

*Building Pedagogical Curb Cuts:
Incorporating Disability in the University
Classroom and Curriculum*

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Editors' Introduction

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In her August 1, 2004 letter to the community, the new chancellor of Syracuse University, Dr. Nancy Cantor, asked, “Across disciplines, constituencies, and roles, how can we engage thoughtfully to make a difference? ... Who defines *the problem* ... and how do we talk to each other and listen respectfully?” In this book, we attempt to address these questions with regard to disability. What is disability? Who defines it? What does this mean for us here on a university campus or in our classrooms? Does it mean different things for students than for teachers? Finally, what can we do as individuals to create an environment where the perspectives of all are taken into account?

In trying to answer the chancellor’s questions, we must first examine the meaning of the term “disability.” Disability is often seen as a static category with clear boundaries between the disabled and the nondisabled. Upon closer examination, however, the fluidity of the label “disability” is evident. For example, consider people with age-related hearing loss who identify as nondisabled in relation to those have less hearing loss, but who identify with the Deaf community. Where is the line between them? What about someone who tests poorly in math, but is brilliant in art? Would that person count as disabled? Studies of individual cases reveal that disability is contextual.

To further complicate the definition, there is significant variation within the group that is identified as disabled. For instance, people with vision impairments and people with

psychiatric labels fall into the same category, yet what do they have in common? Although contested in its meaning and value, the category “disabled” does legitimately exist. It is based on a commonality of experience, a shared history of oppression, and the identification as disabled by self or others. Similarities of experience and advocacy have created the disability rights movement, a movement based on full participation and autonomy for people labeled with disabilities. Scholarship and theory around disability developed from this movement. Activist and author James Charleton said, “having a disability is *essentially* neither a good thing nor a bad thing. It just is.” (p. 167). Nonetheless there are multiple ways of understanding disability. This book seeks to examine the fluidity of the category of disability in the instructional setting.

This book is the result of a collaborative and interdisciplinary effort to examine how the university can better include the perspectives of scholars and students who have disabilities in the classroom. Through the combined efforts of the Beyond Compliance Coordinating Committee (BCCC) and the Graduate School, both of Syracuse University. BCCC is an advocacy organization of students working to create and support a positive climate for disability that values individual difference in all university settings. In the fall of 2003, the BCCC approached the Graduate School to present its vision and mission, and to gain support. The Future Professoriate Program (FPP) of the Graduate School took on the project of producing this book as part of its efforts and invited the editors of this book to participate in coordinating this effort. The FPP prepares graduate students for the full range of responsibilities they might assume as employees in higher education. The authors of this book come from a variety of disciplines and have engaged in disability scholarship, activism or accommodation in their classes.

The book is organized into three sections followed by a resource guide. Each of the articles discusses a different aspect of bringing the disability perspective and/or students with disabilities into the classroom. Anita Ho begins the section **Incorporating**

Disability into the Curriculum with, “Mainstreaming Disability: A Case in Bioethics.” She encourages instructors to avoid marginalizing disability or using it as an “add on” to reading materials. She demonstrates her claim by using examples from bioethics courses. Elizabeth Hamilton and Tammy Berberi examine how disability is, or is not, taught as part of the foreign language curriculum in “Language Barriers and Barriers to Language: Disability in the Foreign Language Classroom.” In her article, “Including Women with Disabilities in Women Studies,” Maria Barile examines some of the benefits and problems of the intersection of disability studies and women studies. Ann Millett’s “Seeing Double,” examines ways of teaching about artistic representations of different bodies.

It is common to use popular culture to explore academic concepts. In “Cinematically Challenged: Using Film in Class,” Mia Feldbaum and Zach Rossetti explore some of the most common tropes of film representations of disability and provide a film directory to help integrate disability into the classroom. Julia White, in her article, “‘Krazy Kripples’: Using *South Park* to Talk About Disability,” deconstructs an episode of the popular adult cartoon television program, and models how cultural products such as television shows can be used to teach disability theory. In “Teaching for Social Change,” Kathy Kniepmann uses media representations of disability to teach students about social participation and human dignity.

In **Designing Instruction for Everyone**, the authors discuss their experiences with teaching diverse groups of learners and demonstrate how advanced planning can create an accessible and challenging learning environment for all. In “Nothing Special: Becoming a Good Teacher for All,” Zach Rossetti and Christy Ashby discuss how they create classrooms that are accessible to their students. Similarly, in “Tools for Universal Instruction,” Thomas Argondizza outlines the principles of Universal Design that are the foundation for an accessible curriculum. Liat Ben-Moshe, in “Lame Idea: Disabling Language in the Classroom,” examines how we, as instructors, should be mindful of our

language since the terminology we use may perpetuate abelist stereotypes. This section concludes with “Learning from Each Other: Syracuse University and the OnCampus Program” by Cheryl G. Najarian and Michele Paetow. They discuss the experiences of two teachers who participated in the On Campus program at Syracuse University; a program that supports students labeled with cognitive disabilities in their experiences at the university.

