Why is Special Education So Afraid of Disability Studies?

Analyzing Attacks of Disdain and Distortion from Leaders in the Field

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AS A CAREER-LONG SPECIAL EDUCATOR who identifies as a Disability Studies (DS) scholar, I walk the line between working within education while knowing there is so much more knowledge about *disability and education* that special education has historically offered. As a doctoral student, I was introduced to the work of critical special educator Ellen Brantlinger (1997) who openly critiqued how prominent researchers within the field of special education served as epistemological gatekeepers within the field's major publications. Subsequently, I discovered the work of other critical scholars who persuasively argued against limitations of special education's: mechanistic ways of conceptualizing disability and implementing instruction (Heshusius, 1989); reification of human differences through organizational structures (Skrtic, 1991); and use of scientism to make authoritative declarations of knowledge, claims said to be superior to qualitative, interpretive, or other methodological traditions (Gallagher, 1998). In retrospect, these critical scholars paved the way for the growth of Disability Studies in Education (DSE), as they sought new ways to consider questions such as: What constitutes a disability? According to whom, and based upon what evidence? Where and how should students identified as dis/abled be taught? And, what are possibilities for research on *education and disability* without the automatic historical default of special education?

As a contributor to, and consumer of, research in both fields of special education and DSE, over the last decade I have worked with colleagues to dialogue about the cleft encompassing many epistemological, ontological, and methodological differences (Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011; Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011; Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008; Connor, Gallagher & Ferri, 2011; Ferri, Gallagher, & Connor, 2011; Connor, Cavendish, Gonzalez, & Jeanne-Pierre, 2019). At the same time, prominent scholars in the field of special education have pushed back upon pluralizing perspectives by articulating the same core idea: special education should be unequivocally defined as scientific. Unfortunately, this situation signifies that multiple ways of thinking about, and responding to, disabilities are not engaged within substantive ways befitting of public academic debate. Instead, alternative perspectives are side-stepped, ignored altogether, or derided.

As a critical special educator and DSE-identified scholar, I am dissatisfied that my professional field of special education remains insular and out of touch with other academic fields. This has led me to wonder why the field of special education consistently demonstrates hostility toward healthy scholarly engagement and persistently attacks other ways of knowing besides a scientific approach, leading to the question I seek to answer in this article: *In what ways do recent widespread and sustained critiques of Disability Studies reveal both the restrictiveness and vulnerabilities in the field of Special Education?*

Theoretical Framework

The lens through which I choose to analyze recent writings of prominent special education scholars (henceforth referred to as "the authors") is composed of a DSE theoretical framework with a *justification of bias* in this particular analysis (Babbit, 2001). By recognizing bias in scholarship as a strength rather a weakness, an asset rather than a liability, Babbit underscores how "there is power in the control of the story" (p. 297). To this end, the purpose of DSE is "to promote the understanding of disability from a social model perspective drawing on social, cultural, historical, discursive, philosophical, literary, aesthetic, artistic, and other traditions to challenge medical, scientific, and psychological models of disability as they relate to education" (Disability Studies in Education Special Interest Group 143 (DSESIG), 2019, n.p.). The tenets of DSE are to engage in research, policy, and action that:

- contextualize disability within political and social spheres
- privilege the interest, agendas, and voices of people labeled with disability/disabled people
- promote social justice, equitable and inclusive educational opportunities, and full and meaningful access to all aspects of society for people labeled with disability/disabled people
- assume competence and reject deficit models of disability.

It is my contention to claim the *value of bias* in responding to the field of special education's critique of DS, as positions and philosophies that have consistently been overlooked, deemed less important, and summarily rejected within the field of special education deserve to be foregrounded. In engaging special education in its critiques of DS by using a DSE lens, I illustrate core questions within Curriculum Studies that include: What knowledge is of most worth? Who decides? Who benefits? And, reflect upon the pertinent question: Who makes the rules? (Kumashiro, 2012). I return to these questions in the Discussion section of this article.

Data

The data consist of six professional articles published in established journals of special education or a closely related field. Criteria for selection included each article: (1) rigorously champions a Scientific framework as the singular knowledge base of special education, (2) rejects knowledge based upon the social model of disability, and (3) vociferously critiques alternative ways of knowing within the disciplines of Disability Studies/DSE (See Table 1 found at the end of the article). For purposes of accurate referencing, the six articles are referred to throughout the remainder of this article as A1 through A6.

