities found in schools are perceived as being basically neutral" (p. 37). The active, spontaneous, and assertive ADHD body is differentiated from the passive, predictable, and receptive "neutral" body through a state of continual diagnosis.

Julie Webber's (2003) description of the way that government has responded to the deviant behavior of school violence is also indicative of the "official" response ADHD: "The question always asked when such tragedies occur is 'What are the government, schools and lawmakers going to *do* about this problem?' never 'Why is this happening now, to whom, and in what setting?'" (p. 193). In order to determine what to do about the problem of millions of disengaged students and how to fix their abnormalities, we look to individual bodies, which are much easily treated than a curriculum in which we are so deeply invested. This state of perpetual diagnosis is symptomatic of what Deleuze (1992) terms "control" societies, which differ from the Foucauldian disciplinary societies in which individuals are passed through a succession of institutions. In the disciplinary society, what is important is the individuals "place" within the institutional framework, but in the control society the "*password*," the means of accessing the individual's "information," becomes the focus. In this case, it is through the carefully documented (textualized) diagnosis that we gain access to information about how the student deviates from the "neutral" standard of normalcy.

A "biological" explanation for ADHD is convenient in many ways; parents can rid themselves of the guilt that perhaps they caused their child's condition, and biological conditions can be treated inexpensively with medication. Many physicians and ADHD advocates continue to hope that a definitive physiological and/or genetic "explanation" for ADHD will be discovered in order to legitimize its status as a neurobiological disability and justify the medical interventions that have become commonplace. As we increase our "knowledge" of this condition, we perceive that we are gaining more information about the children with these characteristics by identifying their deficiencies, but instead we are isolating and exposing the minutia of their brains and genetic makeup because we need this explanation in order to "prove" that there is really a tangible and significant difference between people who exhibit the characteristics of ADHD and "normal" people. This search for a genetic explanation is not unlike the way we have attempted to define other forms of "deviance" in terms of eugenics:

> Eugenics saw the possible improvement of the race as being accomplished by diminishing problematic peoples and their problematic behaviors – these peoples were clearly delineated under the rubric of feeble-mindedness and degeneration as women, people of color, homosexuals, the working classes, and so on. (Davis, 2002, p 14.)

Just as our modern predecessors attempted to document what they saw as transgressive characteristics in order to "treat" them, medical research has sought to put to text a grand narrative to explain why so many children are now languishing in traditional classrooms across the nation. These untamed, resistant bodies do not fit into the controlled and scripted environment that becomes necessary for the transmission of a standardized

curriculum. Thus, even in the absence of significant physiological makeup of those

diagnosed with ADHD, "experts" have depicted ADHD behavior as deviant and even

delinquent. Dr. David W. Goodman, an ADHD specialist at the John's Hopkins

University School of Medicine in Baltimore, asserts that "those with untreated ADHD

take even more risks" warns, "A big problem is that someone with undiagnosed ADHD

may prompt other kids to do something really dangerous" (Bernstein, 2006, p. 17). Such

fear-enciting tactics have been successful in mobilizing concerned parents to accept

psychotropic medication as the primary treatment for their child's academic failure. As

one child psychiatrist notes "Parents and teachers are rushing like lemmings to identify a

pathology. . . .Our current pathologizing of behavior leads to massive swelling of the

ranks of the diseased, the dysfunctional, the disordered and the disabled" (Moreno, 1998,

p. 1).

Indeed, this seems to be the case, as with the emergence of ADHD has also come

a dramatic new emphasis on subjectively diagnosed neurobiological disorders such as

specific learning disabilities and autism. Perhaps the most recognizable new condition is

that of Asperger's sydrome, which is considered to be a "high-functioning" form of

Autism Spectrum disorder, which encompasses a wide range of largely unexplainable

mental conditions. The figures here are dramatic; according to the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention, the nation saw a 556 percent increase in the number of children

with ASD being served in special education from 1991 to 1997. The CDC now estimates

the incidence of Autism Spectrum disorders to be as high as 500, 000, affecting 0.024 to

0.36 % of school-age children (2006).

Asperger's didn't officially join ADHD on the neurobiological scene until 1994, when it was recognized by the American Psychiatric Association as a form of autism, with distinct diagnostic criteria. In 1981, however, British psychiatrist Dr. Lorna Wing published a paper that focused on the work of Hans Asperger, who had coined the term "Little Professor Syndrome" in 1944 to describe the behavior of some of his patients (Silberman, 2001). Asperger had noticed that these young patients often possessed advanced verbal skills, tended to be extremely gifted in specific areas (especially math, science, and art) but lacked certain skills of social interactions. In addition, children with Asperger's syndrome, according to the DSM-IV, have excellent rote memory, and display intense curiosity about a specific area of interest (to the exclusion of other interests), but they have difficulty empathizing with others, and often react inappropriately in social situations. Children with Asperger's often have limited facial expressions and tone of voice, an inability to pick up on the non-verbal communications of others, and an intense attachment to certain objects and routines. It was this combination of characteristics, along with what seems to be a distinct genetic tendency (which seems to be particularly pronounced among the techno-oriented families of Silicon Valley), to dub the condition "The Geek Syndrome."

As the veritable explosion of ADHD and Asperger's illustrate, in recent years, the pathological categories we use to "define" the "others" in our classrooms have expanded rapidly to include many more characteristics and behaviors that are perceived to fall outside the "norm." Rhodes (1995) observes that, " In the controversial ones, like "behavioral disorders" and "learning disabilities," we have isolated all sorts of subtle differences, to the point where we could include most of the school population" (p. 460).

Thus, the state of perpetual diagnosis puts everyone "at-risk" for falling outside the norm and into a neurobiological disability. However, when it comes to certain conditions, it seems that certain students are at greater risk than others: "a major portion of the individuals and groups we consider to have pathologies in learning also come from populations and cultures we have "othered" on the basis of color and socioeconomic status" (Rhodes, 1995, p. 460). Thus, we see how the state of perpetual diagnosis, framed as a means of "assisting" learners with "special needs," operates to construct cognitive privilege.

As with ADHD, we have responded to Asperger's with the same questions of what to *do* about the problem and the condition has been the subject of many concerns about the potential delinquency of those diagnosed. Like those diagnosed with ADHD, children with Asperger's tend to be highly creative and inventive, and some skeptical depictions of Asperger's have even bordered on anti-intellectual criticism. Recently, in an article called "Nutty Professors," which appeared in *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Mikita Brottman (2005) observed that, "Academe appeals particularly to introspective, narcissistic, obsessive characters who occasionally suffer from mood disorders or other psychological problems. Often, these difficulties go untreated because they are closely tied to enhanced creativity (Brottman, 2005, p. B7.) Here, Brottman not only asserts that we academics are just a bunch of nutcases; she further stigmatizes the energetic, assertive, spontaneous, and sometimes socially awkward traits shared by those diagnosed with both ADHD and Asperger's.

