

Research Article

Preparing Preservice Teachers to Navigate Between Special Education and Disability Studies

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Abstract: The field of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) has been critiqued as failing to bridge or make explicit how DSE theory is translated into educational practice. This qualitative autoethnography study uses examples from the classroom to explore how teacher preparation programs can prepare preservice teachers to translate DSE theory into practice within traditional Special Education settings.

Keywords: Disability Studies; Special Education; Teacher Preparation

I arrive a few minutes before the start of the school day, and Jessica, who describes herself as an autism teacher, greets me. She greets me in the school office, and I can tell she is genuinely excited to see me, as I am to see her. She was a student in my undergraduate methods course many years ago, and I remember her as incredibly articulate and outspoken in her advocacy for students with significant disabilities. Today I am visiting her self-contained classroom because she has agreed to participate in a research project exploring the current practices and beliefs of teachers who educate students with significant disabilities.

She motions for me to follow and begins describing her students and classroom. Like a proud mother, she brags about her students' recent progress. One student has started using a communication device, and another student has recently started to read a few words. As we reach the door of her classroom, she pauses, looks at me, and in a confessional tone says, "it's not perfect, it's reality."

A maze of three-quarter high walls greets me upon entering her classroom. Jessica takes the lead, and we weave through the maze to a horseshoe table that is positioned in front of a whiteboard. She offers a verbal tour of her classroom, "[e]ach student has a workstation where they begin the day completing their work basket tasks. Depending on the schedule, students then rotate through a variety of stations." Pointing to a row of cubicles, she continues, "we follow Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) and Treatment and Education of Autism and related Communication and Handicapped Children (TEACCH)." As she continues to share, I am no longer listening. My thoughts have taken over, and I am growing anxious. What happened to Jessica? My reaction is visceral as if I've been punched in the gut. I feel betrayed. I did not teach Jessica to use ABA. The room is devoid of typical learning materials, replaced with three-quarter walls that resemble cubicles that you might find in an office building. Learning is referred to as work, and Jessica speaks in the behavioral jargon of "first you work, then you get a break." This teacher is not the same Jessica who sat in my method course advocating for inclusion and the rights of individuals with disabilities. To be continued below...

Introduction

Using qualitative autoethnography and the learning processes of boundary crossing (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011), this paper examines the intersection of Special Education and Disability Studies in Education (DSE) in teacher preparation. As a scholar and educator who aligns with a DSE perspective, I struggle with how my identity of DSE scholar and educator might be reconciled with my (reluctant) identity of a former special educator who works primarily in special education public school settings and prepares future special education teachers. Keeping in mind the vignette from above, I question if I have prepared students for the ‘realities’ of the classroom. As a professor in a special education teacher preparation program, I wonder, *what might I do differently? How can I best prepare special educators to resist, negotiate, and successfully navigate special education systems from a DSE lens?* Given this context, the following research questions have framed this paper. How do DSE scholars and educators bridge DSE theory with teaching and learning in the classroom? How do I (we) negotiate the boundaries between Special Education and DSE? How do I (we) prepare preservice teachers to negotiate and navigate the contradictory fields of Special Education and DSE? This question of how we, as DSE scholars and educators, make DSE theory relevant and useful to teachers working within the field of Special Education is timely and vital. As Cosier and Ashby (2016) so eloquently remind me, “whether teachers agree with the system in place or not, they still have to work within it” (p. 4). In turn, we must understand how to prepare teachers to work within it.

Special Education and Disability Studies in Education

Special Education, as enacted in public schools across the United States, is premised on the medical model of disability. Underlying the medical model of disability are a number of empiricist assumptions that inform the practice and delivery of special education services and supports. Foremost, disability is perceived as an objective reality, and through proper testing, evaluation, and intervention, an individual labeled with a disability can be treated, remediated, or cured (Gallagher, 2004, 2005; Iano, 1990, 2004; Skrtic, 1995, 2004). Educators teaching from a medical model framework, thus, seek to set aside personal experience, beliefs, or background to ‘objectively’ discover the ‘truth’ of teaching and learning. From this understanding, disability exists independent of the social and cultural context, instead of residing within the individual.

