"Dealing with Diversity and Difference":
A DisCrit analysis of teacher education curriculum at a Minority Serving Institution

TARA EVE SCHWITZMAN
Columbia University

INEQUITABLE EDUCATION ACCESS IN THE UNITED STATES is often attributed to the fact that the teaching force does not reflect the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of K-12 students in public schools (Brown, 2014; Haddix, 2017). This mismatch has fueled a heightened focus on race and ethnicity in both teacher recruitment and preparation. While well-intentioned, the current focus on placing more diverse teachers in K-12 classrooms often denies teachers of Color access to diversity training, because they are assumed to intuitively know how to translate their experiences with racism into equitable pedagogical practices (Brown, 2014; Jackson, 2015).

Despite recruitment efforts, the majority of the teaching force remains white women (Feistritzer, Griffin, & Linnajarvi, 2011, as cited in King & Butler, 2015). Diversity curricula, then, assume a monocultural, universal (white) teacher education student, who has little experience with marginalization. Diversity in this context is often discussed only on racial and/or ethnic terms (Montecinos, 1994, as cited in Knight, 2002), thereby, discounting the "multiple grounds of identity" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245) that construct the social world.

It would seem, then, that a unidirectional focus on race—whether through recruitment and/or preparation—denies teachers of all ethnic backgrounds an in-depth and robust diversity education. Much of the current research focuses on how Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) work toward or away from diversity—whether that be through designing curriculum to help white students face their privileges and/or essentializing the few students of Color in their classes as diversity experts. Little is known, however, about the preparation of teachers (of Color) at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) (Will, 2017). This lack of knowledge is not surprising, given the overall pattern of low representation of MSIs in higher education research (Flores & Park, 2013; Raines, 1998). Valuing and acknowledging experiences of marginalization, discrimination, and racism, MSIs might be better positioned to meet the needs of students of Color (Conrad, 2014, 2015; John & Stage, 2014; Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005; O'Brien & Zudak, 1998; Raines, 1998). Yet, they are often considered inferior to PWIs (Gasman, Conrad, & Nguyen, 2015; Raines, 1998). Despite measures that indicate they have remained "on par with traditional [white] institutions" (Flores & Park, 2014, p. 266), MSIs remain historically marginalized spaces in the landscape of

higher education. MSIs produce significant numbers of Black, Hispanic, and Native American teachers; yet, the continued focus on PWIs leaves unknown whether, how, and through what social locations/lenses these teachers experience diversity education. Given the current exclusion of MSIs in teacher preparation research and the limitations of diversity curricula that focus unidirectionally on race, my inquiry is guided by the following question: When first introduced to the concept of dis/ability as a form of diversity, how do undergraduate students at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) negotiate the "'normalizing' aspects of the curriculum that have rendered disability invisible [and] have simultaneously contributed to the oppressive practices meted out to students marked by race, class, gender, and sexuality" (Erevelles, 2005, p. 435)?

Understanding that discussing diversity through the lens of race alone "conflates or ignores intragroup differences" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242), I use dis/ability critical race studies (DisCrit) in education to read and interpret my experience incorporating dis/ability into a stand-alone diversity course at Northern City College (NCC)[1]—a racially diverse HSI in the northeastern United States, with the majority of students coming from low-income households. Understanding racism and ableism as "normalizing processes," this intersectional framework theorizes difference at the mutual construction of race and dis/ability, such that "race does not exist outside of ability and ability does not exist outside of race" (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013, p. 6). DisCrit deliberately utilizes dis/ability to expand notions of student achievement, making it a useful theoretical tool in conversations around multicultural education. Using DisCrit, I demonstrate how historically marginalized students have varied understandings of diversity and difference (Brown, 2014; Jackson, 2015), even in a historically marginalized space that explicitly prioritizes social justice, equity, and diversity. By challenging the notion that students who have been "othered" along *one* line of difference, such as race, automatically understand being "othered" along *any* line of difference, I work to show how centering dis/ability studies in diversity education can: forefront intersectionality in understanding difference; dismantle the essentialization of historically marginalized students; challenge teacher educators' deficit perceptions of preservice teachers of Color; and ultimately grant more preservice teachers access to meaningful curricula and preparation for teaching in urban schools.

Theoretical Framework

Informed by disability studies/in education (DS/E) and critical race theory (CRT), DisCrit proposes a "dual analysis of race and ability" (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 1) to problematize the simultaneous "racializing [of] ability"/"disabling [of] race" (p. 2) in schools and in society. DS/E, CRT, and DisCrit are useful theoretical tools in conceptualizing curriculum and studying the way it shapes educational discourses and experiences. The strands of my theoretical framework take into account what the study of dis/ability and race—both separately and together—brings to understanding subjectivity, difference, and curriculum.