Methodological Approach

First, my interest was piqued by these articles as, when initially reading them all informally as a consumer, I was struck by their repetitive nature in terms of content, tone, and structure—motivating me to consider a formal analysis as a researcher. Second, in undertaking another read to seek a formal analysis of patterns, I determined that all articles contained three elements: (1) a harsh critique of the social model of disability, frequently distorting and rejecting its contributions, (2) a defense of scientific knowledge as the "true" basis of special education, and (3) a generalized tone of fear, anxiety, and anger. Third, having established these elements, another analysis of all articles was undertaken to review and code for related sub-categories. To facilitate this, a grid containing two columns was created for each article. The first column was labeled "Possible Codes/Connections to be Made" and dedicated to generating notes in regard to the three elements. The second column was reserved for quotations that substantiated the points and connections made. Fourth, once the information from all articles was engaged with and data entered into grids, these were all read *across* to consolidate codes under the three major elements. By using this process of analysis, data were "segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation" (Grbich, 2007, p. 21). Additionally, linked to element number two, I also paid particular attention to any *rationale* articulated for rejecting the knowledge claims of DS/DSE. In sum, I sought to answer the research question using a systematic process of analysis and by employing grounded theory, a deductive approach, to generate knowledge (Holton & Walsh, 2016). Echoing Charmaz's (2010) claim, "The grounded theorist's analysis tells a story about people, social processes, and situations" (p. 196), my goal was to explore the ideas of people, the social processes of academic gatekeeping, and the current situation of knowledge in the field of special education. I did this because, as a large body of diverse research has developed over the last two decades about *disability and education* outside of the special education paradigm, such a body of legitimate knowledge cannot be entirely dismissed by those within the field of special education. Therefore, I also searched for instances of contradictions in the authors' own assertions about a using a science-only and, therefore, culture-free approach to researching disability. Subsequently, in the following sections I analyze excerpts from the authors' work that correspond to the three elements initially identified above, along with contradictions that undermine their own rationale.

Characteristic 1: (Mis)characterizations of the Social Models

According to the authors, scholars identifying as social constructionists "share an antirealistic view of both the living and the social world" (A1, p. 373), possessing a "hostile ideological attitude towards special education" (A1, p. 380). In sum, they believe that "the social model of disability represents an extreme form of cultural determinism, because it denies the role of biology and is thus opposed to the actual experience of many people with disabilities" (A3, p.

452). However, there is no *one* social model, as the field of DS has acknowledged the existence of several, urging scholars to define which one they are using (Gabel & Peters, 2010). Moreover, much work has been done within DS to acknowledge biological pain along with the need to retain—and value—medicalized aspects of disability (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001). The purpose of DS is, therefore, not to denigrate or ignore biology and medicine, but rather to allow different conceptualizations of disability to exist simultaneously and "contextualize disability within political and social" realms (DSESIG, 2019, n.p.).

The authors take issue with the notion of even contemplating disability as a social construction, linking it to "moral depravity" (A1, p. 374), expanding, "for some of today's social constructionists potentially anything is socially constructed, from the taste of honey to the Holocaust, quarks, and the planet Mars" (A1, p. 374), a refrain that is repeated almost word for word in several articles. Continuing in a demeaning tone, the authors write, "The Zeitgeist includes, apparently, the notion that theorizing about disability by recounting personal experience (rather than rigorous scientific study) gives strengths to one's ideas" (A1, p. 368). Here they allude to a goal of DSE, that is, to "privilege the interest, agendas, and voices of people labeled with disability/disabled people" (DSESIG, 2019, n.p.).

Interestingly, the authors challenge the validity of disability as a "minority model" akin to other markers of identity such as race, gender, and sexual orientation. They charge, "Despite the fact that disability is part of human diversity, it is not just another difference and cannot be equated with social disadvantage" (A3, p. 446), cautioning that "the negative consequences of a monolithic 'identity' or 'civil rights' political strategy are plenty" (A2, p. 145). This position stands in contrast to DSE scholars who seek to "promote social justice, equitable and inclusive educational opportunities, and full and meaningful access to all aspects of society for people labeled with disability/disabled people" (DSESIG, 2019, n.p.). We also see that special education leaders reject the idea that a group or class of people defined by themselves do not encounter social oppression, thereby indicating non-acknowledgment of disabled people's realities.

