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Intersecting Identities: A Trioethnographic Exploration of How Disability Studies Informs Our Work as Artists, Educators, and Researchers

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Biography

Alexandra Allen is a Postdoctoral Scholar of Art Education at the Pennsylvania State University. With a Ph.D. in Art Education from Florida State University, her research focuses primarily on individuals with invisible disabilities and how they develop and renegotiate their own disability identity. Using theories from critical disability studies, Alexandra continues to generate artwork that addresses issues of ableism in an effort to challenge the stigmatized notion of mental health disorders within a normative society. In her most recent work as a practicing artist, Alexandra's mixed-media sculptures combine wire, glass, fiber and ink to encapsulate her own disability experience as she explores the sociocultural factors that perpetuate performative ablebodiedness. With a background in teaching students with disabilities, she integrates disability awareness into her pedagogical practices, and aims to uncover the ways that arts-based research can support disability identity development within primary and secondary educational institutions.

Biography

Timothy Smith, Ph.D., MFA, is an artist and educator who teaches in the doctoral programme of the Department of Art at Aalto University in Espoo, Finland. His pedagogy and research is grounded in advancing social justice through critical methodologies and activism in art and art education. His research in critical disability studies is focused on higher education in the arts, with a particular emphasis on analyzing and challenging ableism in university institutions through examining emerging discourses and practices of crip theory and slow scholarship. Timothy's artistic practice explores the concept of 'crip time' as the lived experience of disability that often involves unpredictable, lumbering and staggering encounters with time and duration in everyday life. His artistic endeavors generate an experiential mode of knowledge-making that, in turn, informs his engagement with disability awareness and justice through his teaching and research practices.

Biography

Amanda Newman-Godfrey, Assistant Professor of Art Education at Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the U.S., teaches in the BFA, MA, and MFA programs. She has been an art educator in PreK-12 schools, state agencies, and in higher education for 26 years. She has presented at state, national and international conferences, was recipient of the Doctoral Dissertation Grant, and was named a "Rising Star in Higher Education" by Teachers College Today magazine. She is the co-author of a book chapter on visual arts and autism, and several articles on art and disability. Her areas of art education research include preservice curriculum, ASD and art education, and differentiated instruction and assessment in higher education. She is currently the president of Moore's Faculty Forum and serves on two not-for-profit boards, Young Audiences of New Jersey and Eastern PA and Women's Studio Workshop.

Abstract

In this trioethnographic exploration, the three authors critically reflect on the insights gained and shared from their experiences with disability. The co-mingling of personal narratives through a collective dialogic methodology reveal their experiences as a framework for turning to disability studies (DS) through three themes: discovering DS; lived experiences with disability and confronting stigma and passing; and critical disability studies (CDS) as a space for renegotiating our pedagogical/artistic practice. The implications cultivated through this trioethnographic conversation focus on building frameworks to activate CDS in practice in institutions of higher education and art education.

Keywords

ableism, stigma, passing, autoethnography

Reframing the Disability Experience Through an Emergent Critical Perspective

Prior to the emergence of disability studies (DS), many people with disabilities were being spoken *about*, rather than listened *to* to (Newell, 2006). DS aims to destabilize the authoritative voice and replace it with the voice of the disability community. In this article, the authors, three individuals with disabilities engage in a trioethnography that reflects on our experiences as educators, students, artists, and researchers through the lens of DS. Each person considers the challenges of pursuing a terminal degree, the complex task of coming out as an academic and artist, and how a theoretical understanding of the disability experience has informed our work as educators.

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Our primary research question is the one that initiated our trioethnographic dialogue: What were the ways in which we each discovered DS, and how has a shift toward critical disability studies (CDS) informed our practice as artists, educators, and researchers? Our secondary research question emerged through our conversation on lived experiences of ableism, predominantly issues of stigma and passing, within an educational setting: How can the lived experiences for educators with disabilities interrogate prevailing issues of institutionalized ableism in higher education? Our third research question extrapolates from our embodied knowledge of disability: How can a CDS approach facilitate the creation of inclusive spaces within art education? In what follows, we offer a review of the literature that has prompted these research questions, which will then be brought into conversation through the trioethnographies and post-dialogue analysis.