In the schools' response to both neurobiological abnormalities, we see the process of textualization at work. Just as Foucault (1978) explained the regulation of sex in

disciplinary society through studying and committing all its aspects to writing so that it could be properly controlled, we can see textualization operating to control the body. The sudden emergence of these new neurobiological phenomena have prompted us to study the brain extensively so that ostensibly all its aspects can be exposed and written into medical "knowledge" (Block's "incarceration of visibility). And yet, the mapping of the brain has not rendered the answers we were looking for. Ironically, Hallowell (1997) admits, that process has actually only left us with even more questions:

> Today we know more than ever about the brain – but in learning more we have realized how little we actually know. With sophisticated brain scans that map the activity of networks of neurons we can peer inside the once impenetrable armor of our skulls and learn just how brains act when they are seeking, thinking, remembering, and even malfunctioning. And yet the vast territory of the brain stretches out before us as uncharted, like the sixteenth-century maps of the New World we used to see in our fifth-grade history books." (p. 42).

Similarly, our attempts to "map" and textualize our genes in an attempt to uncover the "essential" (read "neutral") genome has only further complicated our understanding of the complex interactions between human genes and the environment. As Davis (2002) observes, we have discovered that "No one gene determines the course of a human life" (p. 17). Brain science and genetic research has only further advanced a post-binary understanding of nature/culture.

ADHD in Context

If our bodies are inseparable from the cultural contexts we find ourselves in, we must consider the potential implications of the postmodern environment many Americans

find ourselves in. We live in a world of technological distractions: cell phones, fax machines, pagers, satellite channels, instant messages, high-speed web browsing, endless emails. Not to mention, we have fast cars, fast food, fast-pass credit cards, and fast vacations-to-go. As *U.S. News & World Report* informs us, "Since 1965, the average news sound bite has shrunk from 42 seconds to just 8. The average network TV ad has shrunk from 53 seconds to 25. Fifteen-second ads are on the rise. Multitasking is in. Downtime is out" (3/26/01). Everywhere we go we are bombarded with more information than we can possibly process, and our bodies, our brains, have to work overtime to in an attempt to keep up. Restak (2003) explains that "the plasticity of our brains responds, for good or for bad, to the technology all around us: television, movies, cell phones, e-mail, laptop computers, and the Internet. And by responding, I mean that our brain literally changes its organization and functioning to accommodate the abundance of stimulation forced on it by the modern world" (p. 38).

This "modern" world, as Restak (2003) calls it, is the digital age, the media-saturated, information overloaded postmodern America. In this predominantly visual context, we experience life in pictures:

> While driving to work in the morning we "fast-forward" a half-hour in our mind to the upcoming office meeting. We reenact in our imagination a series of "scenarios" that could potentially take place. A few minutes later, while entering the garage, we experience a "flashback" of the awkward "scene" that took place during last week's meeting and "dub in" a more pleasing "take." (Restak, 2003, p. 50).

Here, the boundaries between where the images end and our bodies begin virtually disappear; we transcend time and space to inhabit multiple locations so that "place" seem insignficant. We are perpetually immersed in image. As I observed in describing postmodern culture's contribution to the disembodied curriculum, we are often left feeling more distant from our material realities – flesh and blood lost in visual fiction – but we fail to perceive that distance because the image becomes the separation.

An examination of the way the body operates within this digital-visual complex allows us to explore those more pertinent questions offered by Webber (2003): Why are these "neurobiological disorders" such as ADHD, happening now, to whom, and in what setting? I think that Mark Hansen's (2003) reinterpretation of Bergson's (1988) *Matter and Memory*, emphasizes both the profound impact of visual culture and the role that our bodies play in navigating the digital image. Hansen establishes the body as a kind of central nexus: "the body functions as a kind of filter that selects, from among the universe of images circulating around it and according to its own embodied capacities, precisely those that are relevant to it" (3). Perception is always embodied, as with the de-differentiated media of the digital era, we see changes in the "body's scope of perceptual and affective possibilities" (22). Hansen explains these possibilities through the concept of "affectivity": "the capacity of the body to experience itself as "more than itself" and thus to deploy its sensorimotor power to create the unpredictable, the experimental, the new (p. 7). Here, Hansen is primarily countering the notion that technological innovation leads to bodily transcendence and he makes an important statement about the indispensability of the human in the digital era. However, Hansen's description of how the body and the image operate seamlessly to create perception also reveals the

importance of understanding how our bodies are responding to our now profoundly visual, hyper-stimulated, hyper-connected culture.

It is important to note here that I am not attempting to pinpoint "postmodern visual media culture" as a culprit that has tainted the once obedient brains of our children. To define a distinct cause and effect relationship would be to juxtapose techno-culture and the body in binary terms. Rather, I want to explore this relationship to explore how a non-dichotomous understanding of the body might lead us to reconsider our "response" to variations in cognitive style and social interaction. I return to Sullivan's (2001) definition of the "transactional" body:

> the relationship between organism and environment is dynamic and ongoing, both organism and environment are continually being remade by means of shifts and changes in the other. Thus "transaction" designates a process of mutual constitution that entails mutual transformation, including the possibility of significant change (p. 1).

If we begin to think of our bodies as engaged in a process of mutual reorganization with our environments, we can begin to see rigid our ideas about teaching and learning have remained in comparison.

Hansen's (2003) emphasis on imagery is key to understanding the predominantly visual context of a digital environment. If we take seriously Hansen's notion of the body as the transactional, medial nexus of perception that, like the digital image, is continually being remade, reorganized, and revised, we can understand the importance of mutual constitution. In the digital era, we can no longer imagine that technology exists as a distinct entity independent of the body. Technology has provided us with the ability to

exist in multiple identities and presences simultaneously. As Restak (2003) explains,

"The demarcation between here and elsewhere has become blurred. Thanks to

technology, each of us exists simultaneously in not just one *here* but in several" (p. 52).

We rely on image to navigate those multiple presences between where our flesh and

blood happens to be physically situated and the multiple "locations" we find ourselves in.

Restak (2003 expands on this thought, explaining that, "intellectually, we have always

known that the "reality" of the here and now before our eyes is only one among many.

But we never directly experienced this multilevel reality until technology made it

possible to reach from one end of the world to another and wipe out differences in time,

space, and place" (p. 53).