The authors use phrases such as, "the hyperbole of phrasing used by proponents of the social model" (A3, p. 451), while demonstrating what they accuse others of. For example, they write, "Social constructionism has resulted in claims that dyslexia is a gift" (A4, p. 147). Indeed, some individuals with dyslexia (and other disabilities for that matter) *do* think how their brain works is a gift because it allows them to view and understand the world in different ways, calling upon creativity and self-reliance. Various individuals such as activists Jonathan Mooney (2008) and David Flink (2014), researchers such as Sally Shaywitz (2003), and Oscar-winning documentary filmmakers Susan and Allan Raymond (2011) have all demonstrated the benefits of thinking outside of the box/lines/deficit-based definitions used within special education. Of course, all disabilities do not equate as gifts, yet *some* may be considered so. In writing, "But disability is not a 'gift' that anyone with an accurate moral sense would give, celebrate, or fail to try to change in the direction of greater ability and less disability" (A6, p. 52), the authors claim a form of moral high ground. Nonetheless, they appear unconvincing due to an unwillingness to engage with the lived experiences of disabled people who have stated with reason, "Nothing about us without us" (Charlton, 1998, p. 1).

Although authors argue how complex disability is as a concept and seek recognition for specific categories within its breadth, they also invoke a "universal" understanding when dismissing the possibility of disability as a gift, stating:

> This view reminds us of the outrageously cruel argument that various medical conditions (e.g. diabetes, cerebral palsy) and diseases (e.g. human immunodeficiency virus, dementias, poliomyelitis or polio, small pox, measles, cardiopulmonary disease) are part of normal human variation (they are, in fact) so they should be celebrated, not changed or perverted. (A6, p. 53)

Of course scholars in DS/DSE would agree that painful *medical conditions* should be cured. However, of interest is that "soft" disabilities that rely upon subjective judgment, such as learning disabilities, speech and language impairments, emotional and behavioral disorders, and intellectual disabilities—making up approximately 85% of students identified as disabled—can be seen as "school-based" disabilities, actual non-medical forms of human variation.

Characteristic 2: Science as the Only Basis for Special Education

According to Kauffman (2011), "for special education, the really radical idea is putting education on a scientific footing" (p. 39). Other authors concur, stating

> Traditionally, special education has largely based its practices on scientific research: replicable empirical evidence and logical thinking. However, recent decades have seen an abandonment of science and rejection of objectivity as exemplified in such philosophies as postmodernism, post structuralism, and social construction…. Special education must decide whether science or an "alternative" way of thinking about disabilities and education best describes its identity. (A5, p. 146)

In claiming a scientific foundation and history, the authors present their narrative as a fait accompli. Considering the positives of a scientific grounding, the authors assert special education: "has produced instructional methods for atypical students and, above all, has empirically validated their effectiveness" (A1, p. 379). They also state, "In our view, today's scientific constructs (e.g. scientific definitions of specific disabilities) in the case of autism, blindness, deafness, physical disabilities, and speech or language impairments have legitimate factual reference and are approximations of scientific truth" (A3, p. 444). Interestingly, non-physical and non-sensory disabilities such as learning disabilities, behavior disorders, and intellectual disabilities, are not claimed with such specificity.

The authors write, "Disability must be seen for what it is—a limitation, an inability to do or extraordinary difficulty in doing what most people of similar age can do without the same difficulty" (A6, p. 58), reifying the default conceptualization of disability as a deficit. DSE scholars, in contrast, seek "Supporting disabled students in the development of a positive disability identity" (DSESIG, 2019, n.p.). The authors also add, "we find denial of disability, the idea of celebrating disability, or trying in some way to disparage the idea of 'normal' to be regressive and cruel to those with disabilities" (A6, p. 59), opposing DSE's mission to challenge the concept of normalcy as damaging and oppressive. They conclude that special education should, therefore, "unabashedly embrace a scientific viewpoint and reject other points of view that are not as helpful" (A4, p. 150).

