

Title: **Putting Disability Studies to work in art education**

Introduction

Putting disability studies to work in art education suggests a form of action or industry, a creative opportunity for something to be done, recognising the relationship between theory and practice as well as an ethical imperative for art educators. This paper employs disability studies in order to recognise the ways in which disability is represented and created in art education via a discourse analysis of writing previously published in *iJADE*. This analysis offers a starting point for a further exploration of the potential that exists in the relationship between disability studies and art education, enabling the recognition of benefits for those who engage and combine both fields to inform their pedagogy.

This work offers a bridge from theoretical textual analysis through to some considerations for practice, including ways of developing a vocabulary for interrogating difference as natural human variation and recognising its value (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Mitchell, 1999). In discussing the application of disability studies to questions regarding inclusive education and exclusion, Moore and Slee (2012: 230) call for an informed understanding of exclusionary processes inherent in specific curricular and pedagogical practices. This paper aims to do this by examining beliefs and attitudes about disability through an examination of art education.

The importance of putting ideas to work has been a recurring concern in my work and I am frequently drawn to Freire's caution regarding 'verbalism' or empty words that lack the potential for action (Freire, 1972). There is a need however, to work with whatever tools are at your disposal, and the importance of interrogating forms of cultural production should not be underestimated in the power that this offers for examining social, cultural and educational equality. The role of discourse analysis therefore operates as the first stage or reflective dimension of Freire's praxis, and predicates proposed action and practical application.

Disability Studies in Art Education

The potential for art education to engage with disability as a site for critical social practice has been recognised by writers in the US (Blandy, 1994; and more recently Derby, 2011 and Wexler, 2011) who have made connections between disability studies and art education. However, such connections are less apparent in writing in the UK. Art education has traditionally been associated with the development of practical skills and control through fine art practice (XXXX, 2010) yet there is some recognition, that education through art can be a powerful pedagogic tool, capable of transforming the lives of young people, by enabling them to engage with significant ideas about their own cultural identities (Dash, 2005; Johnston, 2005). Atkinson and Dash (2005) have discussed the connections between art education with the potentially transformative nature of critical pedagogy advocating for 'art in education as critical social practice' which 'has indirect but radical implications for implementing and renewing the systems within which teaching and learning take place' (p.xii). This work is yet to be more explicitly extended to a discussion of disability. It is important, therefore, to begin by examining what is meant in this context by 'a disability studies perspective' in order that we can recognise its usefulness to art education (although I recognise that any definition here must be relatively brief and therefore potentially inadequate).

Bolt (2012) argues that the lens of critical social pedagogies applied to work relating to gender, race and class should be extended to disability since this has been, and continues to be, a site for critical avoidance. Here I am extending this discussion in order to promote critical engagement through art education as a means of counteracting the types of avoidance described by Bolt. It is worth noting at this point that the dominant discourse around disability that beginning teachers are likely to encounter relates to 'special educational needs' and that this in itself could be described as a type of critical avoidance since. Although regarded as a means of 'managing' need and allocating resources (Terzi, 2010), the political dimension of this educational category is not unproblematic, yet this 'symbolic complexity' is rarely examined in teacher education (Moore & Slee, 2012: 226). Disability studies, described as a multidisciplinary field and one that promotes the interrogation of the

experience and production of disablement, offers a space within the curriculum to promote this level of critical enquiry. Baglieri and Knopf (2004) indicate that the goal for those who are active in 'Disability Studies in Education (DSE)' is:

to uncover and eliminate social, cultural, and political barriers that prevent access to employment, academic, recreational, and residential opportunities afforded to those without variations that society labels as impairments
(Baglieri & Knopf, 2004: 525)

Moore and Slee (2012) discuss the contribution of disability studies suggesting that it offers an 'authentic' approach, enabling us to reclaim inclusive education as 'rights-based' and requiring us to be vigilant to inequalities in power relationships. They advocate for disability studies in teacher education as a means of re-engaging with teaching as a political activity and as a means of critical engagement with exclusionary practices. Art educators may of course have their own experiential understanding of impairment but it is worth noting that their main encounter with disability, within a school setting, will be via the dominant discourse of 'special education'. We can therefore ask whether future teachers are sufficiently challenged to consider the 'politics of disablement' inherent in contemporary curricular, pedagogy and assessment practices – or the politics of special education (Oliver, 1999).