The particular characteristics used to define ADHD: the constant cognitive

"scene" shifting, the state of hyperawareness of the image, illustrate the way that this

process of mutual transformation has operated to change the way that many students are

responding to methods of schooling that no longer make sense for who they are. The

reliance of those diagnosed with ADHD on image-based perception has been

corroborated in scientific study: A 2000 study (Schweitzer et al., 2000) had adults with

and without ADHD listen to a series of numbers, add each number to the previous

number. Those with ADD said they visualized images rather than simply listening to the

spoken numbers, which was also confirmed using brain-imaging technology. In the

ADHD adults, the so-deemed visual processing regions of the brain were activated,

whereas the non-ADHD adults tended to rely on auditory processing to interpret the

information that was given to them. In the image-rich, media-drenched cultural

environment, we must attempt to adapt to the constant barrage of digital information

through multiple, simultaneous acts of cognition – we receive information all at once and often spontaneously from countless sources and we rely on our bodies (Hansen's medial nexus) to, returning to Hansen's (2003) words, "deploy its sensorimotor power to create the unpredictable, the experimental, the new" (p. 7). Considering the modern work environment described by Restak (2003), one could easily argue that a person has to possess at least some ADHD traits just to survive in the adult techno-culture:

> You must learn to rapidly process information, function amidst a surrounding
> your parents would have described as "chaotic," always remain prepared to
> rapidly shift from one activity to another, and redirect your attention among
> competing tasks without becoming bogged down or losing time. Such facility in
> rapid information processing requires profound alternations in our brain (p. 48).

Compare *this* corpo/reality of the digital context to the classroom setting where, even when multiple modes of presentation are employed, children are generally offered one information source to which they are to impart their undivided attention. This traditional top-down method (Freire's (197?) banking method still at work) is a one-to-all approach in which information originating in the standards is passed down from one teacher (or textbook) to all students. As Freed and Parsons (1997) observe, "Our educational system hammers at visual learners' weaknesses rather than utilizing their greatest strength: an uncanny visual memory. The cost of such rigidity is incalculable, and the lost potential is astronomical" (p. 18). When teachers today complain that they can't "compete" with video games, they are expressing the frustration that comes from the presence of technology that surpasses the limitations of human physicality. And yet, rather than trying to really understand the process that is taking place here, what we *do* about this

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"problem," is rigidly cling to the restrictive one-to-all approach and rely on medication to regulate the unruly bodies. In the same way that our society turns difference (immobility, for example) into disability by failing to make an environment navigable for someone confined to a wheelchair, we make the cognitive and physical traits of ADHD a disability by failing to make the curriculum navigable. However, because we assume that the curriculum is "neutral," we treat the child instead of the environment. Of course, medication has not been the only way we have tried to control the symptoms of ADHD, but alternative treatments for ADHD have offered little hope. Thousands of parents, desperate to keep their children off medication being pushed on them by commercial medicine, have tried modified diets, exercise plans, herbal remedies, and biofeedback training, among other non-pharmacological treatments, but it seems that only psychotropic drugs consistently force their bodies into the conformity that the standardized curriculum requires.

Psychotropic Ethics

The issue here, where medication is concerned, is not that all psychotropic drugs are evil or that altering the body to make it "fit" into an environment is always wrong. We all want to be well, to be free from pain, free to live and move as we choose. But there is nothing liberating about using stimulant drugs to preserve a culture of schooling that is grounded in inequality and hegemony. Part of the incalculable cost of the rigidity of our educational system is realized in the perpetuation of disembodied educational practice and the preservation of an outdated notion of an ideal, "neutral" student body. By "treating" the symptoms of conditions like ADHD and Asperger's so that students can conform to the demands of a maladaptive (morose) curriculum, we fail to recognize the

what Jane Healy (2004) calls the "magic of human variability." The human body is not standard, static, consistent. As the opening Aldous Huxley quote illustrates, the only consistent people are dead. However, our obsession with constantly diagnosing the cognitive styles and classroom behaviors of our students suggests that we still believe in some essential model, the "model" student body. If we are determining some students are "deficient" because we find them to be active, energetic, hyperaware of sensory data, and existing in states of multi-presence, then the ideal student must be one who is passive, half-hearted, unaware of all of but the authoritative teacher, and existing only in the here and now. Certainly, such a student body makes for a convenient vessel, but is this a realistic ideal for the digital age? As Hartmann (1996) explains, "our system was designed from the ground up to operate exactly as it does today. Once upon a time the most important product of a public school system, for government and commerce, was compliant young women for the household and men for the arm and industry. Do we still want this today?" (p. 21).

Hartmann's question is pivotal: do we still want this? Is this normative apparatus, the standardized curriculum, designed to contain the excesses of the body, worth the price that millions of American children are paying?   As David Nylund (2000) observes, "To place a child on Ritalin so that he can succeed in this environment ignores the wider problem: the structure, tools, methods, and resources of our schools" (p. 186). Why must we diagnose and treat the body without consideration for the context? What is the advantage of the pathologizing of difference? Eberstadt (1999) has an answer:

> One of the most obvious reasons "millions of Americans, most of them children,
> are now taking Ritalin can be summarized in a single word that crops up

everywhere in the dry-bones literature on add and its drug of choice: *compliance*.

One day at a time, the drug continues to make children do what their parents and

teachers either will not or cannot get them to do without it: Sit down, shut up,

keep still, pay attention" (p. 24).

Perhaps we are getting what we want, if what we want to keep the messy, frenzied

intricacies of bodies out of our classrooms – out of sight, out of mind. But what are we

really getting? As Breggin (1998), observes, "Ritalin calms children, indeed it often

turns rambunctious kids into socially inhibited conformers, which, though it may make

things easier for teachers and parents, is but suppressing the growing-up problems, not

solving them" (p. 99). It seems to me that just when we need more than ever to really

consider our corpo/realities, our embodied perceptions, we find ways to push needs and

desires further into the margins of curriculum. The medicated compliance of unruly

bodies comes at a high price:

> If we think of our ourselves as little more than chemical machines that can be
>
> altered by drugs, then what happens to traditional concepts like free will and
>
> personal responsibility? While for the most part advances in our understanding of
>
> the brain lead to enhancement of, rather than limitations on, our freedom, what
>
> will be the overall result if the benefits come at the price of biobabble: people
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> interpreting their experience in chemical terms rather than interpersonal ones
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> (Restak, 2003, p. 147)?

Instead of considering moving out of our pedagogical comfort zones, instead of engaging

our students' minds and bodies in confronting difference through dialogue and

experience, we allow medication to become yet another boundary, a safety net to protect

us from the body in chaos. Not only do we teach children that difference is unacceptable, and that the possess deficits beyond their control, but we diminish the possibility that we can reclaim the distance we had already created between ourselves and the bodies we teach, between teachers and children.

Each day, parents across the country are struggling with the decision to medicate their children with powerful stimulants to standardize them, to diminish the intricate variations that have emerged from the mutual transformation of the body/techno-culture complex. I am writing for these parents, and I am writing for the children who grow up believing that they lacking, deviant, sick. I am also writing for my own children, because although my bright, imaginative daughter has thus far lived up to the "ideal," I live in fear that one of my sons might eventually become yet another casualty of perpetual diagnosis. From the time my oldest son turned two, I have monitored his behavior with baited breath, becoming more apprehensive with every year. Because he has a late birthday, ADHD played a big part in our decision not to send him to state-funded Pre-K until he was almost five. Now almost six, he is a conscientious student but he is an active child and a visual learner like me. As he gets ready to enter kindergarten next year, I worry, what if he is too restless? What if he doesn't listen? What will I do if I have to face the guilt and shame that millions of American parents have confronted in the last decade? For now, I can only hope that his body will be able to navigate between the structured, standardized classroom and the fast-paced, stimulating and spontaneous world he knows.