In the section **Students with Disabilities in the Classroom**, the book explores the classroom experience from the perspective of students with disabilities. Each of these articles narrates a personal experience of a student or group of students in the classroom. In “Being an Ally,” Katrina Arndt and Pat English-Sand discuss how they, as instructors and non-disabled students, have worked to ally themselves with the disability rights movement and support their peers who have disabilities. “Adapting and ‘Passing’: My Experiences as a Graduate Student with Multiple Invisible Disabilities” by Elizabeth Sierra-Zarella and “We’re not Stupid: My College Years as a Mentally Challenged Student” by Anthony Nocella, II, chronicle two specific students’ experiences in higher education. In “Crucial Communication Triangle: Students With Disabilities, Faculty, and Disability Support Services” by Sara Pace and in “Signs of Inclusion: Using Sign Language Interpreters in the Classroom” by Jeremy L. Brunson, the authors discuss aspects of collaboration among faculty, students and auxiliary service providers. Crystal Doody and Julie Morse’s “Legal Requirements for Students with Disabilities and Universities” makes sense of the requirements for classroom accessibility and inclusion from an American legal standpoint. The book concludes with a resource guide to help readers find further resources for making classrooms inclusive and integrating the disability perspective into curricula.

This book is by no means a complete account of all pedagogical issues pertaining to disability. It cannot, and does not cover all disciplines, all disabilities or all topics; however, we feel that the information presented in this volume can be applied to

most disciplines and all disabilities. We see this volume as a starting point. We invite you to engage with the content and ideas, to ask questions and to challenge yourselves and your colleagues to look at your curricula through the perspectives and ideas presented here.

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Resource Guide

Liat Ben-Moshe

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For a fuller list of books, web sites, films and articles that engage with disability issues in different disciplines, access *Disability studies: Information and resources*, an online publication produced by the Center on Human Policy at Syracuse University: http://soeweb.syr.edu/thechp/Disability_Studies_2003_current.html

For more information on disability issues in postsecondary education see *Beyond compliance: An information package on the inclusion of people with disabilities in postsecondary education*, another online publication produced by the same group available at: http://soeweb.syr.edu/thechp/BCCC_PACKAGE.HTML

The print version does include reprints that cannot be re-produced on the web site. Print copies of both publications can be requested by writing to:

Center on Human Policy
Syracuse University
805 S. Crouse Ave.
Syracuse, NY 13244-2280 or by calling the center at
(315) 443-3851 or (800) 894-0826.

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Thomas Argondizza started working with instructional design while employed by BellSouth. He took a sabbatical leave and pursued a master's of science in instructional design, development and evaluation at Syracuse University. While at Syracuse University, he designed and developed materials for the Federal Aviation Administration, the Syracuse Information Institute and the Syracuse City School District. He is currently employed as an instructional designer in Maryland.

Katrina Arndt

Katrina Arndt is a doctoral student in the special education program at Syracuse University. For the past several years, she has worked in classrooms with youth who have disabilities and has been an ally to students with disabilities. Her research interests include self-determination and self advocacy.

Christy Ashby

Christy Ashby is a graduate student at Syracuse University pursuing her doctorate in special education and in disability studies. A former inclusive special education teacher, she is interested in inclusive education at all levels with particular interest in the school experiences of students with autism and mental retardation labels. Other research interests include the social construction of disability and issues of cultural representation.

Maria Barile

Maria G. Barile received a master's degree in social work from McGill University in 1993. She is among 17 female co-founders of Dis-Abled Women's Network Canada and its local affiliate Action des femmes handicapées (Montréal). As an activist, she uses writing to promote a progressive perspective of the lives of persons with disabilities. She works for Adaptech Research Network ().

Liat Ben-Moshe

Liat Ben-Moshe began pursuing her doctorate in sociology, disability studies and women's studies at Syracuse University in 2002. Her current research interests are construction of dis/Ability, representations of disability in film and literature, discourse on nationalism and militarization, activism and the body. She is also an active member of Beyond Compliance (BCCC), an organization devoted to raising awareness around disability issues at Syracuse University.

Tammy Berberi

Tammy Berberi (doctorate, Indiana University) is an assistant professor of French at the University of Minnesota in Morris, where she also directs the university's Language Teaching Center. She has advocated for students and educators with disabilities for more than a decade and currently serves as the moderator of DS-HUM, a listserv devoted to disability in the humanities.

Jeremy L. Brunson

Jeremy has been a sign language interpreter for 10 years and has taught interpreters for 5 years. He holds a certification of interpretation and a certification of transliteration from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. A native of Arizona, he is currently pursuing sociology and disability studies in the graduate school of Syracuse University. His current research focus is the transformation process of sign language interpreting as it moves from something people "do" (an occupation) to something people "are" (a profession).

Rebecca C. Cory

Rebecca Cory is a doctoral candidate in cultural foundations of education and disability studies at Syracuse University. She works as the disability specialist at Wells College and is a founding member of Beyond Compliance (BCCC).