Theorizing Curriculum

Understanding that identities are both socially constructed and embodied, I view both the manifest and hidden curricula of schooling as "normalizing texts" (Erevelles, 2005) that maintain dominant ideologies and legible subjectivities. The knowledge that is produced by teachers and

students is shaped by both what is explicitly addressed—or manifested—in educational discourses and what is excluded, or hidden. For example, my students' knowledge of what constitutes "diversity" is shaped both by the categories of difference that I explicitly define in my course, as well as the ones that I exclude. They learn what diversity is, as well as what it is not. The manifest and hidden curricula also teach students the appropriate ways to produce knowledge through valuing particular types of school work and behaviors, while simultaneously "construct[ing] certain student subjectivities as deviant, disturbing, and dangerous" (Erevelles, 2011, p. 2157). Curriculum, then, acts as "both a disciplinary tool and a normative social practice" (p. 2162) that justifies the inclusion of "normal" students and the exclusion of those marked as different. Additionally, I understand curriculum to include both the text and what happens outside of the text (Erevelles, 2005)—as something linguistic, affective, and embodied.

DS/E and Curriculum Studies

Pushing against the medical model dominating the applied sciences that conceptualizes disability as an individual, inherent deficit in need of diagnosis and treatment, disability studies (DS) offers the social model of disability that instead problematizes the environment that disables individuals. Grounded in DS, disability studies in education (DSE) similarly rejects deficit thinking that locates educational "problems" or labels in individual students (Sleeter, 1986; Valle & Connor, 2011). Instead, DSE focuses on how disabling school environments and contexts— such as traditional special education curricula—"other" individual students. Relatedly, both DS and DSE (DS/E) privilege the voices and experiences of people with disabilities (Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008) and understand that, taken collectively, they constitute a minority group (Erevelles, 2005; Siebers, 2008).

In thinking about subjectivity, DS/E re-conceptualizes dis/ability as another facet of human diversity that is part of someone's identity and mediated by his/her/their specific sociocultural context (Connor et al., 2008; Linton, 1998; Thomson, 1997). Yet, their shared "pivotal, unifying perspective...that disability is a social construct" (Connor et al., 2008, p. 447) has certain limitations when discussing disabilities that have medical and/or painful components (Connor, 2006; Siebers, 2008), as well as the materialist consequences of being labelled disabled (Erevelles, 2005). Given that dis/ability can be a "hyper-visible identity" (p. 422), it "cannot be easily written out of the body's script" (p. 424) and, therefore, "marks the limits of performativity" (p. 424). Thus, I use philosophical realism, rather than poststructuralism, to conceptualize dis/ability as complexly embodied (Siebers, 2008), thereby, understanding "the body *and* its representations as mutually transformative" (p. 2, emphasis added). Philosophical realism also fits better with Crenshaw's (1991) conceptualization of intersectionality. Rather than focusing exclusively on the (de)construction of identity itself, intersectional theories of difference, such as DisCrit, focus their attention on "the system of subordination based on that identity" (p. 1297).

As "an object of general knowledge" (Siebers, 2008, p. 81) foundational to the understanding of difference, dis/ability exposes ableism and normality, thereby, providing an alternative set of "powerful ideological commitments and political aims" (Connor et al., 2008, p. 447). DS works to problematize curricula that normalize the exclusion of "deviance/disability that...threaten[s] the social [and economic] order" (Erevelles, 2005, p. 433), not only because the hidden curriculum sorts students into predetermined economic strata (Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1997), but also because economic exclusion itself is premised on an ideology of ability that

rationalizes any exclusion from the economic sphere on the basis of capacity (Erevelles, 2005). DS intersects with curriculum studies by "focus[ing] on the social construction of the 'normal' body in the curriculum" (p. 423) and addressing the positioning of disability as the "othering other" (Siebers, 2008, p. 6) and the "disabled student [as] 'abject' entity" (Erevelles, 2005, p. 434). DS has been a powerful theoretical tool for examining the (mis)representation of dis/ability in higher education curricula across academic disciplines (Linton, 1998) and the inaccurate, negative depictions of disability in school curricula and society (Erevelles, 2005; Valle & Connor, 2011). In practice, DSE takes up this intersection between DS and curriculum studies by centering notions of accessibility in both the manifest and hidden curricula. For example, many DSE scholars prioritize an *inclusive stance* that continuously interrogates barriers to learning for *all* students, rather than the mere placement, or inclusion, of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Naraian, 2017).

CRT and Curriculum Studies

CRT rejects the ways in which whiteness marginalizes people of Color and problematizes the embeddedness of racism in the fabric of our society (Bell, 1992). Grounded in critical legal studies, CRT scholars understand racism not simply as individual bias, but as an entire de facto *system* granting privileges to whites *from* the disadvantages of people of Color (Alexander, 2010; Tatum, 1997). CRT historicizes and interrogates the function of schools as institutions used to stratify students not only based on class, but also based on race (Anderson, 1988) through a variety of mechanisms, such as: unequal funding, inadequate resources, and lack of representation in the curriculum. CRT also problematizes the ways in which both the manifest and hidden curricula maintain whiteness as the norm. For example, the manifest curriculum often "actively denies any acknowledgement of the contributions of African-American culture and knowledge to mainstream society" (Pinar, 1993, as cited in Erevelles, 2005, p. 423). The hidden curriculum teaches all students that the correct ways to produce knowledge and to behave in schools are those aligned with white norms. Students of Color are taught how to "code switch"—sometimes explicitly in "social emotional learning" curricula—between their home and school contexts, in order to be perceived as "normal." CRT in education addresses these mechanisms by centering the (counter) narratives of students of Color (Jackson, 2015; Milner, 2007; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and prioritizing culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014).