When applied to students in classroom contexts, these assumptions are problematic. Under the premise that adherence to the medical model will result in learning and growth, teachers assume the role of a technician and follow a prescribed set of techniques (Iano, 1990). This type of instruction fails to consider a student's cultural, social, or economic backgrounds and how they may intersect and impact on the classroom context. From a medical model framework, instruction is reduced to a set of skills to be mastered and often narrow in its curricular focus.

An alternative understanding of disability is the notion of disability as socially

constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1966). In contrast to the medical model, a socially constructed understanding of disability acknowledges that differences among individuals exist; however, the meaning we ascribe to those differences are a matter of interpretation and dependent upon social, cultural, and economic contexts. That is, we, as educators, have the power to make differences matter more or less depending on the meaning we ascribe to difference. From this perspective, students labeled with disabilities are understood within their educational settings, and the onus for learning does not solely reside on the student's ability to change his or her perceived inherent deficit. Instead, educators and students collectively examine and explore the educational environment to consider what instructional routines, practices, or contexts that hinder a student's learning. Educators recognize and acknowledge how classroom climate and culture, coupled with students' backgrounds and experiences, may construct students as disabled, and they actively seek ways to construct those spaces and practices differently.

Disability Studies in Education (DSE) is a field of study that explores the process of teaching and learning as socially constructed and thus, disability as socially constructed. From this framework, traditional Special Education structures, systems, and practices, such as the medical model and the subsequent practices that often prevail, are critiqued as inequitable, unjust, and disabling (Brantlinger, 2005). Continually evolving as a field, DSE has been challenged in that:

one of the criticisms of current disability studies approaches is that they tend to be too focused on theory and too unconcerned with practice. . . . in our efforts to advance social interpretations of disability, it is the case that we have ignored the genuine needs of practitioners for conversations between theory and practice and concrete examples of social interpretations in practice (Gabel, 2005, p. 16).

To this end, scholars and educators have begun to explore and examine the pragmatics of teaching and learning from a DSE framework (e.g., Cosier & Ashby, 2016; Heroux, 2017; Lim, Thaver, & Poon, 2008; Young & Mintz, 2008). This exploration is timely as it relates to teacher preparation. Heroux (2017) explains:

pre-service teacher preparation program must analyze their current practices and evaluate their effectiveness for preparing high-quality, future special educators for increasingly diverse classrooms. While preparation informed by the medical model of disability is necessary for ensuring that pre-service teachers are knowledgeable about how special education services are delivered across the U.S., it does little in the way of preparing them for addressing how disability is defined and represented in society (p. 10).

This paper contributes to this literature by describing concrete teaching examples that illuminate the tensions between special education and DSE and seeks to understand these 'realities' in ways that inform how we might best prepare preservice educators to negotiate such 'realities.'

Methodology and Methods

In my struggle with how to embed the social model and a DSE framework within the field of Special Education, I have come to understand the necessity of locating myself within and between the boundaries of Special Education and DSE. Making explicit how I attempt to work within and between these two often competing and contradictory systems is a useful reminder of the challenges teachers in the field encounter and the importance of bridging DSE theory with practice. By locating my own teaching stories within and between these boundaries, I use autoethnography to explore how we can prepare teachers to work within Special Education systems and from a DSE framework.

Autoethnography is the critical examination of the self in relation to a broader social context (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). As described above, one of the challenges to the field of DSE is how to bridge DSE theory with practice. By connecting this larger challenge with personal stories of navigating between two seemingly conflicting and contradictory fields, autoethnography serves as a useful tool. That is, I use my personal teaching stories to illuminate the challenges of bridging DSE theory as an avenue to develop a deeper understanding of how we can prepare preservice teachers to teach and learn within the field of Special Education.

