Anti-oppressive Education and Disability: towards an anti-ableist pedagogy?
August 2013
This paper is part of the ‘White Rose Studies of Ableism’ panel and emerging collaboration:

http://whiterosestudiesofableism.wordpress.com/about/

This paper seeks to connect theories of ‘anti-oppressive education’ with Disability Studies perspectives.

Please do not quote from this presentation. Please see penultimate slide for details of publication upon which this presentation is based. Many thanks!
Key definitions

Pedagogy: *that which informs teaching and from which curriculum emerges* (Ellsworth 2005).

Anti-oppressive education = a *range* of approaches concerned with challenging oppression.
Disability Equality in English Primary Schools Project

Explored:

a) Primary-age non-disabled children’s knowledge about, and attitudes towards, disability and the lives of disabled people.

b) The role English primary schools playing in challenging attitudes towards disabled people.

Key findings:

- Non-disabled children enact cultural schemas that sustain their privileged position and subordinate disabled people.

- Schools could do more to address the issue of disability within their teaching and learning activities.

Acknowledgement:

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Example mind-map drawn by a non-disabled child aged 1-11 years.

Evidence of work to be done!
Publications from DEEPS Project include...


UNCRPD

UK context: Disability Equality Duty & Public Sector Equality Duty
INTERCONNECTED & INTERDEPENDENT
• Propose a **typology** of possible approaches

• Bringing together an existing typology developed by **Kevin Kumashiro** (2000) and three strands of theorising in Disability Studies
Underlying assumption: discrimination results from ‘social biases’.

• Challenge stigmatisation that leads to discrimination and internalized oppression.
• Understand that disability is socially constructed and contestable
• Raise awareness of lives and celebrate achievements of disabled people.
• Challenge stereotypes.
• Encourage students to see ‘person first’ before the label.
• Teach about the role of the disability movement in claiming civil rights.

Pedagogy might appeal to proponents of the ‘US social constructionist’ approach to disability.
Essentialism.

‘Spotlighting’ disabled children.

Is prejudice really due to ignorance?

Celebrating difference can create new stereotypes.

Risks sentimentalised narratives.

Leaves self/Other binary in tact.

Pedagogy of cordial relations not transformation.

Risks failing to illuminate, critique and transform ‘the norm’ against which disabled people are judged.
Underlying assumption: inequality is socially created. Social structures (primarily of CAPITALISM!) determine relations between social groups. Erasing ‘mistaken attitudes’ is not enough.

- Critical pedagogy.
- Encourages students to recognise invisible systems conferring privilege.
- Conscientization (amongst oppressed); unpacking privilege (amongst oppressors).
- Students to ‘root out’ structures of disability oppression.
- Reject super-cripple narrative. Reject charitable response.

Pedagogy might appeal to advocates of socio-structural perspectives on disability.
• Is this pedagogy in itself ideology?
• Not all members of same group have the same or even similar experiences with oppression.
• Oppression = complex & situated.
• Binary oppositions e.g. Oppressor/Oppressed = problematic.
• Expects/demands exercise of ‘voice’ in particular ways – disabling?
• Why should the powerful group (non-disabled people) WANT to disempower itself?
• Rationalist and cognitive approach neglects the psychoanalytical dimensions of oppression.
Underlying assumption: oppression is produced discursively.

• ‘Post-critical-pedagogy’ – various versions.

• A disability-focused version of this pedagogy might help students to:
  a) recognise and analyse ‘ableist relations’;
  b) recognise intersectionality;
  c) interrogate disability discourse and labour to change citational practices;
  d) question their readings of normalcy and Otherness, understanding that the categories ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ are interdependent and unstable.

Might appeal to those who favour post-conventional approaches to theorising disability.
Unveiling the non-disabled stance (Linton 1998)

Disrupting compulsory ablebodiedness (McRuer 2006)

“Crippin’ the human”? Putting impairment back into the human?

Questioning conditions that privilege ‘normative’ ways of being (Campbell n.d., 5)

Problematizing ‘the hegemony of ableist sensibilities’ (Hughes 2012, 67)

Acknowledging vulnerabilities of the embodied self (Beckett 2006)

Transforming negative assessments of bodily ‘impairment’ to positive account

Making anomalous body a crucial site of positive resistance (Goodley and Lawthom 2013)

Rejecting compulsion to emulate the norm (Campbell 2008, para.4)
Critiques & Dilemmas

• It may discomfort the privileged! (oh dear...)
• Is it at risk of being “academicised”?! “Excessive social-theoretical practice?”
• Does it underplay structural constraints (set by capitalism)?

Suggest need to be wary of above, but these issues can be addressed without dismissing this type of approach!
Allows for pedagogies that encourage students to:

- critique the ‘pathologies of non-disablement’ (Hughes 1999, 2007);

- devise new (positive and non-oppressive) ways of thinking and acting about themselves and others;

This pedagogy may address some of the difficulties with earlier forms of anti-oppressive pedagogy including essentialism, economic determinism and the failure to engage with ‘affect’.
For further detail/discussion of arguments made within this paper, please see my article in the *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*:


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References