Of note, here, is a key difference between special education and DSE. Unlike special education, DSE "Welcomes interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the phenomenon of disability, e.g. with educational foundations, special education, etc." (DSESIG, 2019, n.p.). The interdisciplinary focus on disability is not reciprocal for traditional special education authors who seek engagement only within the domain of science. The authors note, "Apparently, disability studies are not homogenous, and can have pockets of science," but soon follow up with, "Nevertheless, DS is colored by strong nonscientific and even antiscientific trends" (A5, p. 149), implying DSE critical special educators are against science altogether, rather than simply acknowledging science's limitations.

Characteristic 3: Fear, Anxiety, and Anger

According to the authors, the field of special education is "Under Siege" (A1, p. 379). Throughout all six articles, the authors write of special education's decline and possible extinction if a return to scientific-only thinking cannot be achieved. For example, they share:

> We fear that these new ideas—the constructionist model, which has now become orthodoxy—will not be a liberating force. In fact, the constructionist model of disability may contribute not only to a zealous pursuit of inclusion at the expense of effective instruction but also to the demise of special education. (A1, p. 368)

Such fear is felt as a tangible loss on many fronts, revealed in the comment, "Special education is losing its identity—its visibility, distinctiveness, budget, and basic functions are all at risk" (A4, p. 139). The blame has arisen internally, caused by special education scholars who have different perspectives from traditionalists like themselves, stating:

> It is highly unusual for professionals within their discipline to so vehemently consider it harmful. Certainly other disciplines such as psychology, medicine, and law have criticized certain of their practices and tried to improve them, but never to portray their entire enterprise as racist, ineffective, and harmful. (A4, p. 140)

Dissenting scholars have, therefore, fueled "The movement toward special education's extinction" (A4, p. 140), creating a crisis. Hence, "special education is at a crossroad…. Its very identity is at risk, and its fate will depend on the direction it takes" (A4, p. 140).

Returning to a pure scientific identity, they urge, is the answer because special education must "be reconstructed on the basis of sound science, not alternative narratives or nonscientific ways of knowing that do not help students with disabilities learn all they can" (A4, p. 139). Tying disability to the Disability Rights Movements has been an error as "Portraying disabilities as demanding the same civil rights remedy as other differences will surely stymie efforts to prevent and remediate disabilities and do justice to people with disabilities" (A5, p. 7). Furthermore, the goal of full inclusion is seen as unrealistic, a form of extremism because "insisting on a single placement (only general education, in which one may offer different levels of support) is extremism that may well lead to the dissolution of special education as an identifiable entity" (A6, p. 59). While a discussion is merited about the *goal* of full inclusion and the inevitable exceptions that can occur, the authors' distancing of special education from the Disability Rights Movement is concerning. Yet, they are clear on their position: "In sum, the disability movement must not be built on false arguments that ignore realities; instead, it needs scientific truths" (A3, p. 456). When disability is viewed in non-scientific ways (social, cultural, historical, political, etc.), the authors claim it is an attempt to be "chic," writing:

> we are concerned that disabilities themselves may become seen as chic by too many people if we are not careful in the ways they are portrayed and attitudes toward them are expressed. In fact, some forms of disability chic might themselves be seen as a kind of EBD [Emotional Behavioral Disorder] or mental aberration that should be treated by mental health service providers. (A6, p. 50)

Such comments are deeply disturbing in that the authors ascribe disability, without using their own scientific criteria, to scholars and activists who disagree with them, alleging "a kind of" emotional disturbance that is actually *only* based upon scholarly disagreement. It is also—ironically and sadly—using disability as a form of name-calling, an ableist act that asserts a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority.