To carry out this exploration, I use journals, field notes, and a methodological log to examine my personal experiences. Gallagher (1995) described a methodological log as a place to record field observations, explore ideas, and reflect on the data and research questions. My methodological log contained hundreds of pages of transcribed entries that included: 1) dated entries of documented conversations with colleagues, educators, and students, 2) sketches of ideas, 3) graphic organizers depicting possible theory, and 4) reflections.

To analyze this data, I engaged in the process of journal writing and reading relevant literature and theory to interpret and understand these experiences. I reconstructed significant moments by writing short narrative vignettes. I looked across these narratives for specific themes, and in doing so, I found these experiences were complicated and messy. My experiences shifted between old and new understandings about disability, teaching and learning as I attempted to make sense of and integrate these understandings with my teaching 'realities.' While my understanding of disability, as well as teaching and learning, grew in sophistication over time, these understandings were also mediated by the contexts I found myself navigating. Thus, reconstructing stories through writing vignettes served to both analyze the data and illustrate how I have negotiated the boundaries between Special Education and DSE, while also highlighting the complexities in such negotiations.

Findings and Discussion

Below I use a layered approach to share my findings and discussion. First, I identify three teaching examples that represent critical moments in my thinking about DSE and Special Education. I reconstruct these experiences in the form of narrative vignettes. Following each vignette, I offer discussion by drawing from the theoretical framework of

boundary crossing to analyze the experiences. Akkerman and Bakker (2011) define a boundary as “a sociocultural difference leading to discontinuity in action or interaction” (p. 133). My experiences within and across DSE and Special Education represent a boundary space where “new understandings, identity development, change of practices, and institutional development” (p. 142) emerge. To understand these experiences at the boundary of Special Education and DSE, I use three learning processes identified by Akkerman and Bakker (2011). These processes include identification, coordination, and reflection.

There is no Going Back

In a graduate seminar class, I am introduced to the work of Terry Jo Smith (1997). I am assigned to read her manuscript titled ‘Storying the Moral Dimensions of Disordering: Teacher Inquiry into the Social Construction of Severe Emotional Disturbance.’ When I am assigned this reading, I am both a part-time graduate student and a special educator, teaching in a self-contained classroom for students who are labeled with behavioral disabilities.

My classroom consists of six students who range in age from 11–13 years; five students are male; one student is female. They share the marginalized statuses of minority, low income, and disabled. My instruction consists of one-on-one lessons with each student using a direct instruction curriculum. Each lesson is scripted and requires both teacher and student to engage when cued with the appropriate response. The Boys Town Model, a prescriptive behavioral management system, provides a rigid classroom structure and culture wherein students learn ‘appropriate’ social skills and are rewarded or penalized within an elaborate point system.

When I begin reading Smith’s (1997) manuscript, I am captivated, and I immediately feel a connection to her experiences. In a striking scene, Smith describes an encounter with a student at a bulletin board located in a hallway outside the classroom. The student, Gary, is destroying the bulletin board and Smith is called upon to stop him. In full grandiose fashion, she expresses a willingness to die in his honor and convinces Gary to step away from the bulletin board. She learns he feels humiliated because he is identified as a student with an emotional disturbance on the bulletin board—for all to see. Smith allows Gary to remove his name from the bulletin board, but her peers later criticize her for her ‘unconventional’ methods. That is, she used humor, treated Gary as a person, respectfully communicated, and demonstrated empathy. Like Gary, she, too, is labeled ‘crazy.’ For Smith, this incident leads her to question her purpose, the profession, and how she defined students.