Cultural disability studies, contributes to the broader field of disability studies by recognising disability, alongside gender, ethnicity, sexuality and class, as a theoretical basis for cultural criticism (Bolt, 2012: 288). In this sub-discipline representations of disability can be examined in a range of cultural artefacts including literature, film, the arts or advertising, or the range of academic papers that are the subject of discussion in this paper. In the Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies, Bolt asks if the study of culture can deepen our understanding of disability and, whether the study of disability can therefore deepen our understanding of culture. This offers a starting point for the exploration of art education through the application of a disability studies perspective. In exploring the extent to which a study of art education can deepen our understanding of disability, I am also concerned with the extent to which a study of disability can deepen our

understanding of art education. These ideas represent my continued interest in the distinctive contribution of art to education and exemplify the ways in which an interrogation of existing attitudes and practices can offer a useful starting point for the transformation of attitudes and, potentially, practice.

Discourses Analysis

Baglieri and Knopf (2004) refer to discourse as 'working attitudes, modes of address, terms of reference, and courses of action suffused into social practice' (Gubrium and Holstein in Baglieri and Knopf, 2004). They are particularly concerned with the way in which the ab/normal binary dominates the ways in which we recognise and respond to difference and the ways that this is reinforced through social and cultural practices. Discourse is recognised as the ways in which these ideas and ideology become subsumed into practice and discourse analysis can therefore offer a useful analytical tool for recognising where and how this takes place and the power relationships that are evident in such processes. Official knowledge forms, such as peer reviewed academic papers can act as instruments of normalisation by reinforcing such binaries, 'by dividing the normal person from the pathological specimen, the good citizen from the delinquent, and so on' (Foucault, 1991 p.17). Foucault's recognition of the role of disciplinary power on the production of discourse and reproduction of knowledge is significant in recognizing that official knowledge forms occlude other 'subjugated knowledges'. Discourses analysis has the potential to reclaim these subjugated knowledge forms enabling us to recognise and reflect on the ways in which our own language and practices produce and reinforce binary thinking around natural human variation. Tracing 'systems of thought', enables us to examine the ways in which 'knowledge' about disability has been conveyed via explorations of art education and the ways in which knowledge about art education has been conveyed via representations of disability. Employing disability studies in discourse analysis encourages us to recognise the ways in which the ab/normal binary is created and presented via discourses relating to art education, enabling accepted educational and scholarly practices to be problematized and challenged (Baglieri and Knopf, 2004). The next section offers a revised analysis of the work originally presented at the conference in 2013 although

the original discussion can be found in 'Changing Attitudes Towards Disability: Perspectives from historical, cultural and educational studies' (XXXX, 2014).

Exploring Disability Discourses in IJADE

So what happens at the intersection between art education and disability and how is this evidenced in papers published in IJADE? There have been over 900 papers published in the last 30 years and approximately 14 of these have an explicit reference to disability. The first article included 'The Original Art of Mentally-Handicapped People' (Timmerman, 1986) was published four years after the publication of the first volume. The final article included 'Dyslexia and the studio: Bridging the gap between theory and practice' by Alden and Pollock was published in 2011. In this section these papers are explored with a specific focus on the role that art education appears to play in attributing value to difference by reinforcing the ab/normal binary as a means of elevating art education and practice. I will go on to argue that the ways in which art intersects with disability reflects a conflict for the subject by contradicting the claims made for the distinctive contribution that the arts can make to education (Eisner, 2004).

Challenging the binary

A number of the papers reviewed suggest that art education offers a challenge to binary thinking about difference. Corlett (1994) challenges exclusionary practices in art courses in higher education and Candlin (2003) encourages readers to engage with the inequity in the gallery experience problematizing the tendency for access to galleries to be framed around a homogenous ideal of the blind visitor. Similarly De Coster and Loots (2004) discuss access to art education 'for blind individuals' acknowledging the tensions in a visual arts education from an ocularnormative position. Candlin and Corlett offer a challenge to institutional practices that, whilst seeking to include, can reinforce problematic assumptions regarding impairment. Hermon and Prentice (2003) discuss art education as a means of encouraging highly personal ways of responding. They discuss the artist as 'the outsider' able to 'challenge the concept of normality'. Here they do not challenge the ab/normal binary but attempt to reclaim the abnormal as a desirable state. Art practice is

offered as a means of empowerment, with students encouraged to 'challenge a passive, conforming image of disability, addressing issues of difference and achieving a sense of self-fulfillment' with the young people presented as creative and engaged subjects. They are, however, less visible in the work since the professional teachers voice dominates and their creative autonomy is perhaps undermined by this omission.