The question that remains for all of us is how many millions of cognitively "disabled" children will it take for us to understand that the deficit lies not in our constantly shifting corpo/realities but in the educational system that has failed to respond

to our changing technological and cultural landscapes? Eberhardt's (1999) sarcasm illustrates the absurdity of the dilemma we find ourselves in: "Surely this country can do more, much more, to reduce fidgeting, squirming, talking excessively, interrupting, losing things, ignoring adults, and all those other pathologies of what used to be called childhood (p. 24). Where do we draw the line? How many millions of children must we medicate before we decide that maybe the "easy" solution wasn't really a solution at all? Certainly, the current obsession with high-stakes standardized testing has only exacerbated the disembodiment of school curriculum and educational practice. Maybe standardized testing is never going to go away. Perhaps, then, our responsibility is even more urgent because we have to find a way to address the needs of transactional bodies in meaningful ways in spite of assessments that force us to maintain a safe distance. We cannot allow the living, breathing, social, emotional, chaotic, complex, unique, and wonderful bodies of our children to be overshadowed by accountability. If we have any hope of preserving democratic public education in this country, we have to find a way to embrace the "magic of human variability," spontaneity, difference. Our bodies give us a place to start.

CHAPTER 5
BODIES IN THE CLASSROOM:
REFLEXIVE PEDAGOGY AND AN EMBODIED CURRICULUM

What does the future hold for our teaching bodies and the taught bodies of children who enter our classrooms each day? Can we allow difference, bliss, and pain to inform our pedagogies? Can we liberate capricious, extraordinary bodies, isolated and othered through theory, pedagogy, popular culture, and pathology, from the margins of a standardized curriculum?

In the era of high-stakes testing and accountability, these questions seem more important now more than ever. In keeping with a long history of behaviorism and the idea that the "most anxiety produces the best results," we have placed an enormous amount of pressure on teachers to shape their students into the standardized ideal – or else. In light of such extreme pressures, as Kohn (2005) observes, we see that "[p]ractice tests replace student-centered projects; students appear alternately anxious and bored; terrific teachers quit in disgust (p. 20). What's more, teachers, many of whom understand the inability of standardized tests to accurately "measure" their students, resort to medication to deal with the anxiety of accountability, and students are placed on medication to control characteristics that are not conducive to shallow, desubstantialized learning. And perhaps, worst of all, students and teachers come to understand that their only value lies in the text, the scores they produce, and that their bodies, their physical, social, emotional experiences are not important. As Kohn (2005) explains, "when some capabilities are privileged over others, and a broader approach to education is sacrificed, we begin to look at students differently. We lose sight of children "except as they distribute themselves across deciles (Hogan, 1974, p. 111)" (p. 20). To lose sight of

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children beyond the rhetoric of standards and accountability is to ignore their

corpo/realities, their embodied knowledge and experiences, the lenses of their perception.

Making Bodies Matter

In the regimented system of top-down scripts and standardized objectives, we

have constructed boundaries between "academic" learning and all the other types of

knowledge we need to experience the world within and beyond the classroom doors. As

Reynolds (2003) observes, "Our entire economic and educational system is based on

profit, efficiency and control rather than on human need, justice and compassion" (p. 42).

We have operated under a widespread belief "that schools are best organized to

accomplish academic goals and that we should charge other institutions with the task of

pursuing the physical, moral, social, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic aims that we

associate with the whole child (Noddings, 2005, p. 10). We have pushed aside these

other aspects of our students' being in an effort to perpetually textualize and diagnose

them so that we can fill their deficits before test time comes. This separation, this

alienating codification, does not resonate with our complexity of our most intimate

context, our bodies. If we want to make public education matter, if we want it to be

meaningful, and liberating, and worthwhile, we have to complicate our understanding of

what teaching and learning really mean. As Eisner (2005) observes,

> In the human organism, there is no such thing as an independent part; all parts are
>
> interconnected. We need to recognize those connections when we teach, when we
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> design education environments, when we provide incentives, and when we grade
>
> students. Attention to such complex matters will not simplify our tasks as

teachers, but it will bring education closer to the heart of what really matters" (p. 18).

We do need to recognize those connections, but we need to do more than that; we need to broaden our understandings of achievement and assessment and bring the body, with all its frenzied, impulsive intricacies, fully into the curricular conversation.

We can begin by rethinking the body in theory. We need to resist the temptation to employ postmodernism in writing the physical body out of discursive subjectivity. We can appreciate the fleeting quality of our culturally constructed identities without losing sight of bodies that bleed and break. We have to recognize not only the way that we discursively construct our bodies but how our bodies participate in language games through initiation and response, sometimes without our permission. To do so requires that we "get over" our biological insecurities, our fears of confronting the frailty of human flesh. As LeCourt (2004) asserts, we have to recognize the role our bodies play in our knowing of ourselves and others:

> My body is how I perceive myself. I have lived in this body for years; it is this body with whom others interact, and through this body that I construct the social relations that sustain me in the material world. There is a substance to body, my students continually remind me, that is not perceived as fluid or discursive. Rather, we live within social relations with others that are perceived as *bodily* interactions (p. 21).

Just as Hansen (2004) recognizes the body as the medial nexus for the image, LeCourt sees the body as the site from which our social relations are constructed. Thus, we bring the body into theory by considering how our understandings of identity, our perceptions

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of ourselves and others, are intimately and simultaneously connected to our bodies and our social/cultural/technological relations.

Lennard Davis (2002) suggests that we can reimagine the body in theory by expanding our thinking from postmodernism to what he calls "dismodernism," a rethinking of our understanding of postmodern identity through disability. Davis (2002) suggests that disability is unique in that it is historically linked to the categories of oppression most visible in academic discourse: race, gender and sexuality (p. 26). I have already noted Davis implication the eugenics movement in "diminishing problematic peoples and their problematic behaviors – these peoples were clearly delineated under the rubric of feeble-mindedness and degeneration as women, people of color, homosexuals, the working classes, and so on" (p. 14). These transgressive bodies were faultily but powerfully constructed through pathological categories of disability. The "flawed" science used to initially construct these identities is not unlike the questionable methods used to define the newest postmodern additions to the category of disability, "neurobiological" disorders like ADHD. Thus, by studying the ways that disability has been constructed, we can explore "how all groups, based on physical traits or markings, are selected for disablement by a larger system of regulation and signification" (Davis, 2002, p. 29). Davis argues that, considering the initial construction of race, gender, and sexuality as well as the vast assortment of "conditions" (blindness, amputation, obesity, disfigurement, diabetes, attention deficit disorder, Asperger's, learning disability, and so on) that are included under the category, disability presents us with a "malleable view of the human body and identity" (26). Thus, Davis' notion of "dismodernism" helps us understand how power has operated to construct the inequality of particular bodies, and

the importance of the recognition that human bodies cannot and should not be standardized:

> The dismodern era ushers in the concept that difference is what all of us have in common. That identity is not fixed but malleable. That technology is not separate but part of the body. That dependence, not individual interdependence, is the rule. There is no single clockmaker who made the uniform clock of the human body. The watchword of dismodernism could be: Form follows dysfunction." (p. 27).

