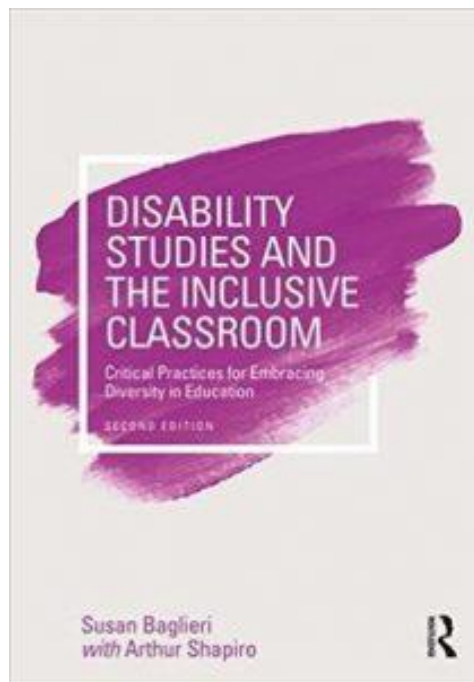


***Review of Disability Studies and the Inclusive Classroom:
Critical Practices for Embracing Diversity in Education.***

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The recently released second edition of *Disability Studies and the Inclusive Classroom: Critical Practices for Embracing Diversity in Education* makes a significant contribution to the growing community of scholars who seek to make pedagogical practices more inclusive. The field of disability studies in education aims to disrupt the ableist logic that has upheld normative expectations in both special education and inclusion practices for many years. This pernicious enforcement of ableist logic interferes with the success of inclusion practices (Allen, 2008; Danforth, 2014; Smith, 2010; Ware 2003). Baglieri consolidates several decades of theory and research from the fields of both disability studies and special education. In addition to providing a survey of these fields, the text notes the intersectionality between race, gender, sexuality, class, and abilities.

Baglieri successfully captures the essential elements of disability studies in education for a wider audience of readers. The need for such a text can be seen in a quote by Corbett Joan Otoole (2015), a disability activist and scholar, who claims that “nearly every article about disability in mainstream media is by nondisabled people for nondisabled people. These articles focus on the imagined distress at the losses that will occur if nondisabled people become disabled and almost never on the systems that create the perceived losses” (p. 14). The deficit narrative around disability is so established within school districts that K-12 teachers and administrators rarely consider the potential of differing abilities. In turn, most inclusive educators encourage students with differing abilities to function in the “normate” manner like that of the general education students. This approach to inclusive teaching often excludes students with differing abilities and establishes normative expectations that limit the potential for learning amongst all students in the classroom. Baglieri’s text takes a strong stand against such harmful pedagogical practices.

Typical discussions about inclusive education in the K-12 classroom focus on accommodations for students with Individualized Education Program (I.E.P.) and 504s; however, Baglieri redefines inclusive education as an approach to teaching that aligns with the values of disability studies and the disability rights movement. As a result, inclusive education underscores “disability and disabled persons’ experiences as distinctive and productive worldviews through which to engage in examination and critique of culture in order to post problems and possibilities” (p. 5). The experiences of disabled individuals reveal how society creates barriers that exclude and ignore many groups of people. Though difficult, locating these societal barriers is the first step to successful inclusive practices. Creating inclusive schools and societies “requires us to contend with histories and beliefs about ability and disability that have long led to exclusion” (p. 3). Examining such histories and beliefs opens up the inclusive classroom to become a space that acknowledges the marginalization of many groups of people. Baglieri explains, “inclusive education [...] encompasses the experiences of students with disabilities, but is not exclusive to them” (p. 5). The text assures that inclusive classrooms provide an opportunity for all students to feel more accepted within the learning community.

Baglieri aligns inclusive education with critical pedagogy and claims, “inclusive education is a process, or project, that emanates from a critique of schooling that recognizes that injustices experienced by children with disabilities are rooted in systemic problems that are also experienced by many others” (p.7). This concept of inclusive education does not remain focused solely on the experiences of the disabled students. Rather, it encourages teachers to consider how systemic injustice occurs across many differing groups of students.

The text is broken into three different sections. They start with a broad exploration of the history of

disability in America and lead to a focused examination of specific methods to implement in the inclusive education classroom.

Part one contains four chapters that focus on disability in society and situates the definition of Inclusive Education within the larger Disability Studies movement. As a Ph.D. Candidate who teaches Secondary English methods at my university, I was particularly interested in this section, as historical perspectives on disabilities provide an essential foundation for inclusive education and often get under-examined in special education courses. The first chapter, “What is Inclusive Education?”, outlines five differing tenets of inclusive education. Classrooms that strive to create inclusive communities must: provide opportunities to engage in meaningful learning through diverse experiences; value and respect diverse ways of knowing; embrace difference in self and others; support intellectual pursuit; value education as agency. The following chapter, “Perspectives on Disability”, introduces key terms involved with disability studies. First, Baglieri contrasts the dominant models around disability: the medical model and the social model. From there, she explores the varying euphemisms used to label differing abilities as well as the differences between people-first and identity first language. Baglieri stresses the importance of language choices used to describe a person when she asserts, “language is both descriptive and political. Words are imbued with meaning derived from history, context, and paradigms of disability” (p. 32).