DisCrit and Curriculum Studies

DisCrit brings these two theories together to move beyond unidimensional understandings of both race and ability. Questions of ability have generally been absent from conversations about race, except to argue that students of Color are competent and/or *not* disabled. Similarly, questions about race have largely been absent from DS/E. Indeed, the latter has been critiqued for being "too white" and not taking into account how the intersection of race and class influences one's access to inclusion in schools and in society. Conceptualizing race as embedded in dis/ability and dis/ability as embedded in race opens conversations around liberating educational and societal praxis. For example, CRT challenges notions of colorblindness that shape common understandings

of meritocracy, objectivity, and liberalism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). CRT scholars assert that not to "see" race is to refuse to "see" people of Color and to deny how whiteness functions as a form of property in our society (Lipsitz, 1998). DisCrit scholars have troubled notions of color*blind*ness for: utilizing ableist metaphors that position dis/ability as ignorance (or blind people as unknowing), limiting understandings of racism as only visual, and suggesting a passive response to the "failure to address [the unequal] material conditions" (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017, p. 154) experienced by people of Color. They instead propose color-evasiveness as a term that: is not ableist, signals a more robust understanding of racism as multimodal, and more appropriately captures society's purposeful, rather than passive, refusal to interrogate racism and white privilege (Annamma et al., 2017).

In education, DisCrit affords a simultaneous interrogation of whiteness and smartness in the "normalizing text," or curriculum, that legitimizes exclusionary practices in both K-12 schools and teacher education. For example, it highlights the overrepresentation of minority students in (more subjective) special education categories, such as emotional disturbance and learning disability (Ferri & Connor, 2006; Harry & Klingner, 2005), and how a disability diagnosis is used to segregate students of Color. It similarly emphasizes how whiteness continues to define "good" behavior (Broderick & Leonardo, 2016), resulting in higher suspension rates for students of Color (Milner, 2010). In teacher preparation, DisCrit calls attention to how whiteness presents multiple barriers to preservice teachers of Color—such as the regiment of standardized testing and racial biases in defining teacher quality (Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Epstein, & Mayfield, 2012; Sleeter, 2017)—that are premised on the basis of capacity. Building on these prior affordances of DisCrit and reading the intersection of race and dis/ability as a normalizing text that "reveal[s] the critical relationship between disability and the other social categories of difference" (Erevelles, 2005, p. 434), I work to use it as a tool to unpack unidimensional understandings of diversity when preparing historically marginalized preservice teachers in a historically marginalized space to teach historically marginalized students in urban schools.

Methodological Approach

I utilize DisCrit to approach my students' work in my diversity course for preservice teachers at NCC. While there is disagreement over the effectiveness of stand-alone, separate diversity courses (Juarez, Smith, & Hayes, 2008; McDonald, 2005; McHatton, Keller, Shircliffe, & Zalaquett, 2009; Talbert-Johnson & Tillman, 1999), the majority of perspectives has developed from studying the curriculum at PWIs. The preferred approach to teaching diversity at HSIs—and MSIs more broadly—has yet to be discussed in the literature.

Using Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality framework, I focus each section of a semester-long course on a particular lens of difference: class, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, dis/ability. While we focus on one of these lenses at a time, I still work to demonstrate how none of these social locations can exist without the others. To prepare for the first class that forefronts dis/ability as a form of diversity, students complete two readings—a historical overview of how dis/ability has been used to justify inequality in the United States (Baynton, 2001) and a *New York Times* article covering the Anna Stubblefield trial (Engber, 2015). In the trial, the family of D. J.— a Black man with cerebral palsy—pressed charges against Anna—his white professor/tutor—for engaging in a sexual relationship with him. I chose these pieces because they utilize the affordances of using an intersectional framework to think about difference. Next, students choose one of the

readings and post a reflection to the online discussion board that addresses their prior knowledge, what they learned from the reading, and any questions they have. Finally, students respond to at least two of their classmates.

I selected some of my students' discussion posts and responses that resonated with me, or "glowed" (MacLure, 2010). For example, one student wrote:

> I'd like to think of myself as someone who has their eyes open when it comes to injustice. Most of the articles or topics we've discussed in this class have been about things I've noticed already (with the exception of the use of minority prisoners to add to the population of "red states"). I'd also like to believe that I am open-minded and am not discriminatory against any group. This piece, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History" has proved me wrong on both fronts. I have honestly never realized, in all the reading I've done or videos I've watched, how often disability is used as an excuse for inequality. Since I am not disabled myself, I have also never truly thought about how it is not the disabilities themselves that are the problem, but the fact that disability is a reason to be discriminated against. – Student 1
> (The above excerpt and the rest of these selections—which resonated with me for different reasons—can be read in Appendix A.)

I then analyzed these selections in two different qualitative ways: via poetry and via categorizations. Each of these methods allowed something different to emerge from my students' writing. Staying rooted in DisCrit as I engaged in these methods allowed me to comment on their work without engaging in deficit thinking that might marginalize their voices.