The notion of dismodernism helps to bring the body into discourse in a way that recognizes the "magic of human variability," the unity in difference, and the fiction of "normalcy." Davis's expansion of the postmodern subject allows us to bring the body into discourse in a meaningful way while maintaining our understanding of the physical body as inseparable from its discursive social, cultural, and educational contexts.

Whether or not we can accept Davis' abandonment of normalcy, we can imagine a body that is at once subject and object, discursive and substantive. As Grumet (2005) explains, "My body is not only material and the object of another's gaze, it is also my contact with the world, and through it runs a stream of responses and meanings that escapes the channels that culture has constructed to contain it (Grumet, 2003, p. 250). Grumet (2003) looks to Merleau-Ponty (1964) to clarify the third space of subjectivity that is both "of the body" and "of the world." Merleau-Ponty finds that his subjectivity "is inseparable from this body and this world. The ontological world and body which we find at the core of the subject are not the world or body as idea, but on the one hand the world itself contracted into a comprehensive grasp, and on the other hand the body itself

as a knowing-body" (p. 408). Such an admission of the body as knowing-body *and* discursive body allows us to deconstruct the body without denying its existence.

Recognizing the fiction of normalcy and the role our bodies play as the nexus of our social/cultural/technological interactions can also help us resituate the body within the curriculum. The bodies of teachers and students are knowing-bodies existing both in the classroom and in the world. Acknowledging our bodies, resituating the body as the nexus of perception, is both liberating and limiting, as Grumet (2003) explains:

> My body throws a horizon around my imagination. It does not reduce my
>
> subjectivity to my arthritic knee; it does not erase my mortality because my hair is
>
> still brown. But it tethers my imagination to a set of possibilities, which, although
>
> it is protean, is not limitless. This aesthetic reveals the reciprocity of subjectivity
>
> and objectivity by recognizing that the object of study, whether it is literature,
>
> sociology, field biology, or composition, is constituted by an inquiring
>
> subjectivity: We see what we look for, and what we look for is constituted not
>
> only by what my body can do, but also what it cannot do (p. 255).

These inquiring bodies are our nexus for knowing the world and interacting with others; we cannot act on the teacher or the student without also acting on the body because the body is always already inscribed in language, written into the curriculum in more or less damaging ways. The disembodied curriculum, then, is one that fails to "see" the body, one that writes the body into the margins in order to accomplish its educational goals.

Embodying Pedagogy and Curriculum

An embodied curriculum, then, is one that "sees" the body, one that brings the body fully into the learning process to act as the vinculum drawn over

social/cultural/technological interactions within and beyond the classroom. An embodied curriculum draws us into intimacy with the sensual, unruly, unpredictable, desirous body; it is a curriculum that recognizes the connections "between materiality and the psychic world, between social and cultural conditions and circumstances, between desires and pleasures, as well as disappointments," and "undermines 'orderly' teacher-student relations" (Levy, 2000, p. 83). I like the term "reflexive" because it has both physiological and theoretical meanings: it refers both to an action performed without conscious thought and the method or theory that takes account of presence of the researcher/author on what is being investigated. Reflexive pedagogy, then, refers back to the embodied subject and the larger contexts from which it is inseparable. Rather than forcing the body to fit into the curriculum in discrete bits and pieces (30 minutes of physical education here, a week of sex education there), the reflexive curriculum always already recognizes the body, so that references to embodied knowing become an organic part of the learning process. The reflexive curriculum, like the culturally/socially/technologically embedded body, is connected, responsive, meaningful, personal, multiplex.

Certainly, this approach to teaching and learning sounds inviting, but how do we realize embodied, reflexive practice when we are mandated to deliver rigid, standardized content and produce evidence of learning that is limited to answering multiple-choice questions? As Eisner (2005) notes, "One consequence of our preoccupation with standards is that it freezes our conception of what we want to accomplish in our schools. Rigor gets defined and becomes associated with rigor mortis." (p. 15). Is it too late to revive public education and recover curriculum from the rigor morgue? Obviously, I

would not be writing about reflexive pedagogy if I didn't think it was a real possibility, in spite of the constraints of state-dictated standards. As a person whose very livelihood stems from school improvement (read increased test scores) efforts, I want to be realistic about what I am proposing here. While it seems logical that a truly reflexive curriculum would emerge from the needs and interests of the learners rather than the mandates of official knowledge, I do not believe that prescriptive standards erase all possibility of reflexivity and embodied learning. Rather, by changing the way we think about teaching bodies, we can begin to recognize the connections, meanings, and multiplicities that even the youngest knowing-bodies always already bring to the classroom. Our job as educators is to accept and embrace those aspects in our students and our selves.

In honoring the variability of bodies and contexts, I would not venture to offer a prescriptive framework for establishing a reflexive curriculum. We could imagine as many different ways to embody, personalize, complicate, re-member and re-vise curricula as there are classrooms. However, I want to discuss some of the reflexive practices that can help inform embodied learning. These practices, which I have chosen to discuss because they most resonate most with my understanding of embodied pedagogy, are not conceptually distinct; they bleed into and from one another, and they could be expressed in many different ways depending on the particular context in which they emerge.

Disclosure

When I introduced my body autobiography in the first chapter, I brought up Donna Lecourt's (2004) observation that "theory does not begin in the academy; it begins in everyday interactions and reactions. It begins in autobiography" (p. 1). To write

reflexively about t*he* body, I had to unearth and unbury my "private" understandings (or perhaps, misunderstandings) about *my* body. I believe that this process of disclosure is important to reflexive pedagogy because it is a way of purposefully bringing our bodies, our inquiring subjectivities, into the classroom. As I began to examine the body through the perceptual lens of disability, I came across a dialogue between three scholars with disabilities who, each new term, anticipated the moment when they would "disclose" their disabilities to their university students. I wondered, if we all walk into the classrooms with different needs, desires, identities, and varying abilities and disabilities, why don't we feel the need to offer a similar "confession"? If we think of our bodies in Davis's (2003) "dismodern" terms, and we accept that "form follows dysfunction," then we can see how disclosure can undermine the isolating and alienating fiction of normalcy and bring us into a more intimate relationship with ourselves and others.