The final two chapters of part one counter each other. Chapter three, “Cultures of Exclusion,” situates disability stereotypes in a historical context and reveals how many of these stereotypes evolved and persist through ableism. After asserting the roots of exclusion, chapter four, “Moving Toward Cultures of Inclusion,” examines varying ways that

communities overcome a deficit approach to differing abilities. The chapter begins with a concise account of the evolution of the disability rights movement and concludes with an exciting description of the developing concept of disability culture and the arts. One who is unfamiliar with these movements will likely find them informative. Indeed, this section provides an essential foundation for any educator who seeks to enact inclusive teaching.

Part two turns towards schools. Here, Baglieri examines how differing organizations have defined disability. Chapter five, “Conceptualizing Disability in Schools,” offers an overview of the definitions of disability used by the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (I.D.E.I.A.). The chapter provides a detailed account of the evolution of terms that define “soft disabilities.” Though Baglieri dedicates much space to these terms as defined by I.D.E.I.A., she stresses that “some proponents of the social model of disability argue that *all* diagnoses and perceptions of impairment are ultimately subjective” (p. 88). This chapter makes clear that concepts of a “soft” disability are complex and often reveal the differences between the medical and social models of disability. There is a suggestion that I.D.E.I.A. leads schools to apply a medical model of disability to diagnose students. In turn, overuse of these terms may perpetuate a deficit thinking around differing abilities in schools.

After examining the established approach to disability in schools, chapter six, “Disabilities and Initial Approaches for Creating Inclusive Environments,” outlines “starting points and basics for beginning professional inclusive practice” that push against the barriers of the medical model (p. 103). This chapter highlights the strengths of varying disabilities: physical, visual, auditory, speech, and neurological. Rather than remain rooted in the definition of terms, this chapter explores the potential of all differences. In addition to describing

differing disabilities, Baglieri outlines pedagogical strategies, called “Common-Sense Responses,” that lead to inclusive teaching. For example, there are seven common-sense practices for teachers working with students identified with emotional disturbances or behavior disorders: practice and teach to others acceptance, tolerance, and empathy; accept, teach, and encourage many ways of communicating; slow down the pace of talk, pause between topics, and take turns; model and teach respectful communication practices; be aware of and reduce environmental barriers to positive social interaction; structure class activities and routines for positive group interaction; and practice respectful and meaningful individual interventions for undesirable interactions.

Finally, part three contains four chapters dedicated to curriculum and inclusive education. Each chapter offers specific curricular and pedagogical approaches to achieve a more inclusive classroom. Chapter seven, “Approaches to Student Diversity,” posits four pedagogical orientations for fostering inclusive education: an individual approach to difference; pluralism as a social practice; diversity as a curricular practice; and pedagogies for liberation. Baglieri explains, “in perceiving these patterns, inclusive education may not be seen as an additive process of stacking up different ways to attend to student diversities, but in the possibility of deconstructing the barriers common to all” (p. 141). Baglieri stresses that these orientations demand that the teacher shift their approach to teaching in three major ways. First, a successful inclusive educator must be a student of diversity and equity who understands that all knowledge is partial. Then, the teacher must pay close attention to student and family needs in developing curriculum. Finally, the teacher must value pedagogy and curriculum as an active practice of inclusivity.

The chapters which follow offer suggestions of how teachers may successfully develop inclusive

practices. Chapter eight, “Collaborative Planning and Practice,” outlines the many collaborative approaches to inclusive practices. Baglieri encourages the teacher to collaborate equally with school professionals and student families. The chapter contains suggestions for fostering positive relationships to support student learning. Chapter nine, “Instructional Design for Inclusive Education,” presents a number of ways that teachers organize activities of learning and teaching. This chapter begins with a section that suggests how teachers may resist normative practices; there is no “normal” way to live and learn. The chapter then considers an array of theories that align with inclusive education. Baglieri briefly explores constructivist theory, then delves deeper into Universal Design for Learning (U.D.L.), which aims to remove barriers of access for students and lead to more flexible teaching. This chapter leads the reader through the steps of employing U.D.L. while developing a unit of instruction that is inclusive. While chapter seven focuses more on methods, the final chapter, “Designing Curriculum to Account for Disability,” examines how teachers may redesign curriculum to foster inclusivity. Baglieri suggests that the study of disability can enhance many areas of the curriculum. The chapter outlines examples of differing subject areas in which disability perspectives naturally fit: analyzing film, analyzing non-fiction texts, and media studies.

Though part three offers important information on UDL, it is a bit reductive in describing inclusive methods. At times, the descriptions of *doing* inclusive education are too theoretical and seem very regulated. Students who have never been active teachers may find it difficult to visualize *how* to implement these steps and may be too overwhelmed by these demands. Still, Baglieri’s text has proven to be a powerful resource in my English Education methods courses and may invite others to consider how to take steps towards inclusive teaching in their own classrooms as well.

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