Utilizing a poetical approach to my data, I hoped to better understand my students' "experience as it [was] experienced, not as it [was] thought" (Freeman, 2017, p. 75) as they read the pieces and wrestled with their emerging understandings of dis/ability as a form of diversity. As I read through the selections, I removed chunks of sentences that seemed to go together, engaging in a creative approach to the more linear way of coding. Putting the chunks on a new document, I read their words several times to feel where pauses, breaks, and stanzas seemed to fit together. The art of continuously (re)arranging their words de-contextualized and de-authorized their individual ideas, further emphasizing overall experience, rather than analyzing how individual students' identities manifested in their words.

I used indentations to signify where different voices had repeated similar ideas, with the idea that the repetition itself would add emphasis. I did not alter any of the original text; however, there were times in constructing this poem that I could not help but interject. The italicized text represents my interjections that intend to call attention to what I perceive as normalized assumptions embedded in my students' writing. I bracketed this text to call attention to my interjection and the meaning it generates. I also bolded words that explicitly invoked ideas of ableism, normality, and/or "ableist metaphors" (May & Ferri, 2005, p. 120). Below is a stanza of the poem, or a part of this analytic process. The full poem can be found in Appendix B.

> We *[sighted people]* gradually become **blinded** to it.
> > We [*sighted people*] **no longer see**
> > the issues they face on a day to day basis.

In order to understand some of the "pieces of a pattern in progress" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 32), I used DisCrit to inductively (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) categorize my data to look at one theme or idea at a time. Using this method, the chunks were not broken up beyond groups of sentences. I also tried to use, as much as possible, the words of specific participants as category titles. Chunks that belonged to more than one category were placed more than once. For example, I categorized the following chunk—"As for the disabled themselves, I now have a new desire to help them find their voice. I think it's about time they had a movement of their own."—in two places. The first was under the category "Non-disabled identity" for responses that suggest the author identified as non-disabled. The second was under the category "Assuming audience of discussion board is all non-disabled" for responses that suggest the author has not considered the possibility of disabled students in our class. The full list of categorizations and their corresponding chunks of data can be found in Appendix C.

Findings/Themes

Language and Exclusions

Students utilized multiple ableist metaphors in their emerging understandings of dis/ability. For example, they used "seeing" and keeping their "eyes open" as ways to discuss what they "noticed." Not only does this privilege a certain kind of sensory engagement in relation to knowledge production, but it also signals that students might be stuck on physical disabilities and still "unaware" of how they marginalize invisible disabilities. Reproducing this hierarchy within the disability category, one student wrote:

> There is also an association that if people have a physical disability, they also must have a mental one as well. Those two things sometimes do not match up, so people should be taught that if you are talking to someone in a wheelchair, you should treat them as a normal able-bodied person without questioning their mental ability to understand.
> – Student 6

Yet, the fact that these words were rearranged, deauthorized, and decontextualized to tap into a realm outside of discourse somehow shifted my "focus:"

> If you [non-disabled person] are talking to someone in a wheelchair,
> you should treat them as a **normal able-bodied person**
> without questioning their mental ability to understand.

>> [non/disabled] people overuse the word disability for the wrong reasons and
>> abuse it

> **Change how I speak** about inequality now—
> the types of words I use in my rhetoric.

Ableism may be entangled in their language, but their words prompted me to question whether and how it is also entangled in their very thinking about the rights of disabled people

and/or their collective experience(s) with the reading. For example, it is not clear which "people" "overuse the word disability for the wrong reasons and abuse it." Certainly, Student 6 seems to be using the word disability in a way that (metaphorically) abuses people with disabilities. Yet, "people" could also refer to people with disabilities who are wrongfully judged for trying to get "ahead" in life by "using" their disability to their advantage (Siebers, 2008). The fourth line in the above excerpt could be calling attention to ableism or reproducing it.

The poem evokes multiple emotions—shock, sadness, reimagining, hope, mindfulness—as well as affective encounters outside the realm of discourse that could suggest the students understand they should consider changing their orientation toward social justice.

How could this have been possible?
I was getting upset while reading.

When we *[non-disabled people]* are taught about discrimination
and minorities in schools,
we *[sighted people]* only **see color,**
with the exception of the use of minority prisoners *[disabled by society]*
to add to the population of "red states,"
which is sad.
We, as a whole [*group of sighted people*],
need to work on **looking beyond color,**
because this is a major part of history.

Through dis/ability they began to understand the limitations of "seeing" diversity through/as color only, despite relying on the repeated use of "seeing" as a way of knowing. Students' stances toward those marked "different" or "other" shifted. Yet, even though they might feel the exclusion of people with disabilities is "wrong," they still reproduce disability metaphors, hierarchy, and inequality through their language. Without examining the ways in which the linguistic representation of disability shapes the lived experiences of being disabled, it seems they only have a partial understanding of disability as an embodied form of diversity. The curriculum taught them to feel empathy for people with disabilities without teaching them how to unpack the ways in which they are complicit in ableism.