However, because we are accustomed to relegating our corpo/realities to the margins of educational environments, such disclosure does not come naturally. Brueggemann and Moddelmog (2003), who term this "coming out pedagogy," observe, "This act of naming our invisible and supposedly private identities can seem to turn the classroom away from knowledge and toward intimacy, and this can be troubling for both our students and ourselves because we have been conditioned to see the classroom as only an intellectual space" (p. 213). Yet, this process of "coming out," of confessing our particular embodied subjectivities, serves to deconstruct the boundaries we have created to confine the body in the traditional school curriculum. The process becomes even more meaningful when it becomes a continual process rather than a single moment: "Within this perspective, our coming out is not so much a functional disclosure as it is an

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embodied performance" (Brueggemann and Moddelmog, 2003, p. 213). This embodied

performance allows teachers and students to resituate identity within an understanding of

both oppressive and enabling relationships. In this way, the ongoing dialogue of

disclosure becomes "a bidirectional process of communication in which we and our

students must do more than simply encounter a "secret": We and they must relate to it.

That relationship is sometimes comforting, sometimes discomforting, and sometimes

both at once" (Brueggemann and Moddelmog, 2003, p. 213.).

Lability

The process of disclosure is perpetuated through another element of reflexive

practice: lability, an openness to change and spontaneity. I choose to use this term

because its meanings are rooted in the body: In biochemistry, labile means easily

repositioned, as, for example, a labile nitric oxide molecule. In a psychiatric context,

labile refers to emotional instability, freely expressed and easily aroused emotions and

uncontrolled moods. I take great pleasure in taking this term, often used by medical

professionals to describe the mood swings experienced by menstruating, pregnant, and

menopausal women, as presenting it is a positive trait of reflexive pedagogy. Freedom of

emotional expression, instability and spontaneity are all vital elements of our being open

to the new ways of teaching and learning that emerge from our deepened explorations of

our subjectivities. Once we have begun to participate in the process of disclosure, our

particular needs and desires can inform and shape the curriculum so that we avoid

privileging certain bodies and ways of knowing. However, the traditional structures of

that guide school improvement – schedules, grading and promotion policies, assessments,

and outwardly imposed expert "interventions" – are not often conducive to a responsive,

collaborative curriculum and generally operate under paradigms of efficiency and control. As Eisner (2005) asserts, "for U.S. schools, the speed of reaching the destination is considered a virtue: The brighter students are the faster students" (p. 17). Education, then, becomes not something to evoke pleasure and fulfillment (like a satisfying meal) but another rebarbative chore that must be must be accomplished in order to move on to more important things (like waste management). Consider the traditional model of curriculum proposed by Bobbit (1918) nearly a century ago in *The Curriculum:* "These will show the abilities, attitudes, habits, appreciations and forms of knowledge that men need. These will be the objectives of the curriculum. They will be numerous, definite and particularized. The curriculum will then be that series of experiences which children and youth must have by way of obtaining those objectives" (42). This canonical view of curriculum, from which Tyler's (1949) authoritative *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* emerged, could very well describe the state-mandated models now in use, which leave little room for flexible, sensitive instruction that addresses the needs and desires of particular bodies.

Moreover, school administrators, educators, and parents internalize these paradigms, finding it hard to imagine "improvement" outside of these frameworks. In this context, continual flexibility, changing to meet the needs of particular bodies in particular situations, becomes problematic. The dilemma we must face is whether we can be open to reflexive educational environments embodying "soft" values that, as Eisner (2005) observes, "substantially differ from the dominant cultural view?" (p. 16). If we have so concretized a narrow concept of academic performance as the "key to social and economic mobility," can we convince communities of learners to "risk" this established

measure of achievement in order to "enliven school life" in ways that may be perceived as "nonacademic" (Eisner, 2005, p. 16)?

Dialogue

In order to create spaces for disclosure and flexibility, and thus, risk, we have to reevaluate our embedded perceptions of teaching and learning through critical dialogue. If we accept the body as inscribed in language, then embodied pedagogy must involve engaging in meaningful, personal discourse. As Reynolds (2003) suggests, "A curriculum should allow both teacher and student to develop a critical, caring, compassionate conversation rather than treat human beings as objects to be manipulated by prescribed and pre-fashioned technical rationales that reduce human beings to mere raw material" (p. 43). Peter Trifonas (2005) explains that discourse is important because it is the "medium through which students can practice the critical power to interrogate concepts for the sake of learning more about the self while keeping in mind the exploitation or alienation that may arise when knowledge claims are taken to be absolute and not interpretations to be enriched by the creative adding of the difference of experience to a rational possibility" (p. 159). Dialogue creates passages from which to negotiate the complexities of embodied subjectivity, and asks teachers and students to reconsider knowledge claims through an understanding of difference. Dialogue, then, gives way to critical pedagogy, which "allows, indeed encourages, students and teachers together to confront the real problems of their existence and relationships... When students confront the real problems of their existence they will soon also be faced with their own oppression (Grundy, 1987, p. 105). Critical dialogue opens up the curriculum to possibility, contradiction, and difference. Students can then begin to interrogate the

ways that regulation and signification operate to "castigate difference in the everyday conditions that house the living realm of our aspirations as students and teachers" (Trifonas, 2005, p. 159).

Like disclosure, dialogue does not necessarily emerge easily when both teachers and students are accustomed to a passive, top-down, standardized curriculum. Engaging in critical dialogue calls our identities and beliefs into question, which Delpit (1988) says "is not easy. It is painful as well, because it means turning yourself inside out, giving up your sense of who your are, and being willing to see yourself in the unflattering light of another's angry gaze. It is not easy, but it is the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else and the only way to start the dialogue" (p. 297). By starting the dialogue, we engage our bodies in the learning process and the active, collaborative transformation of our inquiring subjectivities.

Co-operation

By continually disclosing and building connections through our discursive "secrets," and engaging in critical dialogue, teachers and students can work together, operating jointly to construct a classroom curriculum that is meaningful and personal – embodied. Kohn (2005) calls this collaborative model a *working with* approach rather than a *doing to* strategy. Rather than imposing the mandated curriculum on students through a set of prescribed practices laid out neatly by a textbook, the standards become a part of our disclosure as teachers: we expose them to the students and engage them in constructing learning experiences that can reach the needs and desires they have disclosed to us. All of the constraints and mandates that are imposed on us – performance standards, pacing guides, textbooks, assessments – as well as our own needs

and desires as experienced educators, are brought into the dialogue so that these limits

can become part of the critical conversation. In the same way that we name our

subjective identities through disclosure, we name the mandates, exposing them and

making them transparent so that they become a part of the ongoing dialogue about how

and why and what we learn. Like the co-evolving body/culture/technology complex, we

work through our rhizomatic connections to "co-operate" in constructing the curriculum,

enacting new social relations and laying bare the power relations that create inequality

along the way. Through consistent and ongoing dialogue, the curriculum (even a

standardized one) can be revisited, reimagined, and reconstructed to meet the meet the

needs of our knowing-bodies.