Arts practice as a means of identifying difference

The recognition of difference as abnormal/normal appears to be central in the arguments for the importance of art education in a number of the papers reviewed. In a reading of the selected papers it is possible to discern a number of ways in which art education can offer a bridge across the normal/abnormal binary. For Alden and Pollock (2011) art practice is recognised as compensatory for students identified as dyslexic although this is also confirmed as a further area of difficulty and deficit. This reading recognises that the binary remains in place, created and reinforced by educational practices in art. In addition, the status of art education appears to be enhanced by the ways in which it is harnessed to compensate the abnormal. Art education is shifted from the non-essential 'fall-back position' (Eisner, 2004) to being a subject that has great significance, and in some cases it appears *essential* in enabling recognition of the human experience. Timmerman (1986) recognises art practice as a means for institutionalised individuals to demonstrate creative ability. Through examples of 'original art of mentally –handicapped people', he is able to demonstrate their creativity capacities. However, the drawings and prints act as signifiers of difference as deficit and the power relations in this representation of institutionalised system of practices is evident, signalling the, now historic practices, relating to the care of disabled adults. Although creative practice through art education is recognised, the relative value attributed to the creative work of the 'mentally-handicapped person' appears to be reduced compared to normalised concepts of art production. Timmerman asks:

*Does the mentally-handicapped person **know** what he or she depicts...Or is it that the mentally-handicapped individual sees and experiences in a different-say, a scrappy-way? (Timmerman, 1986:10)*

The work and lives of the individuals discussed is employed as a means of demonstrating the value of art practice whilst devaluing the people who have made it by questioning the worth of their awareness of the world. This is conveyed through the discourse of care and compassion but the meanings attributed to difference in this instance reinforces the ab/normal binary and this 'scrappy' way of seeing suggests deficit over difference and a disregard for the particular way that individual may perceive of and represent their world.

Paine's discussion of children's 'obsessive drawing' positions art practice as vital particularly for one individual, David, whose life story is narrated through his drawings (Paine, 1997). Paine starts with her fascination with the role that drawing plays for some children who appear to draw obsessively as a substitute for 'normal' development or in response to emotional triggers. David, the person at the centre of her paper, is recognised as exhibiting traits that would now be associated with autism. From the outset art practice is framed as an abnormal or deviant response and drawing appears as a compensatory mode of communication that is developed in response to language delay. Art practice takes on the essential role of enabling communication and David reveals his 'considerable abilities' through his artwork. Art practice becomes a bridge from David's apparently abnormal 'non-communicative' world enabling his true cognitive abilities to be revealed. Again, the role of art practice gains particular importance, enabling David to manage his 'abnormal' emotional responses. There are tensions here for the ways in which difference appears to be valued. Although art practice offers the ability to unlock a form of communication, this is still recognised as an undesirable rather than alternative state of being. As a result of the longevity of the project, David shifts from obsessive child to accomplished artist and the value attributed to his work reflects this shifting status. Similarly, Sagan (2009) describes art practice as a means of enabling communication for those experiencing mental ill-health. Here she questions the 'dark' narrative of mental ill-health and attempts to offer a counter narrative of creative practice as light/life. The creative process is enriching and enabling and art is beneficial again for its compensatory and, in this case, remedial qualities.

Drawing appears to have particular relevance in the identification of difference as abnormal, particularly in papers by Dowling (1994) and Warren (2003) where drawings act as signifiers of pathology and cognitive impairment. Warren is clear that art education can have 'diagnostic' capacity and art practice is called upon as a means of identifying the abnormal although it is unclear to what extent this is useful to Warren's pedagogic practice. We become aware that a pupil 'Henry' is intelligent and conscientious but that his observational drawings 'rang alarms', signifying Henry's abnormal inability to visualise and represent three-dimensional form. The solution to Henry's drawing problem appears to be drawing (and still more drawing) perhaps in order to remediate or cure Henry's difference. For Paine and Warren, the language of deficit is evident and the normal body and mind is privileged. Art education becomes a site for recognising pathology potentially elevating its pedagogic and pseudoscientific potential for remediation.