(In)visibility of Disability

Drawing on the assumption that dis/ability is both physical and visible, many students assumed that everyone reading the discussion board was nondisabled. This was evidenced in statements like: "*We* no longer see the issues *they* face" (emphasis added). This assumption makes sense, given that, during opportunities to write about and/or discuss themselves, students typically forefronted their race, class, gender, and sexuality and generally did not disclose their dis/ability identity. Yet, DisCrit might remind us that, given the racial diversity in the class, it is likely there are students who have/had Individualized Education Programs or have been diagnosed with other (invisible) cognitive, mental, and/or emotional disabilities.

Relying on visibility, students also spoke against the invisibility of people with disabilities in society. Specifically, many felt that people with disabilities should be understood as a minority

group. One student wrote: "I never think of disabled people when I think of minorities either which is truly sad." It is striking that the only way in which disabled people can be humanized, or made "visible," is through a minority status. My students seem to be drawing on the idea that people with disabilities should be understood as a minority group because this status can lend itself to civil rights activism and legislation. Yet, even the passing of legislation that has supposed to support people with disabilities has fallen short in fully integrating them into society (Erevelles & Minear, 2010). For example, the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act did not lead to affirmative action for people with disabilities.

It can be difficult for people with disabilities to assert themselves as a minority group. As the only common experience that people with disabilities share is the stigma of being deemed abnormal (Broderick, 2010; Thomson, 1997), there is often not as clear of a notion of what it means to belong to disability culture (Garland-Thomson, 2016; Hahn, 1988). Additionally, dis/ability is more fluid than other identities, such as race, ethnicity, class, and even gender and/or sexuality (Siebers, 2008; Thomson, 1997). Anyone at any point in time can become disabled, such as through accident, illness, or old age (Garland-Thomson, 2013, 2016; Siebers, 2008; Thomson, 1997). This fluidity has material consequences. For example, people seeking protection under the Americans with Disabilities Act spend more time convincing the court that they are "actually" disabled, rather than explaining their experiences with discrimination (Davis, 2015). Compounding the fluidity of dis/ability identity is the fact that many people with disabilities either have an ambiguous relationship to their disability label (Thomson, 1997) and/or do not want to see themselves as disabled (Baines, 2014; Connor, 2006; Garland-Thomson, 2013). Despite this difficulty, my student's sadness around not considering people with disabilities as minorities might be rooted in beginning to understand that thinking about disabled people as a minority group "offer[s] social critiques" (Siebers, 2008, p. 22) of society and schools that expose the borders imposed by (ab)normalcy.

Curriculum of School(ing)

Students wrote that society constructs and conditions deficit thinking about dis/ability. Many felt they should be learning about dis/ability in this way earlier in their education. One student wrote, "this should be taught in high school." Yet, through the hidden curriculum, the ideology of ability allows dis/ability to act as a legitimized exclusion mechanism in schools—via the myths of the normal curve (Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010) and of the normal child (Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011)—especially for students of Color (Blanchett, 2006; Reid & Knight, 2006). Overall, in education, the very notion of academic achievement is conflated with ability and becomes the way in which high school—the place in which students feel they need to learn about dis/ability oppression—is structured. Those in the academy and in education are the least likely to question smartness, as smartness has benefited them (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011) materially, economically, and emotionally.

A DisCrit lens in this context produces the knowledge that curricular/pedagogical reform is incomplete: students were asking for something that remains an impossibility without a radical restructuring of schools and schooling. They understood school(ing) as a liberatory educational space that is supposed to teach them to be critical, political, and "woke." Yet, if the curriculum in schools remains bound to whiteness/smartness, students "learn" about diversity without experiencing a shift in their social imagination. The unidirectional forefronting of racism, sexism,

and heteronormativity when discussing civil rights and present-day exclusions—"When we talk about race, class, gender, etc. we normally do not discuss the advantages or disadvantages of what it is like to be disabled"—leaves little space to consider the ways that taken-for-granted notions of ability are ignored. Physical disabilities are often viewed as deficit medical conditions in need of "fixing," while "invisible" disabilities go unnoticed and reproduce inequities confounded by race, gender, and sexuality:

> We *[non-disabled people]* tend to overlook the troubles that they actually face in society—
> the people who are being treated differently,
> for not only what they may look like,
> but also **their condition.**
> Being disabled is an **everyday struggle**.

A non-intersectional approach to civil rights curricula, then, might explain the following student's response:

> I agree that it is horrible that people thought African Americans automatically had a disability because of their skin color. It is completely unfair that people were judged by their appearance under the assumption that they have a disability. –Student 6

Not only does this student invoke ableism in discussing the horrible treatment of African Americans, they also invoke whiteness. It was white people, specifically, who conflated ability and race as a way to justify the exclusion of Black people. Yet, by just calling them "people" in the first sentence, this student leaves intact the norm that people are both white and nondisabled unless otherwise specified. This is also supported by the second part of this student's response referenced earlier, in which they described normal people as "able bodied." The inclusion of dis/ability in the curriculum—as a "constant and meaningful presence" (Erevelles, 2005, p. 432), rather than as "liberal gestures that will now mention disability" (p. 435)—might have provided access to more transformative ways of learning for this student. While the Baynton (2001) piece to which Student 6 responded presents dis/ability as the material and discursive location upon which other marginalized groups fight for their rights, the curriculum in my course also needed to deconstruct normality (Erevelles, 2005) and to include dis/ability as a form of diversity (Connor et al., 2008; Erevelles, 2005) that is foundational for challenging deficit thinking.