Discomfort

The process of continual disclosure and dialogue opens up the curriculum to a

level of intimacy and interdependence that can be disconcerting, which leads us to the

reflexive condition of discomfort. Embodied pedagogy requires us to constantly move

out of our comfort zones to unearth the private and the passionate, which have long been

silenced by the traditional school curriculum. Yet, it is through such discomfort that we

can confront the contradictions of our corpo/realities, interrogate normalcy and disability,

and accept and embrace difference in order to construct a reflexive curriculum. This

discomfiting dialogue is a transformative space from which we can explore our own

subjectivities and call into question the dominant values that typically frame teaching and

learning, which Boler and Zembylas (2003) describe as "pedagogy of discomfort."

Through this process, students and teachers work together to recognize and problematize

"the deeply embedded emotional dimensions that frame and shape daily habits, routines,

and unconscious complicity with hegemony (Boler and Zembylas, 111). Pedagogy of discomfort purposefully attends to affective perception and embodied knowing in order to expose the ways we perform and hypostatize prevailing norms and assumptions traditional educational habits and routines. As Boler and Zembylas (2003), explain, "By closely examining emotional reactions and responses – what we call emotional stances – one begins to identify unconscious privileges as well as invisible ways in which one complies with dominant ideology (p. 111).

As Brueggemann and Moddelmog (2003) describe, "this approach to coming out makes our classrooms places of comfort and discomfort because it encourages our students and us to share our stories, to investigate our identities, and to name our passions" (p. 216). Teachers and students must initiate this process of "fleshing out" of our stories, identities and passions because it does not emerge effortlessly from an educational culture of standardization and sterility. This initiation can be difficult, as Martha Stoddard Holmes (2003) describes of her own experience of exposing bodies in the classroom:

> The classroom bodies were all under scrutiny, even when the class talked about bodies, disabilities, or differences as concepts. Many discussions were unintentionally painful in their association with the bodies the discussants lived in outside of the classroom, bodies that were stared at, rejected, obstructed from access to bathrooms and classrooms, diagnosed and classified, loved for the wrong reasons, photographed, written about, beaten, as well as treated kindly, loved, soothed and delighted (Freedman and Holmes, 2003, p. 5).

While self-exposure can unearth powerful emotions in a classroom of adults, such a process may emerge with less difficulty for children who have not yet experienced a lifetime of affective repression. We can begin this dialogue even with very young children (and we do this in preschool) by helping them name their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences, but this process needs to continue into adulthood. Perhaps, if we engage children in this dialogue of disclosure as they grow, we can help them resist the oppression and hegemony that has left so many of us feeling lost and distant.

Ng (2003) describes a similar reflexive process that she calls "teaching against the grain," a term she borrows from Marilyn Cochran-Smith (1991), in which we invite our students in examining the ways that power relations based on race, gender, class, and/or ability intersect to marginalize particular bodies. Ng suggests that we must move beyond our well-meaning but misguided assumption that we should "treat everyone the same" in an effort to avoid bias and inequality because in doing so we actually conceal the unequal power relations that lead to marginalization. Similarly, as Ng (2003) explains, "educational policies that assume that people are the same of equal may serve to entrench existing inequality precisely because people enter into the educational process with different and unequal experiences" (p. 214). Teaching against the grain bids us to disclose and interrogate those different and unequal experiences in order to disclose the power dynamics that construct the inequalities of particular bodies. As Ng (2003) observes, "Rather than overlooking the embeddedness of gender, race, class, ability, and other forms of inequality that shape our interactions, working against the grain makes explicit the political nature of education and how power operates to privilege, silence,

and marginalize individuals who are differently located in the educational process (p. 214).

What does this process of disclosure, dialogue, and discomfort look like in the classroom? Ng (2003) submits the description offered by Cochran-Smith (1991), who is worth quoting at length here:

> To teach against the grain, teachers have to understand and work both *within* and *around* the culture of teaching and the politics of schooling at their particular schools and within their larger school system and communities . . .Without condescension or defensiveness, they have to work with parents and other teachers on different ways of seeing and measuring development, connecting and dividing knowledge, and knowing about teaching and schooling. They have to be astute observers of individual learners with the ability to pose and explore questions that transcend cultural attribution, institutional habit, and the alleged certainty of outside experts. They have to see beyond and through the conventional labels and practices that sustain the status quo by raising unanswerable and often uncomfortable questions. Perhaps most importantly, teachers who work against the grain must name and wrestle with their own doubts, must fend off the fatigue of reform and depend on the strength of their individual and collaborative convictions that their work ultimately makes a difference in the fabric of social responsibility (p. 284-85).

Such an engagement in critical, reflexive practice asks teachers to radically reevaluate their traditional roles as technicians of a standardized curriculum and offer themselves up to pedagogies of difference, responsiveness, and uncertainty. Thus, classrooms where

discomfort is embraced as transformative become "spaces of intellectual and persona discovery as we explore the ways in which identity can ground and trouble us and seek to understand how we come to know what we think we know about ourselves and others" (Brueggemann and Moddelmog, 2003, p. 216).

Context

Constructing these spaces for dialogue and discovery leads us also to consider context. If we take seriously Restak's (2003) claim that "the plasticity of our brains" responds to our techno-cultural context by changing the way it is operates, then we understand that our context, be it the classroom or another location beyond the school campus, is an extension of who we are and how we work in that setting. A reflexive concept of context, or space, is illustrated in Freire's (1996) discussion of educational space, in which he suggests, "We need to associate our workspace with certain qualities that are extensions of ourselves. We make a space that will either remake us or will help us accomplish our tasks. It is in this sense that what may seem circumstantial, mere accessory in the educational space, ends up becoming as essential as the space itself" (p. 123). I envision the reflexive classroom as thriving, dynamic space that celebrates discovery and incites curiosity. Such a classroom resonates with Ayers (2001) vision of a liberated curriculum: one in which students are experiencing discovery and surprise, engaging with primary sources and hands-on materials that they can experience affectively rather than sanitized texts, creating, questioning, and confronting real problems.

The classroom also needs to appeal to the larger cultural contexts of the learners and must be, like the curriculum, labile so that new arrangements and technologies

(multi-age or interest grouping, experimentation, discussion, multi-media devices) can supplement student discovery as needed.   This space enters into the critical dialogue and is co-constructed by the community of learners in tandem with the lived curriculum. As Friere (1996) suggests, "A good starting point for the school year may be a discussion among educators and learners about their space and how to make it or maintain it as a happy and pleasant place. There is a necessary relationship between the educator's body, the learner's body, and the space in which they work. No living body fails to experience its space" (p. 123).