Disability Studies

DS is the interdisciplinary scholarship that merges social justice with disability research (Derby, 2011). Its emergence as an interdisciplinary field of study in the closing decades of the 20th century prompted a move toward politicizing the examination of disability in higher education, particularly through the perspectives of human rights, social justice, equality, and inclusiveness (Garland-Thomson, 2019). Key to the rise of DS in the academy was the development of the social model of disability in the early 1980s, which signaled a shift away from a medical understanding of disability as an objective and individual defect or pathology (Oliver, 1983). The social model exposed the limitations of the medical model by relocating the root of disability within the oppressive barriers created within established conventions, practices, and discourses of society (Barnes, 2019). This radical reframing of disability over the last four decades has revolutionized DS in the academy and served as a major catalyst for disability activism in society at large.

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As DS has evolved in recent decades, many scholars have observed the overreliance of the social model to examine and articulate the everyday experience of disability (Goodley, 2013; Shildrick, 2016; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2016). This has led to an expansion and reconceiving of DS as critical disability studies (CDS), which endeavors toward a deeper and more nuanced analysis of disability. According to Goodley (2013), “the word ‘critical’ denotes a sense of self-appraisal; reassessing where we have come from, where we are at and where we might be going” (p. 632). Shildrick (2016) further suggests that CDS seeks a more complex approach to the social effects of disability by resisting the reification of fixed categories of disability identity: “all putative categories are slippery, unfixed, permeable, deeply intersectional, intrinsically hybrid and resistant to definition” (p. 36). As such, one of the major lines of inquiry of CDS involves a critical interrogation of the social model’s reliance on binary thinking, which tends to fix identity in terms of oppositions, such as impairment/disability, medical/social, and individual/society (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2016).

Critical Disability Studies and Intersectionality

In the way that the binaries associated with DS can be considered a modernist approach to disability, a postmodern approach portends that disability is a socially constructed and performative collection of multiple intersectional identities. Prior to this view, people with disabilities were grouped together as one culture, assumed to share similar experiences and views regardless of other categories of difference such as race and gender (Goethals, De Schauwer, & Van Hove, 2015). However, Davis (2002) asserts that disability may be the identity that links all other identities, therefore, making disability the most intersectional subject, particularly as a means of understanding exclusion.

Intersectionality in relation to CDS “seeks to explore convergence and divergence of multiple markers” (Goodley, 2013, p. 636). Researchers and educators, who apply CDS to their

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work, confront the ways in which disempowerment is enacted upon different categories of marginalization within the disability community. Through a focus on the intersectionality of socially constructed identity categories, CDS establishes a strong theoretical and political alliance with other emancipatory discourses that can be found in critical race theory and feminism (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2016). Furthermore, adopting an intersectional perspective on disability can serve as a catalyst for engaging social justice pedagogy toward dismantling institutional ableism, which as Liasidou (2013) contends, “lead[s] to the oppression and marginalization of a significant percentage of the student population on the basis of arbitrary and normative definitions of ‘ability’” (p. 302).

Invisible Disabilities (Ableism, Stigma, Passing, and Un/covering)

DS encompasses the majority of scholarship on ableism, which can be defined as “stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and social oppression toward people with disabilities” (Bogart & Dunn, 2019, p. 651). Stigmatization often accompanies ableism. Stigma is a social construction that recognizes characteristics of difference that lead to subsequent devaluation of a person (Dovidio & Crocker, 2000). Roman (2009) asserts that people with invisible disabilities are particularly vulnerable to stigma: “it is commonly accepted that certain invisible impairments despite their ‘invisibility’ are highly stigmatised upon disclosure—whether the disclosure is voluntary or not, as is the case with epilepsy and mental health issues” (p. 678).