Significance

At NCC, I have heard traces of faculty discourse on diversity. "The students here *get* diversity. That's not the issue. The issue is passing the Praxis." Students have echoed similar sentiments, saying they are "used to *dealing* with a lot of diversity and differences." MSIs might be uniquely positioned to combat the essentialization that often happens to preservice teachers of Color; however, even a space that prioritizes diversity is not immune to this essentializing and/or framing it as a problem or issue to be solved. A DisCrit analysis of my students' work demonstrates that students of Color at all types of higher education institutions should have access to an intersectional approach to diversity education. Like the inclusion of students with disabilities in

K-12 classrooms, diversity education does not just happen by mere *placement* of diverse, historically marginalized students in a college course (or campus), especially when it is conceptualized only through the lens of race.

The ways in which race and dis/ability work together in my students' writing troubles the assumption that students of Color have deeper understandings of diversity—an assumption that receives significant caution in the literature (Brown, 2014; Jackson, 2015; Sheets, 2001, as cited in Knight, 2002; Sheets, 2004). Using DisCrit problematizes the assumption that experiences of being marginalized along one line of difference translate into an automatic understanding of diversity along another. The persistence of deficit language about physical disabilities and the erasure of nonphysical disabilities across multiple students' writing demonstrates that even people with disabilities can engage in ableist ways of knowing and/or distance themselves from that identity. Put differently, teacher educators cannot essentialize all students with dis/abilities or disabling experiences as intuitively understanding ableism, just as we cannot essentialize all racial minorities as intuitively understanding racial inequity.

While categorizing the data allowed me to centralize dis/ability assumptions, the poem afforded an affective engagement with my students' experience that touched on how their thinking was changing in ways that cannot be captured through (academic) discourse. Touching on this counternarrative is an important tenet for both dis/ability studies and critical race theory. Put differently, focusing only on ableist metaphors might have framed my students on deficit terms alone, focusing on the understandings that they lack. For historically marginalized students, this narrative of being cast as not knowing something might be too familiar. In analyzing data, I took up several modes of inquiry to make complex their multiple meanings and intentions, understanding that words are both contradictory and powerful when analyzed from different angles (e.g. poetry, categorizations). A DisCrit approach to diversity curriculum should prioritize presuming competence (Biklen & Burke, 2007)—especially for students of Color who may have internalized the trauma from their K-12 years of being overly disciplined and/or stereotyped as "stupid" or "lazy." As the students of Color remain underserved in many of their K-12 schools, college might be the first time that some students are granted access to high quality education that centers their experiences. Presuming competence, however, does not need to come at the price of dismissing ableist knowledge that students of all backgrounds should be confronting in a diversity course. As teacher educators, then, we must continuously work the balance of facilitating inclusive *and* culturally responsive pedagogy, while also paying deliberate and intersectional attention to the social locations, such as dis/ability, that do not receive as much attention in conversations around social justice and inequity. This more complete stance may be an important component of the necessary curricular/pedagogical reform of diversity education.

Notes

1. "NCC" is a pseudonym to protect identity.

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Appendix A

I'd like to think of myself as someone who has their eyes open when it comes to injustice. Most of the articles or topics we've discussed in thiass have been about things I've noticed already (with the exception of the use of minority prisoners to add to the population of "red states"). I'd also like to believe that I am open-minded and am not discriminatory against any group. This piece, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History" has proved me wrong on both fronts. I have honestly never realized, in all the reading I've done or videos I've watched, how often disability is used as an excuse for inequality. Since I am not disabled myself, I have also never truly thought about how it is not the disabilities themselves that are the problem, but the fact that disability is a reason to be discriminated against.

I think in our society, we are just so conditioned to believe that being disabled is just this taboo, unfixable thing and that disabled people are unequal burdens to the "real man". If you asked me to list all the minority groups I could think of before reading this work, the disabled probably would have been toward the end, if at all. This work has really opened up my eyes and mind in a new way. I know it will change how I speak about inequality now- the types of words I use in my rhetoric. As for the disabled themselves, I now have a new desire to help them find their voice. I think it's about time they had a movement of their own. –Student 1

I would like to start my response by first saying that I really connected with your opening sentiment. As someone who has also spent a lot of free time researching social justice, I too was mildly alarmed to find that I had not been frequently including the disabled when speaking about discriminated groups. I think this may be a byproduct of what you've said, that we see disability as a taboo and unfixable thing. However, I'd like to run in a slightly different direction with this concept. I think that we as a society are so conditioned that disability is this entirely unfixable concept that we gradually become blinded to it. We no longer see the issues they face on a day to day basis, and push them to the furthest reaches of our minds. I also agree that it is time the disabled receive a movement of their own; as this is a group that has definitely spent too much time in the shadows, and needs some well-deserved recognition. – Student 2

I agree with everything you stated in the response. I never think of disabled people when I think of minorities either which is truly sad because as a person who considers themselves to be aware of injustice, like you, that shows how much this group of people is truly ignored. I feel like there are many things to blame when it comes to us being uneducated about disabled people as a whole and a lot of that comes from the schooling system. When we are taught about discrimination and minorities in schools we only see color which is sad. We don't even think to focus on the people who are being treated differently for not only what they may look like, but also their condition. We, as a whole, need to work on looking beyond color so we can realize and understand all the issues that occur with the people around us. –Student 3