Contradictions

Charging a lack of rigor in non-positivist research, the authors' own arguments often betray noticeable contradictions. For example, a major area is the concept of disability being used to cover so many different conditions—be they physical, sensory, cognitive, or emotional. The authors seek to harness the definition of disability in scientific terms, yet admit its elusiveness by writing, "Disability, in the singular, is useful because we can use a unique term to describe any severe restriction of lack of ability to perform a usual, critical activity of human beings" (A1, p. 375), and then immediately stating, "However, disability is a problematic category for scientific purposes, including education, simply because it constitutes a very abstract and general concept" (A1, p. 375). The category is problematic because "the generality, vagueness, and complexities of the notion of disability do not contribute to a general agreement on its definition. Instead, the general term generates several misconceptions and confusions in science" (A1, p. 376). The scientific "truths" of disability appear not to be clear-cut, as witnessed in the following statement:

> The identification of a disability depends on judgment, and judgment means that one arrives at a cutpoint on continuously distributed abilities. Inevitably social values are linked to the judgement of disabilities. However, not making such a judgment precludes the kind of assistance we consider necessary for social justice. (A3, p. 447)

Here, the authors state the need to measure humans against a statistically average person, in other words, one who has been socially constructed as "normal." They also concede such measurement cannot be achieved without interpretation and is, essentially, a *judgment*. In other words, the identification of disabilities is, at least in part, subjective. Put differently by the authors, "Any conceptualization of disability, whether physical or mental, is inevitably value-laden" (A3, p. 447).

Having vigorously rejected the concept of disability as a social construct, the authors consistently contradict themselves. In one instance they write, "disabilities are sealed within their social context. And many concepts about disabilities, whether involving low-incidence disabilities (e.g. severe intellectual disabilities) or high incidence disabilities (e.g. mild intellectual disabilities, specific learning disability) have socially constructed aspects" (A3, p. 449). In another instance, the authors note that:

> Intellectual disabilities, autism, and EBD may be at least partially intrinsic, but they are also socially mediated. It is not accidental that they have been classified and reclassified, defined and redefined according to the status of scientific knowledge and social values. (A3, p. 449)

They also confess, “Regrettably, the truth is that there are still uncrossed boundaries, especially in the case of cognitive and behavioral disabilities” (A3, p. 450), indicating their own unsure footing against claims to the contrary.

The measuring of humans to determine disability is also alluded to throughout the authors’ articles. For example, they write:

> The line that defines disability is necessarily arbitrary, arguable, and a matter of judgment based on the best data available, as is true for establishing a cut point in any continuously distributed variable…. Moreover, what is considered a disability can change over time and with particular circumstances. For example, the recognition of mental illness has varied greatly over time. (A6, p. 49)

In these slippages from “pure” science, the authors raise questions of *who* draws the lines of determining disability, and *how* and when disability occurs. Ironically, the authors’ acknowledgement of social, cultural, and historical influences appears to consistently undercut their own arguments. As a reader, I am left wondering: Which parts of disability are socially constructed, and which parts are not? How do/can we know? According to whom? The authors reluctantly admit being unable to conceptualize or discuss disability in a culture-free context and attempt to *sometimes* acknowledge social consideration as necessary. They assert:

> what is needed is a unified and multidimensional understanding of disabilities, clarifying the relationship among the biological and cultural individuals and social, psychological and behavioral, intrinsic and external factors affecting the lives of people without eliminating one of these levels of analysis. (A3, p. 454)

This sentiment is very much in line with the philosophy of DS/DSE and offers a glimmer of hope. However, the authors then immediately revert to the dominant narrative of science being the centripetal force and default position of special education, writing, “In our view, the disability movement can be based on the sound ground of scientific theories and gain a lot through this meeting of biological and social explanations” (A3, p. 454). This position is echoed in their urging that, “Disabilities must be seen as *socialized biological conditions* (defined as social and technological mediations of biological features)…and as cultural factors and differences as well” (A5, p. 3). All of these instances symbolize the inability of special education to be culture free, despite arguments to the contrary.

Discussion

Let us return to the original question posed in this paper: *In what ways do recent* *widespread and sustained critiques of Disability Studies reveal both the restrictiveness and vulnerabilities in the field of Special Education?* In order to respond, I also invoke core questions within Curriculum Studies to contemplate these interrelated domains: What knowledge is of most worth? Who decides? Who makes the rules? Who benefits?

What knowledge is of most worth?

What can be seen in the six articles analyzed is a coordinated effort to discredit DS and re-establish claims for a science-only based field of special education. But just as, from its inception, special education never functioned entirely as scientific-based profession, it cannot resurrect what was once imagined to be its future. Too much has happened. The Disability Rights Movement, the growth of DS as an inter-disciplinary field, and the emergence of DSE as a thriving sub-field have given rise to real alternatives to the proposed monopoly of science-only conceptualizations of disability.