Due to experience of stigma, individuals with disabilities can feel pressured to adapt and engage in “passing” in relation to the normative, able-bodied ideal. The act of passing can be viewed as a way to integrate into an ableist society, but not without consequence. Lingsom (2008) suggests that passing is a creative and cathartic form of identity-building that is distanced from the impairment that is stigmatized. She also notes, however, that passing may lead to repression of the embodied knowledge of impairment, suggesting that these many other selves

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do not include a positive disability identity because their identity is being purposefully hidden. Although in some situations, passing can be considered an act of agency and self-determination, the act of passing for individuals with invisible disabilities can “strengthen for themselves and others the already strong cultural aversions to pain, vulnerability and difference” (Lingsom, 2008, p. 14).

Evans’s (2017) research focuses on the process of un/covering as a way for people with invisible disabilities to contest the performance of passing, and that disclosure could be powerful and transformative for individuals with invisible disabilities. She stresses that the un/covering of disability fosters disability self-identity as well as opens dialogue regarding disability experience with other disabled individuals. This coalition between people with disabilities can serve as a way to bring to light areas of institutionalized discrimination, and further serve as a means for political engagement.

Barnes (2007) states, “most disabled students are reluctant to adopt a disabled identity and only a small minority are aware of disability politics and the disabled people’s movement” (p. 142). Furthermore, Barnes asserts that hidden impairments tend to dominate higher education, maintaining that the perspectives of individuals with disabilities must be properly represented within the academy. According to Liasidou (2014), “the pervasive influence of ‘normalcy’ in higher education creates an ‘academic elitism’ that engenders negative attitudes toward disabled students” (p. 125). Rooted in ableist perspectives, this negative attitude only further reinforces instances of institutionalized discrimination for individuals with disabilities, many of who already experience disenfranchisement within higher education. In response to these issues, Liasidou (2014) suggests that disability must be positioned in a social justice framework insofar as it attends to the “accumulative effects of multiple sources of social disadvantage experienced by disabled students” (p. 124).

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Intersections of Art Education and Critical Disability Studies

In considering the intersections between the arts and DS, Wexler (2016) states:

while the arts have not been as visible in DS as they might, I argue that they offer students and teachers an examination of personal experience of disability that merits intense investigation and produces interdisciplinary forms of self-representation and self-narrative. (p. 36)

Additionally, Derby (2012) offers five pedagogical perspectives on the ways in which the arts can enhance DS: art addresses identity; art practices are social, cultural, and critical; art and visual culture can be transdisciplinary; visual culture is narrative; and art making can performatively interact with spaces as tactics. When considering the ways in which university level art education courses can incorporate a DS perspective, educators can use these same five perspectives to showcase the way the arts can be used to:

- promote an understanding of the disability culture through self-reflection,
- engage students in collaborative projects with their peers so that they may learn about and better understand difference,
- investigate how students situate themselves within their own environment,
- promote potential for dynamic storytelling between peers that can deepen social bonds and interactions, and
- engage students with their environment through interventionist tactics as a means of understanding ableism.

Taylor (2005) states that the visual arts are essential in empowering people with disabilities in order to challenge the idea of disability as deficit, and she promotes the idea that arts education provides a venue to explore issues of self-identity for people with disabilities. In addition

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to the visual arts, Derby (2011) suggests that the art making process can be combined with writing as means of contributing to the narratives about disability. This is particularly relevant to our research as it encourages a combination of visual and narrative inquiry from those within the disability community. Furthermore, Derby states “by engaging in scholarly conversation, art education and DS can continue to expand and learn from each others’ critical knowledge, enabling the pedagogical potential of an inclusive, interdisciplinary social space” (p. 106).