I read this manuscript. I reread it. I am Terry Jo Smith. I realize that I, too, am ‘crazy.’ My student’s name is Jay. He is intelligent and curious, while also nervous, untrusting, and belligerent. On the day that I so vividly recall, Jay comes to school wearing a hat. As I greet him at the door to walk him to class (because I’ve been told that I can’t possibly trust him to walk himself to class), he is wearing a hat. Hats are not allowed. I feel myself tense, anticipating the interaction to come. Without so much as a greeting, I order, “Jay, remove your hat.” Refusal. He ignores me. Again, I instruct, “Jay, I need you to remove your

hat. I need you to look at me, say okay, and do it right away." Refusal. I watch his stance grow more rigid. My associates direct the other students to hush and begin to step out of the way, taking up sides. "Jay, I will deduct a point, if you do not follow my directive," I repeat my command. I deduct a point. Then another point. "Jay, you have lost three points, and you will now go to the time-out room." We face off like a gunfighter and gunslinger in a duel. He refuses to move, and I, regrettably, physically remove him with the assistance of an associate to a padded room. He stays there for the remainder of the morning because he refuses to take off his hat or follow my directions to look at me, do what I say, and check back with me. In the early afternoon, he draws me a picture and slips it under the door. Although the Boys Town Model dictates that this is not protocol and I should not accept it, I do because I am desperate. He has drawn a picture of himself wearing a hat. In a speak bubble stemming from his mouth, he has written, "bad haircut."

I never asked Jay why he wouldn't take off his hat. I didn't consider that as a sixth grader, he may have an excellent reason to wear his hat. I never allowed Jay the opportunity to speak freely; I failed to treat Jay humanly. I sucked. I hated teaching.

The nagging feeling that exists in the shadows of my teaching is revealed and named in Smith's manuscript. I am comforted by her 'craziness' and her suggestion something is amiss in our educational system. Through her critique of special education, she helps me name the conditions of marginalization and oppression. In doing so, I begin to take responsibility for my role in constructing spaces where inequalities play out. I begin to ask: what am I to do? How do I act on this new knowledge? And, while I desire to return to a time that I might perceive as easier, more comfortable, there is no going back. Yet, I am also unsure of how to move forward.

Identification

In the above vignette, I describe my first encounter with Disability Studies in Education—a beautifully written autoethnography by Terry Jo Smith (1997). In this paper, she describes her experiences teaching students labeled with behavioral disabilities and her realization that her students are not the ones who are “emotionally disturbed.” This article conveys an alternative perspective that creates the space to explore the multiple meanings of disability and special education. Smith’s story causes me to begin to question the tenets of special education, and in doing so, I begin to compare and contrast Special Education with the alternative lens of DSE. I begin to understand how significant the differences are between DSE and Special Education.

This teaching story marked the moment when my sense of identity as a Special Education teacher changed, and the boundaries between Special Education and DSE emerged. I wondered, *how can I be both a special and disability studies educator?* Akkerman and Bakker (2011) describe this experience as a process of identification. Identification entails an examination of the core values, beliefs, and identities of two intersecting boundaries or practices. In the process of identification, an individual defines one practice or boundary in light of another. That is, a practice or boundary is compared to another in an attempt to

understand how each practice may be similar or different. As individuals, like myself, begin to understand the differences between the practices or boundaries, they often seek to understand how each can coexist, leading to reconstructed practices or boundaries without necessarily overcoming the discontinuities.

Drugs Deals

My students and I climb the stairs to Mr. Sampson's sixth-grade general education classroom. We quietly sneak into the room and take our seats in the back row. On this day, like all other days, I've prepared 'my students' with verbal instructions, including expectations that border on thinly veiled threats. In the strongest teacher voice I can muster, I say, "I expect you will sit keeping your hands and feet to yourself. Do not disturb the person next to you, and I should see your eyes at the front of the classroom. Do not talk unless you've raised your hand and are called upon. And, remember," I plead, "this is Mr. Sampson's room, and we must show him that we belong here by following his rules." Johnny rolls his eyes at me, and I invoke a small bribe, "This is your opportunity to earn 100 points. I know many of you need these points to earn the opportunity to go on the field trip later this week." Ashamed with the speed at which I capitulate to bribery, I avoid any further eye contact.