Who decides what knowledge is of most worth?

I was drawn to writing this article because, while finding the field of special education well intended, it is also limiting in its conceptualization of—and response to—disability. Special education's journals, past and present, are almost exclusively scientific-based, positivist, and quantitative in design, filled with inaccessible language that does not resonate with many teachers. For two decades now, I have followed writings in DS/DSE and Special Education and am representative of educators who navigate the space within and between *both* worlds, working in the structure and apparatus of special education, yet having a DS disposition that views considering disability through a plurality of perspectives as a strength. Contrary to claims made by the authors, DS welcomes engagement with science while offering a critique if it is the only model used to understand all disabilities. As evidence, the tenets of DSE includes the statement, "Disability studies welcomes inter-disciplinary collaborations, including with science" (DSESIG, 2019, n.p.).

Who makes the rules about knowledge?

This analysis has foregrounded ways in which the field of special education exerts forms of gatekeeping regarding ideas about disability. While the arguments made in these articles contain valuable points that are ripe for more debate, they also lack rigor, are saturated with sarcasm, and end by insisting upon an uncritical adherence to scientism. However, such reasoning means the field of special education always leads itself into an epistemological cul-de-sac. The lack of tolerance for diverse opinions actually acts as a form of censorship, forcing many critical special educators to publish in non-special education journals. Furthermore, painting accomplished scholars with whom one disagrees as fad followers and/or deranged is an act that willfully dismisses their ideas and conveniently sidesteps serious engagement expected of academics. The renewed attempt by traditional scholars to define knowledge about disability and education while eschewing social models that feature historical, social, and cultural understandings has been given prime space among special education journals, yet DSE scholars have been turned down in their request to write rejoinders *in those same journals* (Mastropieri & Scruggs, personal communication). Again, this active blocking of diversity symbolizes how the field of special education seeks to exert an epistemological monopoly on disability.

Who benefits from knowledge?

Whether self-defining as a special educator, critical special educator, or DSE-grounded educator, all professionals share the common ground of understanding disability and the desire to best educate students with disabilities. However, who benefits from the use of knowledge about disability and education varies enormously. While many achievements have been documented in the field of special education for individuals with disabilities such as guaranteed protections within law, engagement with parents, and developing creative ways of teaching, the field has also received criticism for: reifying human differences (Linton, 1998), being grounded in deficit-based perspectives of disability (Danforth, 2014), causing low graduation rates and high drop our rates (Advocates for Children, 2005), functioning as part of the school-to-prison pipeline (Annamma, 2014), inadequately addressing high rates of unemployment and underemployment (Moxley & Finch, 2003), and maintaining the overrepresentation of students of color in disability categories and restrictive settings (Losen & Orfield, 2002). In sum, the field of special education as currently configured does benefit many students and their families, yet these are often in contexts mediated by social class, race, and disability-type (Ong-Dean, 2009). At the same time, the field continues to marginalize many other students (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Valle, 2009).

DS has always sought engagement with special education to address what has variously been called a "divide" (Andrews et al., 2000) or a "schism" (Gallagher, Connor, & Ferri, 2014) in contrasting perspectives held about disability, including who is advantaged and disadvantaged by existing beliefs of special education's foundational knowledge and the social structures and practices built upon that knowledge. In fact, the inception of DSE was borne of scholars who saw the very real limitations of how disability was conceived and operationalized in education (Danforth & Gabel, 2007). By willfully ignoring DS/DSE, dismissing the social models of disability, and insisting that science is the only way to understand disability and education, the academic field of special education is attempting to maintain the power it has in shaping educational research and teacher education. In doing so, it has involuntarily shrunk itself. Its current arguments within these articles and those similar in nature "preach to the choir," are repetitive and reductive, and ultimately unconvincing to many educators interested in the joint topics of disability and education. Disconcertingly, ideas within the current field of special education are also dangerous. For instance, the field's embrace of recent claims by Morgan et al. (2015) that racial minorities are *underrepresented* in special education as proven by (unquestionable) scientifically-based empirical studies (Hallahan, personal communication; Kauffman & Lloyd, 2017) has resulted in the temporary suspension of federal funding to ameliorate this well documented historical phenomenon (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Losen & Orfield, 2002). This recent situation not only reveals special education's determination to adhere to scientific and mathematical-only ways of knowing, it also speaks to the field's deliberate race-evasiveness, particularly at the intersections of race and ability (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017).