Methodology: Autoethnography, Duoethnography, and Trioethnography

Autoethnography is situated as a viable method for engaging self-reflection through DS toward CDS, to such an extent, as Pearson and Boskovich (2019) assert, that it “entwines lived experiences, ideologies, and sense of self to tease out alternative understandings about society and culture” (para. 19). Engelman (2020) further articulates the connection between autoethnography and the experience of disability through the potential for revealing to readers personal experiences that are often “shrouded in silence,” which can cultivate greater empathy between researcher and readers (p. 331). As such, in the past decade researchers of DS and CDS have increasingly turned to autoethnography as a method for engaging in dialogue with the lived experience of disability (Castrodale, 2017; Engleman, 2020; Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). Following Goethals, De Schauwer and Van Hove’s (2015) contention that “inclusive, reflexive and anti-essentialist approaches are required for conducting critical and intersectional DS research” (p 76), autoethnography privileges the fluid and complex lived experience of the individual, therefore, situating autoethnography as a viable method for investigating the core attributes of postmodern performativity and intersectionality in CDS.

Duoethnography sets out to create a “dialogic methodology” that is structured upon the concepts of storytelling through *currere*, an autobiographical reflection on educational experiences (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 9). Moreover, Norris and Sawyer (2012) contend that “through

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the dialogic storytelling, one can reclaim agency, authority, and authorship over one's life" (p. 35). Underlying duoethnography tenets is a strong emphasis on flexibility and fluidity of the multiple researchers/writers, and of their positions.

Trioethnography is a duoethnography with three participants. Breault, Hackler, and Bradley (2012) discuss this method within the context of its initial organization of a trioethnographic study, and asserts that a three-participant study maintains a focused and sustainable dialogue while cultivating the potential to produce transformational outcomes.

Dialogic Data

The data for our trioethnography is based on three major themes that correspond to the three research questions established at the outset of this article. Due to the space limitations within this article format, we agreed upon an approximate word limit for each of us to respond to each theme. Adhering to a trioethnography mindset, we wrote our accounts in dialogue with each other understanding that change will manifest as recognition happens, and insights and *aha!* moments occur whether sudden or gradual. The following insights are meant to engage the reader in ways that the multiple viewpoints can be understood and partially lived.

Discovering DS (Theme 1)

Alex: When I decided to go back to school for a doctoral degree, I knew that I wanted my research focus to be on the intersection of art and disability, but I had no idea how this would manifest into what would later become my dissertation. My initial inclination was to explore mental health disorders, in particular the ones that I identified with, which I referred to at the time as Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD). While investigating the literature around EBD, I started to consider different arts-based methods that would provide an avenue for ex-

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ploring my experience with these mental health disorders as they existed within the space of the art room for both children and young adults. Although I considered many different ways to visualize these experiences, I kept circling back to portraiture and autoethnography. As I continued to dig deeper into the intersections of these methods with art and disability, I discovered a dissertation written by John Derby (2009). I reached out to him and asked if we could discuss some of the theories in his work with which I profoundly resonated. As we corresponded about each other's research, he asked me why I chose to uncritically use the term EBD and he referenced some key points in DS. It was through this conversation that I experienced a total paradigm shift and began to explore the ways in which I could situate my research within the framework of DS.

Tim: I too trace my discovery of DS as a research path back to an interaction with another researcher, although for me it was through reading a personal narrative in an article. That specific "awakening" moment happened only a few years ago when, on a curious hunch, I did a Google search for "ADHD disability studies." Until that moment, I had always made an ableist assumption that ADHD and learning disabilities weren't included in DS discourses because they weren't visible disabilities. When the search came back, I was astonished to find so many results populate on my screen. One of the first results was an article in *Disability Studies Quarterly* by Jared David Berezin (2014) that recalled his experiences having ADHD in his adolescence, in which he was forced to sit at a desk that was separated from the rest of his peers' class. I remember reading this and saying to myself, "that was my experience too!" On a personal level, I felt such a connection with Bezerin's narrative account, which served to set up his discussion of DS. My way of making sense of my disability took shape

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through seeking out personal narratives of other students, teachers, artists, and researchers as a way to anchor my fluid disabled and passing-as-abled identities. Crucially, my initial reading of these personal narrative accounts (Berezin, 2014; Brown & Price, 2008; Samuels, 2003) offered another discovery insofar as many of these experiences were theorized within a DS context.