When math begins, I take my position, standing in the back corner of the room. I listen and watch as my co-teacher reviews the homework from the day before. I grow restless in the corner and decide to circle the room. Weaving in and out of desks, I glance over the shoulders of students to be certain everyone is following along. As I pass along the back row, I give Johnny a gentle nudge and a small smile that is intended to convey the message: "you're doing great, keep it up." I have the lesson plan that Mr. Sampson shared with me just this morning. In the plan, I've noted the various accommodations that 'my students' require, such as scaffolding and breaking down concepts into steps. Because I didn't have an opportunity to plan with Mr. Sampson, I am a bit uncertain as to the overarching objective and how 'my students' might 'keep up.'

As Mr. Sampson begins to introduce the new concept, I am inclined to join him at the board so that I might break his verbal explanation into a list of steps written for all to see on the whiteboard, but I hold back. I've made a certain, if albeit uncomfortable, peace with our co-teaching arrangement. That is, my students and my very presence in Mr. Sampson's math class came about in what might be described as a 'drug deal' of sorts that entailed me 'selling' what I could offer his classroom in an effort to secure a co-teaching arrangement. I shamelessly provided the security of an extra body in the classroom, additional support in the form of supervision and a willingness to take on shared grading responsibilities. In the act of hustling my way into his classroom, I convinced myself that once granted access, the terms and nature of our agreement could eventually be renegotiated. Months into the school year, I still wander the rows, serving more as a watchdog associate than a co-teacher. On this day, like every other day, I keep an eye on 'my students' and take note of where their learning breaks down so I can provide additional instruction once we return to the special education classroom.

Coordination

In the teaching story above, I attempted to acquiesce to the expectations of the general education classroom, while at the same time trying to quietly meet my students' needs with the necessary special education supports and services. I struggled with the concessions I was making to integrate my students into the general education classroom, as well as what I was asking of my students. Essentially, I was expecting (and bribing) students to 'hide' certain parts of themselves or set aside particular needs to appear as though they belonged in the classroom. I began to equate these efforts as drug deals in that I was selling or offering up my soul (i.e., my values and beliefs) and asking my students to do the same in a desperate attempt at inclusion. I felt conflicted by my new understanding of teaching and learning from a DSE framework and my desire to provide an opportunity for my students and me to be part of the general education classroom no matter the cost. As I began to realize that making these concessions did not accomplish what I had hoped, I grew weary and burnt out. Although my students were in the general education setting, they experienced additional oppression by the denial of or suggestion that they should hide their differences and accept the denial of any necessary accommodations.

Akkerman and Bakker (2011) describe the learning mechanism of coordination as the process of seeking procedures that allow for diverse perspectives, but without disrupting traditional practice. The concept of coordination helps me to make sense of this teaching story. In the process of coordination, communication and collaboration are established with the goal of maintaining the flow of work; however, there is not necessarily consensus between the two practices or boundaries (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). Coordination includes four elements. First, there is a communicative connection that is established across the boundaries in the form of a shared boundary object. In this example, the shared general education lesson plan served as the boundary object because it provided a common structure within which the general education and myself were connected around a common purpose.

Second, there are concerted efforts at translating that boundary object to bridge the boundary practices. In this case, the lesson plan was translated between general and special education knowledge and practice to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. To do this, I worked to find a balance between the general education expectations and the special education accommodations and services my students required to be successful in the general education setting. However, in the example above, I understood that I needed to be careful so that my students' needs did not appear to be so significant as to justify pull-out instruction. Thus, I attempted to make the classroom run as smoothly as possible without drawing any attention to my students. These efforts represent the third element of coordination—that of routinization. Routinization is achieved when coordination becomes automatic, and the boundary is seemingly overcome. For me, routinization and merely overcoming the boundary was problematic. While it appeared that diverse practices were in place to sustain an inclusive classroom, there remained a majority practice, and without genuine consensus, the boundaries and dominant practice remain intact. My efforts at coordination silently maintained oppression under the guise that we can all live and work together (Akkerman & Bakker,

2011).