The role of technology in art production for disabled young people is discussed by Taylor (2005) and Young (2008) with students framed and described as users of assistive technology. The depersonalised discussion and disembodied experiences conveyed by the professional art teacher is crystallized in the images in Young (2008) where the person, art student, is reduced to an image of a foot making use of a piece of technology. Who is the foot? What type of work will this person make? The discussion of technology in this context offers a reductive view of the student and a limited concept of art education as a series of technical solutions with little consideration given to the creative potentialities of the subject or the student.

In a number of the papers reviewed (including XXXX, 2007) art educators reinforce the ab/normal binary by recognising that art education has 'special qualities' or particular challenges for 'special learners'. The particularity of art education, as a subject offering inclusive possibilities, becomes implicated in exclusionary processes where the intersection between disability and the arts is de-politicised. In addition, the relationship between art education and disability also suggests a form of 'narrative prosthesis' or 'discursive dependence on disability' (Mitchell and Snyder in Bolt, 2014). Here disability is harnessed as a trope to reinforce the narrative of 'the

importance of art education'. These representations contribute to a process of 'epistemic invalidation' where different ways of being in the world are negated through their recognition of being deviant or abnormal and where the professional voice of the art educator represents the other. Swain et al (2004) describe a process of 'epistemic invalidation' when disabled people engage with professional experts and professional knowledge takes precedence over the knowledge people have about their own bodies and experiences. It is possible however, to revise this relationship and to consider ways in which a more productive relationship could be fostered where the potential of art education as a critical social practice can be put to work as a means for re-politicising the relationship between disability and education.

Applying Eisner's 6 lessons to disability and art education

Art practice is described by Julie Allan (2008) as an antidote to 'disciplinary regimes' offering opportunities for what she describes as 'tactical defiance and resistance', the potential for a different type of pedagogic relationship and a different type of place for learning. She recognises alternative spaces for participation through the arts by referring to 'disability arts', art produced by disabled arts activists that is informed by, and draws attention to particular, political and embodied experiences of disablement.

Bolt's assertion that disability is an area for critical avoidance may cause us to reflect on the extent to which we are prepared to engage with the politics of disability in the art classroom particularly when this space is more frequently colonised by the language of 'special' education (Bolt, 2012: 287). Avoidance suggests a vacancy, however the arts and art education present ways to fill such spaces, creating the potential for the interrogation and transformation of ableist discourses. Eisner's six lessons for what education can learn from the arts offer a useful for exploring the ways in which art education might make a particularly useful partner for disability studies (Eisner, 2004). Eisner's lessons are drawn on here to explore the ways in which art education may contribute to processes of 'epistemic in/validation'. For example, the first of these lessons recognises the importance of somatic knowledge

as a means of realising the distinctive qualitative relationships between elements, through activities that 'slow down perception rather than speed it up'. This suggests respect for the ways in which an individual comes to know the world by paying attention to the embodied experience, valuing and prioritising this way of knowing.

The second lesson teaches us to acknowledge that we do not always need to work with clear and predetermined aims, suggesting a shift away from normalising discourses and expectations to a circumstance of unpredictability. Warren (2003), for example, working with the unpredictability of visual representation, might reposition Henry's drawing as less 'alarming' in order that he might ask: 'Why do these drawings shock or destabilise me? What does this say about my own awareness and understanding of difference? What role might drawing play in Henry's education, other than diagnosis? As a consequence, Warren may develop opportunities for the development of his own teaching practices that do not rely on specific and limited forms of representation.

For Timmerman, a lesson in the value of unpredictability may enable this observation:

*Does the mentally-handicapped person **know** what he or she depicts...Or is it that the mentally-handicapped individual sees and experiences in a different-say, a scrappy-way? (Timmerman, 1986:10)*

To be reframed as:

*Why am I uncertain about what the person **knows and** what he or she depicts? How might I learn from the ways in which they represent their experience? How do I ensure that these experiences are valued?*