Amanda: DS became the underlying subtext in my teaching, research, and artistry after a nearly fifteen-year career in PreK–12 art education and special education. Locating my identity within DS allowed me to own the unique ontological space in which I had long dwelled but lacked the ideas to justify. I felt torn with the different definitions, assumptions, and experiences I had encountered inside and outside the disability community. I had always intuitively gravitated towards a social model of disability even though the world in which I taught and administered was governed by the medical model. During my doctoral studies, I became increasingly aware that there existed the theoretical space of DS. As such, my educational practices as a teacher coupled with this newfound awareness, would serve as a foundation for this next phase of my intellectual development. As detailed in my co-authors' narratives, I too sought to read theoretical, philosophical, and pedagogical texts to inform and support my academic, personal, and creative investigations.

Lived Experiences of Disability: Confronting Stigma and Passing (Theme 2)

Tim: My discovery of personal narratives of other researchers with disabilities was a way to build up a sense of kinship that I hadn't felt before, because as a student I was always afraid to reveal my impairment with anyone. I had known since adolescence about my learning disability, ADHD, and mental health disorder di-

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agnoses. I was given accommodations in K-12 schooling, but once I began my university studies, I stopped disclosing my diagnoses to teachers or administrators. That refusal to disclose resulted from stigmatization that I had experienced by being placed in segregated resource rooms in K-12, which later led to a fear of being separated from other students in university life. This led to my decision to hide my disabilities in my university years to the point where I did everything I could to maintain that appearance of “normalcy.” I did so by working to the point of mental and physical exhaustion in private to ensure that I kept up with my peers. I did everything I could to maintain the outward appearances of functioning as a “normal” student.

Amanda: At seventeen and a month from college, I acquired a permanent physical (and later health) disability after a drastic horse accident. Navigating college and studio spaces in a wheelchair forced me to recalculate what it meant to relate to one’s physical, intellectual, emotional, and social self. I questioned my “new” body and its way of moving through space. I withdrew from social scenarios and ceased to self-soothe through art making. I realized my artistic practice had to become my way of plugging back into both myself and the outside world. I had long held an intuitive trust in the power of art making. Physically engaging with art materials and allowing their sensory properties to inform my ways of making meaning gave me the traction I needed to start making sense of my lived experiences. I had always made art, and I knew in those spaces I felt the most present in my body and mind. As such I began to locate pieces of my old self and create new identities. As Alex and Tim discussed, I too experienced a deep reverberation between external and internal identity as it related to my projection and ownership of disability. I had made adjustments too, along with

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realizations in my own teaching practice, yet I had not applied my burgeoning ideas about DS to my personal life. I represented internally as one version of myself (disabled), and externally as another version (able-bodied or “normal”). This dichotomous way of navigating professional and personal situations felt untrue to my beliefs that all people should be allowed to live outside the bounds of binary labels. My investigation of DS led me to realize that success is measured by the person at its helm, and not by others. DS, and its application to the arts, shifted my “success gaze” from external validation to internal motivation and actualization.

Alex: I wasn't diagnosed with disabilities until I was in my mid-twenties, which isn't to say that I didn't feel the effects of my various mental health disorders, but rather that I refused to accept or acknowledge their presence. It wasn't until I started experiencing relentless psychosomatic symptoms that I started to come to terms with the fact that this could be something worth investigating. It was at this point that I sought professional help and was diagnosed with not one, but multiple mental health disorders. Even so, I still felt the stigma that was attached to the disabilities that I was diagnosed with, and I chose to hide my diagnoses from everyone, especially those who were closest to me. I spent the first twenty years of my life denying my disabilities, and perfecting the act of passing, albeit subconsciously. I continued to pass and cover my disability identity for several years following my diagnoses, which resulted in an identity that was entirely performative, until I began to engage with DS.

I find it interesting that each of us have not only dealt with stigma and institutionalized ableism, but we have also managed to maintain these same social expectations for ourselves, despite knowing the difficulties that arise when try-

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ing to operate within these social constraints. Recognizing that many of the limitations that I experienced were centered around socially constructed ideas of normalcy helped me understand that it was not my job to “fit into” these parameters but shift the way the human experience was understood as a whole. When I began to understand that disability was separate from impairment, I was able to take responsibility for my own ableist beliefs towards myself, and the power dynamics that reinforced these types of stigma.