Undercover Cop

... [continued from above] I remain in Jessica's classroom all day. I begin to feel like an outsider in her class. These are not the instructional strategies that I taught her. I taught her about cooperative learning, project-based instruction, and community-driven classrooms, but I witness students sitting in isolation for long periods, working on worksheets or receiving one-on-one instruction. Although she warned me that her class was 'not perfect,' I feel conflicted as I seek to understand what happened to Jessica. She is proud of her classroom and seeking my approval, but I am reluctant. How can I approve of practices so counter to what I believe to be good instruction? Do I merely go along with the instruction I am witnessing? Alternatively, do I say something?

It is apparent that Jessica has worked diligently to structure a classroom that adheres to the principles of TEACCH and structured teaching. The students rotate to various stations, complete work tasks, and respond with automaticity. The class runs like a well-oiled machine, but I am distraught. I do not want to offend her, so I tell her that it is obvious how much she cares for her students and how hard she works on their behalf. This part is true. What I don't tell her is that I am deeply disappointed. I don't ask why she so quickly embraced a deficit understanding of her students and the accompanying medical model that characterizes traditional special education practice. I sense this would deeply trouble her, and as I look around, I imagine she might not have had much choice. I attempt to understand what led her to these instructional practices. She is a new special education teacher surrounded by veteran teachers and a school district that uses a particular curriculum and behavioral approach for students with autism. She is, I come to realize, just doing her job—the job the district asked her to do. However, I wonder if I have done my job in preparing her?

Reflection

The opening and above vignettes provide an example of the process of reflection. Reflection refers to the potential of a boundary to facilitate and explicate differences between practices that lead to learning something new about one's own and others' practices (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). As Jessica's former professor, I found myself in a unique position as I entered her classroom. With the lens of both a researcher and teacher, I immediately identified a boundary between what I had taught Jessica and the practices that I witnessed. In conversation with Jessica, I was unable to indict her practices out of respect for her and her willingness to participate in the research, but I was also distraught and conflicted. How did Jessica come to teach from a medical model framework? My immediate inclination was that Jessica sold out; however, I also sensed that her story and experiences were more complicated than merely selling out. How did Jessica shift from a social model view of disability during her undergraduate coursework to medical or deficit understanding? How did she reconcile these two differing frameworks? To answer these questions required reflection and a willingness to call into question my instructional practices. I contemplated: *What are*

the realities that new teachers encounter? How do they make decisions? What concessions must they make? How do I, as a professor, better prepare my students for the 'realities' of the classrooms they will encounter?

I also worried that I was offering approval to Jessica. It was evident that she was seeking my approval. Did my presence imply approval? Should I have asked her harder questions? This approach would have been disrespectful, I fear, and not productive. However, if I choose not to confront her, have I sold out? Was I condoning these cubicle workstations and the underlying ideology that understands students as objectives in need of training? I felt like an imposter, pretending to go along with practices I so profoundly abhorred. However, on reflection, I also began to understand the constraints, the complexities that lead me to better understand how the Jessica that I knew as an undergraduate was now a part of a larger system. I felt caught in the middle. When I considered Jessica's circumstances, I found myself making concessions that would be counter to my DSE identity. However, I was hesitant to be more direct with Jessica out of fear of sacrificing my 'cover.'