I find it immensely disheartening that women did not use their newfound voice to uplift all repressed groups. I think that helping only yourself or groups that you belong to, on the front of social justice is not a win for equality, but rather for systemic oppression. By new groups reaching separate "equality", it leaves more discrimination and inconsideration for the remaining marginalized groups, such as the disabled, as you had mentioned in your writing. – Student 2

I personally never thought of disability this way. This is something that I think should be taught in high school because this is a major part of history. Throughout the reading I found myself asking how could this have been possible to the point that I was getting upset while reading.
– Student 4

I agree that this should have been taught in high school. – Student 5

I agree that it is horrible that people thought African Americans automatically had a disability because of their skin color. It is completely unfair that people were judged by their appearance under the assumption that they have a disability. There is also an association that if people have a physical disability, they also must have a mental one as well. Those two things sometimes do not match up, so people should be taught that if you are talking to someone in a wheelchair, you should treat them as a normal able-bodied person without questioning their mental ability to understand.
– Student 6

I have noticed that sometimes people overuse the word disability for the wrong reasons and abuse it. [...] This article has taught me that it is not just an inequality between the LGBTQ or races, but everyone facing a difficulty reality in their lives. – Student 7

I think that disability is not often spoken of. When we talk about race, class, gender, etc. we normally do not discuss the advantages or disadvantages of what it is like to be disabled. Those who have a disability are often judged because of their appearance and we tend to overlook the troubles that they actually face in society. Being disabled is an everyday struggle and we should be more mindful of them and not treat them any less because we are all the same. –Student 8

Appendix B

A lot of free time researching
social justice,
I am **open-minded**,
eyes open when it comes to injustice.
How often disability is used as an excuse for inequality
proved me wrong on both fronts,
opened up my eyes and mind in a new way,
since I am not disabled myself.

It is not disabilities themselves,
that are the problem,
but the fact that disability is a reason to be discriminated against.

I personally never thought of disability this way.
   I never think of disabled people
   when I think of minorities,
   which is truly sad.

We [*non-disabled people]* are just so conditioned to believe,
that disabled people are unequal burdens
to the "real man."
That being disabled is just this taboo,
unfixable thing,
   this entirely unfixable concept.

I had not been frequently including the disabled
when speaking about discriminated groups,
   when we talk about race, class, gender, etc.,
     disability is not often spoken of.
       We [*nondisabled people]* **normally** do not discuss the advantages
       or disadvantages
       of what it is like to be disabled.

We [*non-disabled people]* tend to overlook the troubles that they actually face in society—
the people who are being treated differently,
for not only what they may look like,
but also **their condition.**
Being disabled is an **everyday struggle**.

   We [*sighted people]* gradually become **blinded** to it.
    We [*sighted people*] **no longer see**
    the issues they face on a day to day basis.

How could this have been possible?

I was getting upset while reading.

This group of people is truly ignored,
and a lot of that comes from the schooling system.
       This is something that I think should be taught in high school
          I agree that this should have been taught in high school.
When we *[non-disabled people]* are taught about discrimination
and minorities in schools,
we *[sighted people]* only **see color,**
with the exception of the use of minority prisoners *[disabled by society]*
to add to the population of "red states,"
which is sad.
We, as a whole [*group of sighted people],*
need to work on **looking beyond color,**
because this is a major part of history.

[white] people thought African Americans automatically had a disability
because of their skin color.
It is completely unfair
that *[Black]* people were judged by their appearance
under the **assumption that they have a disability**,
that if people have a physical disability,
they also must have a mental one as well.

I now have a new desire to help them
find their voice.
It's about time they had a movement
of their own.

If you *[non-disabled person]* are talking to someone in a wheelchair,
you should treat them as a **normal able-bodied person**
without questioning their mental ability to understand.

        [non/disabled] people overuse the word disability for the wrong reasons and
        abuse it

Change how I speak about inequality now—
the types of words I use in my rhetoric.

I'd **like to run** in a slightly different direction
with this concept.
We should be more **mindful** of them
and not treat them any less
because we are all the same.

Appendix C

Social Justice Identity

- I'd like to think of myself as someone who has their eyes open when it comes to injustice. Most of the articles or topics we've discussed in this class have been about things I've noticed already (with the exception of the use of minority prisoners to add to the population of "red states.") I'd also like to believe that I am open-minded and am not discriminatory against any group.
- As someone who has also spent a lot of free time researching social justice, I too was mildly alarmed to find that I had not been frequently including the disabled when speaking about discriminated groups
- I never think of disabled people when I think of minorities either which is truly sad because as a person who considers themselves to be aware of injustice, like you, that shows how much this group of people is truly ignored.