DS as a Space for Renegotiating Our Pedagogical/Artistic Practice (Theme 3)

Amanda: The process of emerging from behind the ableist curtain was challenging. I felt deep empathy when students spoke to me about their own feelings of otherness. I realized I had to locate the language in which to convey to my students that I too knew that struggle. I hoped to facilitate a safe space in which students were open to share their own challenges, privately or publicly, and shift the perception of disability in my students’ higher education classroom. This uncovering of my own narrative as a person with hidden physical and health disabilities was finally an opportunity rather than a hobble.¹ I am now twenty-five years into my career as an artist, educator, and researcher. The artistic and academic works I have made, encountered, and embedded in my merged identity and practices have allowed me to stay sensitive, reflective, reflexive, and responsive to the needs of my students and colleagues as we co-construct our higher education environment. Every day I seek to support and encourage preservice art educators, and facilitate a student-centered environment that is open-minded, safe, and supportive of all identities and learners. Through the application of DS, and later CDS, I hope to inform a new generation of art educators that no longer

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solely rely on medical model definitions. In examining my own trajectory as an educator, artist, and researcher, I realize the importance of self-awareness and grounding in CDS theoretical and pedagogical practice.

Tim: DS served as a way to understand my disabilities, but also to build the confidence to cultivate a different path for my own research and teaching. It offered new modes of seeking institutional change rather than requiring the individual to adapt to ableist standards of normalcy. As an educator teaching studio art, that commitment for me has meant understanding that the effects of institutional ableism can slow and speed up time in very unpredictable ways for students with disabilities. Working through a DS lens has helped me to design curriculum that can take many durational forms for students. For example, some students might work very quickly and finish a major assignment in one week, while others may require more time to complete an assignment. (I was always in the latter group.) As a response to this, I structure the course so that students can create anywhere from one to three works to complete during the duration of an assignment. By the due date of the assignment, some students may present three works, while others may have one or two works to present. Importantly, I also schedule a good amount of in-class work time, which allows me to engage in continual conversation to understand each of the students' process. Through this connection I have learned to become very attuned to the different kinds of pacing needed by students, regardless as to whether they do or do not identify as disabled.

Alex: I agree that recognizing modifications to the curriculum is incredibly important. I also consider these applications in conjunction with the reshaping of classroom culture, specifically around notions of difference. During the inception of my research interests, I had the propensity to find a particular phenomenon and look

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at it under a microscope—to “zoom in” to the issues present. CDS changed my perspective in that it encouraged me to “zoom out” and look at some of the larger systems in place that facilitate the issues I have perceived. This realization, in many ways, set the stage for changing the way that I teach; by understanding that my purpose as an educator was not to mitigate the observable presence of disability in the classroom, but rather to find ways to make the environment more truly inclusive of all forms of diversity, particularly in understanding the ways in which marginalized identities intersect. Beyond inclusivity, however, I feel a responsibility to educate students on the ways that sociocultural factors can oppress and limit many types of learners. As an educator of preservice teachers, it is particularly imperative that I spend time discussing the importance of becoming a self-reflective practitioner who consider their own subjectivities, how those subjectivities shape the culture of their classroom, and how one’s curriculum can be, in some instances, disabling and/or othering.