Reflection is the process of perspective making and taking. Whereas perspective making requires an individual to make explicit his or her understanding and knowledge of a particular issue, perspective taking requires one to attempt to understand through the lenses of another. In observing Jessica's class and her instruction, I became keenly aware of my early experiences as a special education teacher. I recollected how challenging it was to teach from a DSE framework within structures premised on the medical model. Memories of Jay and co-teaching came rushing back to me, and I began to understand how Jessica might find herself teaching special education, attempting to navigate the boundaries of Special Education and DSE and why she might have started our conversation with an apology of sorts, "It's not perfect, it's reality." Jessica, like my former special education self, was attempting to do the best she could.

Reflection that leads to learning something new about one's own and others' practices in ways that inform future practice is difficult. In contrast to identification or coordination, reflection leads to enhanced, altered, or improved understandings of the world and changes future practice (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). As I use Akkerman and Bakker's (2011) learning processes of identification, coordination, and reflection, it is reflection that illuminates my pivotal moments of identification, my efforts at coordination, and the continued challenges that special educators encounter teaching from a DSE lens. Through such reflection, I understand there remains much work to be done in preparing teachers to transform the boundary between Special Education and DSE.

Implications

When I examine my teaching stories at the boundaries of DSE and Special Education through the learning mechanisms of identification, coordination, and reflection, several implications emerge for how we, as DSE scholars and educators, prepare preservice teachers. First, undergraduate teacher preparation coursework must include multiple opportunities to

examine the fields of Special Education and DSE critically (Heroux, 2017). A thorough examination of each field through a lens of equity, social justice, and diversity should be undertaken. First-person narrative accounts of disability, analysis of the history of Special Education and DSE, including the disability rights movement, and contextualizing disability within political and social spheres are vital components within teacher preparation programs (Connor, 2016). Teacher preparation programs should include spaces for preservice teachers to examine their values and beliefs, and how these beliefs align with various frameworks and understandings of disability. Conversations that center on how theory underlines and informs practice are vital.

Drawing again from the first vignette, I can vividly remember feeling something amiss in my teaching, yet I did not have the means to identify that feeling or make sense of my growing dissatisfaction with teaching. It was not until my graduate work did I encounter the social model and DSE, and while not too late, I remember wondering why I had not been exposed to these ideas sooner. When I reflected on my experiences in Jessica's classroom, I sensed from Jessica that she, too, was conflicted. Although I witnessed what I perceived as some questionable curricular decisions and instructional strategies rooted in a medical model, I also observed how she was well-intended, caring, and an advocate for her students. In her initial greeting to me, she commented that "it wasn't perfect" and in doing so, she conveyed some recognition that she, too, was uncomfortable with the overall nature of her classroom. Without the opportunity to explicitly identify and explore the social model of disability and how various instructional practices align or are counter to the social model in her teacher preparation coursework, Jessica had not learned how to align her instructional practices or push back when given a curriculum that contradicted what she had learned in her teacher preparation program. Thus, teacher preparation programs must also prepare preservice teachers to be boundary workers.

Boundary workers are individuals who encounter discontinuity in their actions and interactions when they find themselves at the intersection of two boundaries (Walker & Nocon, 2007). Boundary workers are located at the heart of discontinuities and can assist in opening windows into the work that occurs in boundary practice (Akkermann & Bakker, 2011; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013). Walker and Nocon (2007) suggest that successful boundary workers possess the ability to teach and learn "within a given context to (a) understand and negotiate the meanings, through the use of material and symbolic artifacts and (b) to understand and negotiate the meanings through engagement with others" (p. 180). The role of the boundary worker is to create connections between the practices of the overlapping communities (i.e., DSE and Special Education) and to facilitate the transactions between them by introducing new elements of one practice to another.

In teaching our preservice teachers to be boundary workers, a useful strategy is the notion of 'working the cracks' (Collins, 2000). Collins (2000) describes the ability to 'work the cracks' as 'resistance from the *inside*.' That is, a person located within an oppressive structure capitalizes on small opportunities by virtue of his or her membership within the structure, to initiate change through pecking away at "cracks and fissures that represent

organizational weakness” (p. 282, italics original). Although Collins (2000) employs the concept to describe individuals within positions of authority in bureaucratic organizations, teacher educators can use the idea to teach preservice teachers how to use their membership in the field of Special Education to introduce and advocate for change that translates DSE theory into practice.