In his third lesson, Eisner encourages us to realise the importance of the relationship between form and content where 'the message is in the form-content relationship (p.6). He applies this lesson specifically to language use advising that 'How history is written matters *how* one speaks to a child matters *how* one tells a story matters'. Art

education has pedagogic value in drawing attention to this inextricable link. A representation of art education that dismisses one or the other negates the potential of this. For Taylor (2005) and Young (2008), form and content are disconnected in their discussion of assistive technology resulting in a disembodied representation of the potential of the creative subject. Related to this idea of the relationship between form and content is the *fourth lesson* which teaches that the limits of our knowledge are not defined by the limits of our language. This enables us to question our understanding of communication or language working outside norms of conventional response. Paine (1997) and Sagan (2009) discuss the communicative power of drawing and arts practice yet this is recognised as therapeutic or compensatory for the abnormal. Eisner authenticates the 'abnormal non-communicative' by questioning the extent to which our knowing can ever be truly reflected in common sense understandings of 'normal' communication. It could be argued that this expands limited and ableist assumptions about processes of communication.

Eisner's *fifth* lesson explores the relationship between thinking and the material with which we work recognising that 'new possibilities for matters of representation can stimulate our imaginative capacities and can generate forms of experience that would otherwise not exist' (p.8). Here we can recognise the potential that can be brought through difference, acknowledging that the use of materials in ways that reflect physical or cognitive difference might generate resources. Papers by Candlin (2003) and De Coster & Loots (2004) could offer a challenge to ocularcentric practices producing valuable rather than compensatory alternatives. Corlett's challenge to discriminatory practice for disabled students in HE is also valuable here for recognising the resources that disabled people bring to art education.

The final lesson concerning the vitality and emotion that can be brought to learning through arts practice supports conditions for the receptivity to the political life world. Eisner argues that the arts promote a surge of emotion pursuing voluntary engagement through vitality and emotion, enabling voluntary incentives and a willingness to engage with ideas. This resonates with the political space generated

by the identity-based project outlined by Hermon and Prentice (2003). The fashion design work created by the young people here offers a vital space where work is made and identities can be performed but where there is also an acknowledgement of the complexity of practicing inclusive values within segregated settings. Students' work with material forms enable new possibilities to be recognised and performance and practice recognise different forms of communication. In addition the authors are compelled to engage directly with the politics of this art practice.

Finding a vocabulary through cultural disability studies and art education

Recently a colleague expressed some reluctance to talk about the extermination of disabled people as part of the Nazi's T4 programme. Although working with materials relating to genocide and mass murder, the inclusion of disability in this art lesson was considered too sensitive an area to discuss since there may have been disabled pupils present. In concluding this discussion I would like to propose that cultural disability studies can support practitioners by providing a vocabulary to counteract such acts of avoidance. Art education is well placed for providing the materials and resources for such conversations by creating the conditions for recognising the value of difference. Disability arts can offer ways of addressing the disabling nature of societal structures and practices. Liz Crowe's work, for example, is designed specifically to communicate difficult and sensitive ideas to audiences through shock and surprise. Crow appeared on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square, sat in her wheelchair, dressed as a Nazi as part of Anthony Gormley's One and Other project. Her recent work 'Bedding Out' draws our attention to recent changes to the benefits system for disabled people in the UK as she lives in her bed in a gallery installation. Bedding Out was commissioned as part of Disability Arts Online's Diverse Perspectives project (www.disabilityartsonline.org.uk), which commissioned eight disabled artists across the UK to make a new artwork that would generate debate about the 'Creative Case for Diversity'. Using performance and installation, Liz Crow explores private bed-oriented life in public for a 48-hour period 'in order to show that what many see as contradiction, or fraud, is simply the complexity of real life'. Crow offers a model for arts practice as a political response that acknowledges the connections between embodied experience where form and content are

inextricably linked in work that communicates in ways that are not limited to the verbal or textual since the audience can be *with* Crow in this experiential work.

Reluctance, sensitivity or discomfort is at least a starting point for engaging with difficult questions and disability arts may offer challenging as well as empowering tools for the development of critical enquiry and arts practice. Art education is well placed as a subject that engages very directly with the ways in which culture is read and made. There is therefore some real potential in a partnership between disability studies and art education. David Mitchell urges us to '*recognize that human capacities vary greatly from one another*' and that '*those differences mark the dynamic essence of what it means to be human*'. As a subject art education has the capacity for valuing individual differences '*rather than differentiat[ing] between the value of individuals*' (Mitchell in Stiker, 1999). The art classroom is, therefore, a good place to put disability studies to work.

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