In addition to considering the way we collaboratively construct the classroom environment, we can also bring context into the critical dialogue in other meaningful ways. We can recognize our affective investments in mass digital popular culture and offer multiple readings – "seek out those voices that do not fit our world view or our readings of popular culture texts" – in order to reconstruct our understandings of bodies, and difference, and schooling (Daspit and Weaver, 2000, p. xix). We can allow popular culture to raise important, and often, uncomfortable questions about the prevailing educational narratives that have operated to objectify, diagnose and exclude particular bodies.

We can also bring popular/political/personal context into our critical conversations. I return to the Webber's (2003) observation of the way we tend to approach the problems that arise in schools: What are we going to *do* about this problem? This question is indicative of a *doing to* strategy rather than the reflexive *working with* approach.   When, through our critical conversations, we confront the problems that will arise as we attempt to co-operatively negotiate the curriculum, we can honor context by

asking instead, "Why is this happening now, to whom, and in what setting?" (Webber, 2003, p. 193). In this way, when we confront issues such as disengagement, difference and discontent, we can avoid wasting our time with quick-fix solutions like the measures enacted to address school violence. As Noddings (2005) explains, the official response to the series of highly publicized school shootings in the 1990s was "more surveillance cameras, more security guards, better metal detectors, more locks, shorter lunch periods, more rules," all of which failed to create safer schools (p. 13). As Noddings (2005) suggests, we should have been asking "*why* there has been a decline in security and how we should address the problem. Do we need more prisonlike measures, or is something fundamentally wrong with the entire school arrangement?" (p. 13). Such questions, questions that require us look beyond the "quick fixes" that address only the symptoms of a disembodied curriculum, honor the techno-cultural contexts of our students and allow us to respond in more personal and meaningful ways. These are the kinds of questions reflexive learners can confront through dialogue.

Prosthesis

We cannot consider "context" without recognizing the posthuman condition. To say that we are posthuman is to recognize that our existence in the world is undeniably mediated by technology, that we achieve what we perceive as "normalcy" only through our complex interactions with techno-scientific interventions. In the digital age, the era of nanotechnology, prostheses are no longer simply artificial body parts like arms, legs and breast implants, but other extensions of our bodies that supplement the limitations of the physical body and alter our affective perceptions: psychotropic drugs, virtual reality, the internet, digital images, cell phones, iPods, and more. As Weaver (2005) suggests,

"We can no longer see prosthetics as alien appendages to our bodies but things that are melded onto and into our bodies and as a result enable us to feel, see, hear, and smell the world differently" (p. 84). In the context of posthuman life, a reflexive pedagogy must operate as a prosthetic, an outward extension of ourselves, that allows us to experience the world differently. Confronted with our plasticity, with the idea that technology is not separate but part of our bodies, we need to expose our discursive and affective evolutions through dialogue. Weaver (2005) asserts that we have many questions to consider:

> How are pharmaceuticals, cosmetic surgery, gene therapy, stem cell research, performance enhancement drugs, cloning, and just simple interactive video games and virtual reality changing our bodies? How are our capabilities enhanced as athletes and scholars? What is the price for this enhancement or how does technology as a supplement alter our bodies psychologically and physiologically? How does the post human condition reconfigure such notions as natural and artificial? Are these terms even relevant since they now blur together? Does a natural body now constitute an underprivileged body? (Weaver, 2005, p. 91-92).

Indeed, as Weaver (2005) suggests here, we have many important and potentially uncomfortable questions to consider: when and how do we bring our sometimes "secret" cyborgism – including our optional "enhancements" – into the critical dialogue? How could disclosing our own embodied understandings change the way we think about normalcy, that elusive condition that often drives our prosthetic engagements? We cannot meaningfully consider context in reflexive pedagogies without confronting these issues of posthuman bodies and negotiating through social relations new ways of prosthetic

understanding, and we can seek to do so through these interwoven, reflexive elements of embodied pedagogies.

The elements I have explored here – disclosure, lability, dialogue, discomfort, context, and prosthesis – are some of the ways that I envision reflexive pedagogies emerging from the rhetorical morass of "no child *left*" standards, sanctions, and accountability. Perhaps it is logically untenable to envision a future in which different schools construct and adopt different learning goals and standards that are meaningful and personal for their particular knowing-bodies, but that does not give us license to abandon embodied pedagogy altogether. Rather, I believe that in the current climate of high-stakes minimum competency accountability, it is more important than ever that we seek ways to bring public education into the realm of the intimate, the personal, the pleasurable, the affective. We must do this if we hope to make the marginalizing, categorizing, alienating, dehumanizing institution that public education has become into something liberating, meaningful, and promising.

As I look toward a reconceptualization of the curriculum and the body, I want express the urgency of our task by bringing up the question posed by William Ayers (2001):

> When we teachers look out over our classrooms, what do we see? Half-civilized
> barbarians? Savages? A collection of deficits, or IQs, or averages? Do we see
> fellow creatures? We see students in our classrooms, of course, but who are they?
> What hopes do they bring? What is the language of their dreams? What
> experiences have they had, and where do they want to go? What interests or
> concerns them, how have they been hurt, what are they frightened of, what will

they fight for, and what and whom do they care about? What is their bliss? Their

pain? (p. 56).

Do we see a community of learners who come to us already inscribed in language,

already in need of critical dialogue? Do we see flesh and blood children, fellow

creatures, full with questions, confusions, needs and desires? Or do we see a spreadsheet

of deficits and liabilities? Can we, as teachers, really give our students, *our* children, our

future, what they deserve, what so many of us long to give them, when we are caught in

the gaze of accountability at every turn? Have our perceptions of teaching and learning,

our affective investments in the educational process, been clouded by the rhetoric of

standards and accountability? Can we stomach the blatant injustices, the labels and

pathologies, written on the bodies of our children in the name of achievement? How

many millions of children must we diagnose, other, exclude, and medicate before we

realize that we have been asking the wrong questions? Davis (2002) contends that:

> Only when the veil is torn from the bland face of the average, only when the
>
> hidden political and social injuries are revealed behind the mask of benevolence,
>
> only when the hazardous environment designed to be the comfort zone of the
>
> normal is shown with all its pitfalls and traps that create disability – only then will
>
> we begin to face and feel each other in all that rich variety and difference of our
>
> bodies, our minds, and our outlooks (Davis, 170).

In order to redefine difference and bring bodies fully into our classrooms and curricula,

into the "comfort zone of the normal," we have to confront our seriously misguided

assumptions about assessment, accountability, and academic performance. We have to

ask ourselves what parents want their child to be seen merely as a collection of deficits to

be filled before a test time, or a "sure bet" that can be left to his own vices, or a "lost cause" that is abandoned to the isolation of a resource room? What child doesn't deserve to be "seen" in the classroom, embraced, celebrated, for all of the messy, complicated idiosyncrasies that make every child extraordinary? Ultimately, we will have to decide what the standardization, the efficient measurement of "Adequate Yearly Progress" is worth to us. Until then, we have to seek out ways to keep hope, and our inquiring subjectivities, alive.

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