As we prepare preservice teachers to ‘work the cracks,’ the learning mechanisms of identification, coordination, and reflection can be explicitly taught to preservice teachers as strategies they can use in both ‘working the cracks,’ as well as a means of understanding their work within and between DSE and Special Education. For example, preservice teachers who begin to understand disability through the social model will no doubt encounter the learning mechanism of coordination in their learning as they seek to make sense of how to teach from the social model. In anticipation of this quandary, teacher preparation programs can prepare students to recognize the benefits and challenges of the learning mechanism of coordination in their teaching. For instance, while coordination seeks to embed diverse practices, for example, Universal Design for Learning, within classroom settings, there is often an absence of genuine investment or widespread change on the part of the broader system or classroom. A parallel system is often established that, while representing a certain degree of progress, also presents barriers to more profound change. As preservice teachers participate in field experiences or student teaching experiences, opportunities exist to observe, discuss, and problem-solve around such issues related to coordination.

Concerning reflection, preservice teachers can be taught how to reflect in ways that require them to practice the skills of perspective taking and making. As they work to expand their understanding of the classroom contexts and educators’ actions and motivation within those contexts, readings, activities, and discussions should center on examining the perspectives of stakeholders, including administrators, paraprofessionals, parents, and other educators. For example, Connor (2016) provides an example of how teachers might analyze a school’s culture to understand the various perspectives of educators and administrators, resources, priorities, and contextual factors to enrich their understanding of the dynamics impacting potential change and to strategically plan for short-term, immediate, and long-term action.

Finally, although I chose to present my teaching stories linearly to highlight each learning mechanism, I find that my teaching stories and experiences are not linear. Instead, the learning mechanisms described by Akkerman and Bakker (2011) work concurrently, often dependent upon my positionality, as well as the social, cultural, and environmental contexts that I continually navigate. Making explicit one’s journey by sharing teaching stories and deconstructing these stories with and for preservice educators is essential. Understanding and recognizing how one moves in and out of, across and between these learning mechanisms is vital to change and transformation. If we, as DSE teacher educators, desire to translate DSE theory to practice, we must be willing to share our experiences in ways that give others opportunities and permission to share and reflect on their journeys.

Last, we must continually reevaluate and reflect on the structures within which we work, the practices we purport, and how these practices align with the ‘realities’ of schools and classrooms. We cannot teach from the ‘ivory tower,’ but instead must build networks and partnerships with schools and teachers to understand the contexts within which they teach and the challenges they encounter. We must model the notion of ‘working the cracks’ (Collins, 2000) and while “most days do not involve dramatic, enormous victories” (Danforth, 2016, p. x), one must hold onto the notion that change occurs through small shifts that begin with hope—the hope of something better.

Conclusion

The first qualitative study I remember reading was an ethnography by Elliot Liebow (1967) titled Tally’s Corner. In this ethnography, Liebow seeks to understand the experiences of young black men from urban settings by immersing himself in their daily lives. He witnesses illegal activities, overhears and is privy to rich and indicting conversations, and struggles with the moral and ethical quandaries that emerge, as he moves between membership within the street community and his role of researcher. I identify with Liebow in that my positionality as both a DSE scholar and a reluctant member of the field of special education often results in feeling like an undercover cop located within and between the boundaries of Special Education and DSE. How do I seemingly ‘go along’ when I abhor the very tenets of the field of Special Education? While I struggle with this question, the experiences that I have teaching and learning within the field of Special Education expand my understanding of the ‘realities’ that teachers encounter. I find myself living in an in-between space, and while it is messy and uncomfortable, I recognize such space as useful in helping me understand how to prepare preservice teachers to bridge DSE theory with traditional Special Education classroom practice.

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