Conclusion

While the instance of negating overrepresentation shows the field of special education still wields power and influence, it also reveals the vulnerability of its own limitations and justifies the imperative of DS/DSE to continue providing other renditions of how we understand, and respond to, differences among humans. The growth of DS/DSE shows special education has lost significant ground in terms of itself being a legitimate field of study because key leaders in the field have zealously advocated to maintain an intellectual monopoly. These six articles are testimony to leadership in the field that is, unfortunately, rigid, rule bound, and narrow. As a result, while special education continues to exist as an institution in the form of structures, budgets, teacher certification programs, and so on, the intellectual appeal of special education as a stand alone scientific field of study has experienced a significant decline in currency.

The articles provide evidence of special education's attempt to reassert itself into a nostalgically imagined Golden Age. Tellingly, it does so largely within its own fiercely guarded kingdom of journals in which dissention from orthodoxy equals heresy. Meanwhile, DSE continues to grow, regardless, testimony to how conceptualizing disability in diverse ways is neither extreme nor chic, but rather informative, insightful, useful, and necessary. In sum, DSE has shown that the field of special education is no longer the sole source of information for conceptualizing disability throughout the curriculum. This fact has wide implications for teacher education programs and teaching in schools when, generally speaking, disability is viewed not as a human deficit but rather a form of natural variation. This has been, and continues to be, the contribution of DSE to education.

Table 1: Recent Articles in Special Education Critiquing Disability Studies

Title and Year of Publication	Journal	Authors and # of self referencing	Main areas of Discussion
A social constructionist approach to disability: Implications for special education (2011) [A1]	*Exceptional Children* *77*(3), 367-384	Anastasiou & Kauffman 16	• Challenges social model of disability • Claims viewpoints within disability rights movement largely constructed by wheelchair users do not apply to all types of disabilities • Rebuffs special education as segregationist
Disability as cultural difference: Implications for special education (2012) [A2]	*Remedial and Special Education* *33*(3), 139-149	Anastasiou & Kauffman 22	• Challenges social model and "minority model" of disability • Critiques notions of disability as a cultural difference • Discusses some damaging implications for special education by the politicization of disability identity

The social model of disability: Dichotomy between impairment and disability (2013) [A3]	*Journal of Medicine and Philosophy 38,* 441-459	Anastasiou & Kauffman 12	• Critiques rhetoric of social model of disability • Challenges downplaying of biological and mental conditions • Views oppression as a unidimensional, limiting lens
Disability in multicultural theory: Conceptual and social justice issues (2014) [A4]	*Journal of Disability Policy Studies 27*(1), 3-12	Anastasiou, Kauffman, & Michail 9	• Critiques the minority group model used in multiculturalism when applied to disability • Contests the "neutralization" of disability and attempts of assimilation in the multicultural movement • Discusses differences in perspectives of what constitutes social justice for people with disabilities
Special education at the crossroad: An identity crisis and the need for scientific reconstruction (2017) [A5]	*Exceptionality 25*(2), 139-155	Anastasiou, Kauffman, & Maag 31	• The field of special education is losing ground on all fronts • Other ways of conceptualizing disability have undermined a scientific field • There is no room for "alternative" epistemologies; only Science must prevail
Extremism and disability chic (2018) [A6]	*Exceptionality 26*(1), 46-61	Kauffman, & Badar 24	• Cites certain views of disability as being extremist, including "undesirable, distorted positive perceptions and denial of disability, as well as inappropriate responses to it" (p. 46) • Categorically rejects notion that disabilities can be viewed as "gifts"

Note: Of interest is how the authors self-reference to such a large degree, an average of 19 times per article, with a total of 114 in six publications. What this pattern suggests is their tendency to self-reference their own previous critiques of ideas from specific DS and DSE scholars, filtering through themselves rather than citing the original source of their critique, thereby, controlling the reader's access to original sources that differ from their own perspectives.

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