Recognizing Disability as a Mechanism for Exclusion

- I have honestly never realized, in all the reading I've done or videos I've watched, how often disability is used as an excuse for inequality.
- I find it immensely disheartening that women did not use their newfound voice to uplift all repressed groups. I think that helping only yourself or groups that you belong to, on the front of social justice is not a win for equality, but rather for systemic oppression. By new groups reaching separate "equality", it leaves more discrimination and inconsideration for the remaining marginalized groups, such as the disabled, as you had mentioned in your writing
- Throughout the reading I found myself asking how could this have been possible to the point that I was getting upset while reading.
- I agree that it is horrible that people thought African Americans automatically had a disability because of their skin color.
- Those who have a disability are often judged because of their appearance and we tend to overlook the troubles that they actually face in society.

Non-disabled Identity

- Since I am not disabled myself, I have also never truly thought about how it is not the disabilities themselves that are the problem, but the fact that disability is a reason to be discriminated against.
- As for the disabled themselves, I now have a new desire to help them find their voice. I think it's about time they had a movement of their own.

Assuming Audience of Discussion Board is All Non-disabled

- As for the disabled themselves, I now have a new desire to help them find their voice. I think it's about time they had a movement of their own.
- I also agree that it is time the disabled receive a movement of their own; as this is a group that has definitely spent too much time in the shadows, and needs some well-deserved recognition.
- We no longer see the issues they face on a day to day basis, and push them to the furthest reaches of our minds.
- I never think of disabled people when I think of minorities either which is truly sad because as a person who considers themselves to be aware of injustice, like you, that shows how much this group of people is truly ignored.
- There is also an association that if people have a physical disability, they also must have a mental one as well. Those two things sometimes do not match up, so people should be taught that if you are talking to someone in a wheelchair, you should treat them as a normal able-bodied person without questioning their mental ability to understand.
- I think in our society, we are just so conditioned to believe that being disable is just this taboo, unfixable thing and that disabled people are unequal burdens to the "real man."
- I think that we as a society are so conditioned that disability is this entirely unfixable concept that we gradually become blinded to it.

Society and School Conditions Us to Think About Disability in a Deficit Way

- I think in our society, we are just so conditioned to believe that being disable is just this taboo, unfixable thing and that disabled people are unequal burdens to the "real man."
- I think that we as a society are so conditioned that disability is this entirely unfixable concept that we gradually become blinded to it.
- I feel like there are many things to blame when it comes to us being uneducated about disabled people as a whole and a lot of that comes from the schooling system.
- This is something that I think should be taught in high school because this is a major part of history.
- "I agree that this should have been taught in high school

It is Wrong to Understand Disability as Unfixable

- I think in our society, we are just so conditioned to believe that being disable is just this taboo, unfixable thing and that disabled people are unequal burdens to the "real man."
- I think this may be a byproduct of what you've said, that we see disability as a taboo and unfixable thing.
- I think that we as a society are so conditioned that disability is this entirely unfixable concept that we gradually become blinded to it.

Medical Model of Disability

- We don't even think to focus on the people who are being treated differently for not only what they may look like, but also their condition.
- I agree that it is horrible that people thought African Americans automatically had a disability because of their skin color.
- It is completely unfair that people were judged by their appearance under the assumption that they have a disability.
- There is also an association that if people have a physical disability, they also must have a mental one as well. Those two things sometimes do not match up, so people should be taught that if you are talking to someone in a wheelchair, you should treat them as a normal able-bodied person without questioning their mental ability to understand.
- I have noticed that sometimes people overuse the word disability for the wrong reasons and abuse it.
- Being disabled is an everyday struggle and we should be more mindful of them and not treat them any less because we are all the same

People with Disabilities Should be Understood as a "Minority" Group

- If you asked me to list all the minority groups I could think of before reading this work, the disabled probably would have been toward the end, if at all.
- I think it's about time they had a movement of their own.
- As someone who has also spent a lot of free time researching social justice, I too was mildly alarmed to find that I had not been frequently including the disabled when speaking about discriminated groups
- I never think of disabled people when I think of minorities either which is truly sad because as a person who considers themselves to be aware of injustice, like you, that shows how much this group of people is truly ignored.
- I personally never thought of disability this way.
- This article has taught me that it is not just an inequality between the LGBTQ or races, but everyone facing a difficulty reality in their lives.
- I think that disability is not often spoken of. When we talk about race, class, gender, etc. we normally do not discuss the advantages or disadvantages of what it is like to be disabled.

DisCrit

- When we are taught about discrimination and minorities in schools we only see color which is sad.
- We, as a whole, need to work on looking beyond color so we can realize and understand all the issues that occur with the people around us.
- I agree that it is horrible that people thought African Americans automatically had a disability because of their skin color.

Disability Metaphor
- This work has really opened my eyes and mind in a new way.
- I know it will change how I speak about inequality now- the types of words I use in my rhetoric.
- However, I'd like to run in a slightly different direction with this concept.
- I think that we as a society are so conditioned that disability is this entirely unfixable concept that we gradually become blinded to it.

Nondisabled = Normal/Assumptions About Normality and Difference

- There is also an association that if people have a physical disability, they also must have a mental one as well. Those two things sometimes do not match up, so people should be taught that if you are talking to someone in a wheelchair, you should treat them as a normal able-bodied person without questioning their mental ability to understand.
- Being disabled is an everyday struggle and we should be more mindful of them and not treat them any less because we are all the same