Implications in Academia

At the outset, we (Alex, Amanda, and Tim) located potential avenues to navigate and negotiate this research by following Norris and Sawyer’s (2012) assertion that duo/trioethnographers “enter the research act with multiple and often interconnected intentions” (p. 10). With respect to our intentions, we first sought to gain insights into our own experiences with disability through a collective dialogical engagement with each other. It was through this collaborative process that we were able to recognize the complex nature of our own disability experience, particularly in the ways that our self-prescribed identities of artist, teacher, and researcher have intersected with our marginalized, and at times concealed, disability identity. Additionally, reframing our disabilities from a DS perspective allowed us to recognize the importance of dis-

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mantling the binary of dis/abled, leading us to embrace the possibility of identifying as both. In considering the emergent nature of this research, we must be candid in addressing the various aspects of self-discovery that occurred through and beyond our narrative inquiry. Even after our conversations around shared disability experience, the nuanced differences between framing these experiences through a DS or CDS lens became apparent. It is within these moments of self-reflection and revision that we recognize the lack of focus that was given to the notion of intersectionality, particularly regarding socially constructed identities, within our dialogue. Moving forward we aim to highlight the importance of intersectionality when attempting to unravel the complexity inherent in each of our individual stories, as well as the stories of those we teach. Through our co-mingling of personal narratives, we also sought to reveal our experiences with ableist practices and discourses in academic institutions. As we worked towards identifying the implications of our investigation on how disability theory has impacted our work as artists, educators, and researchers, two key concepts emerged.

The first concept is self-reflection as a pedagogical approach to destabilizing hegemonic narratives in the classroom. According to Dolmage (2017), “disability has always been constructed as the inverse or opposite of higher education” (p. 3). We advocate that the act of self-reflection on issues of diversity, such as ableism, allows a space to critically analyze our own propensity for adhering to these normative expectations, both as practitioners and facilitators of a learning space. This position, however, can be somewhat problematic. As educators, we embrace the disability justice call to action of “Nothing about Us without Us,” and yet larger institutional structures can often promote exactly the opposite by disregarding the complexity of the disability experience and the voice of the individual who embodies it.

The second concept is the validation of invisible disabilities in academia. We each have experienced the guilt and shame catalyzed by the stigma associated with invisible disabilities, and in that experience, we have each felt invalidated, in one way or another, causing us to search

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for substantiation by any means necessary. Some of us had to work tirelessly to meet ableist expectations of academic performance. Others had to keep up appearances through performative able-bodiedness and passing. Despite our best efforts to align with normative expectations, we each have received comments negating our existence as individuals with disabilities because our disabilities may be imperceptible at the time. In acknowledging the negation of recognition of invisible disabilities, we aim at representing voices that often goes unheard inside and outside the classroom setting. Furthermore, we encourage academics to be mindful of their own biases towards the ‘non-apparent’ in the classroom, and to be self-reflective about their own classroom expectations.

Suggestions for Future Research

As addressed earlier, it seems evident that many of the authors’ familiarities with stigma and ableism began within a public institution and have managed to persevere throughout our time as graduate students and even as educators. Our shared experiences of being subject to issues of institutionalized ableism has, in many ways, defined our teaching philosophy and how we approach instruction within the field of art education. CDS has offered each of us a lens through which we can interrogate our own personal experiences of disability without regarding our own disabilities as a deficit. However, it required a lot of digging and sifting through complex CDS theories before we could understand the applications that they have in our personal and professional lives. Many of these abstruse concepts could seem daunting to novice art educators and even more difficult to apply in the field. As academics, we must also consider how we can merge critical disability theory and creative practice, how this can be realistically applied within the field of art education, and the ways in which integrating a CDS framework in our own classroom addresses the systemic approach to inclusivity in higher education.

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A CDS approach to art education would require revisiting what it means to be inclusive in the art classroom. In acknowledging the ways that DS has reshaped current practice in higher education, art educators should consider creating a curriculum that recognizes the overlapping inequities students can face from an intersectional perspective for disabled and nondisabled students alike. This would require adopting a multifaceted, multimodal, multidisciplinary approach that values the lived experience of the individual and utilizes this embodied knowledge as a dialogic tool for addressing inequality in the art classroom.

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Notes

¹"Hobble" is an equestrian term for a piece of equipment strapped to a horse's leg hampering movement and dominating free will. This co-researcher uses equine terms and images in her scholarly and artistic practice given her lifelong immersion in that community, and the equine-related source of her physical disability. This metaphor applies to Alexandra Allen, Amanda Godfrey-Smith, Timothy Smith