Crystal Doody

Crystal Doody is a third-year, joint-degree student in law and disability studies. She is a founding member of the disAbility Law Society. In May of 2005, she will be among the first graduates of the combined juris doctorate/ master's of science in education program at Syracuse University. Crystal hopes to work as a disability rights attorney while also using her degree to educate attorneys about people with disabilities and to educate people with disabilities about legal advocacy.

Pat English-Sand

Pat English-Sand is a teacher of students with special needs, an inclusion facilitator and an ally to students and colleagues with disabilities. She is also a doctoral student in special education and disability studies at Syracuse University. Her research examines the experience of students with significant disabilities in inclusive educational settings with a focus on the development of literacy skills.

Mia Feldbaum

Mia Feldbaum is a graduate student at Syracuse University pursuing her master's degree in cultural foundations of education and in disability studies. She also leads inclusive extended wilderness trips in the United States and in Canada. She is a member of Beyond Compliance (BCCC). Her research interests include the intersections of disability, race and gender; inclusive outdoor education; media representations; and international human rights.

Elizabeth Hamilton

Elizabeth Hamilton is an assistant professor of German at Oberlin College. Her research explores discourses of disability in German literature, film and foreign language pedagogy. She has also served on the executive committee of the Disability Studies Discussion Group within the Modern Language Association.

Anita Ho

Anita Ho is an assistant professor of philosophy and a co-coordinator of the Center for Women, Economic Justice and Public Policy at The College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota. Her teaching and research interests include disability issues, ethics, bioethics and business ethics as well as social and political philosophy.

Kathy Kniepmann

Kathy Kniepmann is on the faculty of the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. She teaches disability courses for undergraduates and teaches health promotion, culture and community education for graduate students. She is an occupational therapist and health educator. Her master's degrees in education and public health are from Harvard University where she developed an office of health education for students, faculty and staff. Her interests include disability studies, media effects, social change and cross-cultural issues in health.

Ann Millett

Ann Millett is a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is currently working on a dissertation that combines the disciplines of art history and disability studies, focusing on examples of contemporary art that relate to historical venues that place the disabled body on display.

Julie Morse

Julie Morse is a third-year, joint-degree student in law and disability studies. She is a founding member of the disAbility Law Society. In May of 2005, she will be among the first graduates of the combined juris doctorate/ master's of science in education program at Syracuse University. Julie hopes to work as a disability rights attorney while also using her degree to educate attorneys about people with disabilities and to educate people with disabilities about legal advocacy.

Cheryl G. Najarian

Cheryl G. Najarian is an assistant professor of sociology and a faculty associate in the Center for Women and Work at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell. She received her bachelor's in English from Boston College, her master's in higher education administration from the University of Arizona and her doctorate in sociology from Syracuse University. Her current research investigates the mothering and paid-work experiences of college-educated deaf women in two different geographical locations. She teaches introductory courses in sociology and gender studies.

Anthony J. Nocella, II

Anthony J. Nocella, II is a social science doctoral student at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University. He holds a M.A. in Peacemaking and Conflict Studies from Fresno Pacific University. Nocella a long-time peace, animal rights, mentally challenged, and environmental activist, first became involved in political activism while attending the Delaware Valley Friends School in Philadelphia, PA, a private Quaker school for students with learning differences. He later moved with his family to Houston, Texas and graduated from Briarwood High School (a private school for mentally and learning challenged students), as the Student of the Year and was awarded the Presidential Award from President Clinton.

Sara Pace

Sara Pace is working on her doctorate in rhetoric at Texas Woman's University, where she also teaches composition and literature courses. Her dissertation focuses on the use of voice recognition software as a writing tool for writers at the college level.

Michele Paetow

Michele Paetow has a master's degree in special education from Syracuse University and has taught at every grade level in her 30-year career in the Syracuse and Oswego schools. Her interests include expanding the ways schools, including colleges, provide instruction and develop an accepting and respectful community for diverse learners, including those with autism and severe disabilities.

Zach Rosetti

Zach Rosetti is currently pursuing a doctorate in special education and in disability studies at Syracuse University. He is a former teacher and inclusion facilitator from New Hampshire. His research interests include inclusive education, autism, friendship formation and media representations of disability. He is a huge Boston Red Sox fan.

Ken Sagendorf

Ken Sagendorf is an associate director for Professional Development Programs of the Graduate School at Syracuse University. He is an adjunct instructor in exercise science as well as a doctoral candidate in science teaching. His research involves studying faculty members in their first year on the job.

Elizabeth Sierra-Zarella

Elizabeth Sierra-Zarella, a third-year doctoral student in child and family studies, was born and raised in Wichita Falls, Texas. As a first-generation college student from an impoverished family, a Hispanic woman with multiple disabilities, and a former teen mother on welfare, she has faced oppression on many levels and is committed to identifying and removing the societal barriers preventing people from reaching their highest potential. She currently resides in Camillus, New York, with her husband, Mark, and her daughter, Tabitha.

Julia White

Julia White is a doctoral candidate in the special education and disability studies programs at Syracuse University. Her research interests include inclusive education for social justice, especially for students of ethnic minorities; comparative analyses of special education law; and disability studies, especially as it pertains to popular culture.