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Students with disabilities have been spoken *for*, *to*, and *about* by art educators. But outside art education, a proliferation of first-person disability narratives in the past 15 years has provided an alternative to the dominant tragic disability narrative written by non-disabled scholars.

Re-imagining Inclusion/ Exclusion: Unpacking Assumptions and Contradictions in Arts and Special Education from a Critical Disability Studies Perspective

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Inclusion is usually defined "as a student with an identified disability, spending greater than 80% of his or her school day in a general education classroom in proximity to nondisabled peers" (Baglieri et al., 2011, p. 2125). This term, although seemingly benign and even beneficial, is nevertheless the outcome of polarized and divided terminologies. As a result, inclusion within the public school system can suggest not belonging. In this article I examine the invisible barriers to children's full inclusion and participation hidden within the terminology and practices of special education, and suggest how the arts might be a natural ally in establishing student empowerment and equality in the classroom.

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> Who are 'we' such that disabled people are excluded? Who are disabled people such that 'they' can be overlooked in the past? Who do we become when such a past is used as a justification for the present state of affairs? (Titchkosky, 2011, p .15)

The Language of Special Education

The acceptance of children with disabilities into public education in the U.S. developed gradually from total exclusion to segregated classrooms. With the advent of federal laws, most notably the 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (formerly the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children, or PL 94-142), children with disabilities were integrated and finally *included* into the *regular* classroom. That means included whenever possible, as Simi Linton (2010) explains, and *whenever possible* varies within schools and districts. Still, most schools and districts exclude children with severe disabilities, although in some instances they have been included with adequate support, and with great success (Linton, 2010). More importantly, the trajectory of special education from omission to *inclusion* involves the pervasive deficit model. The deficit model conceives of disability as a problem to be solved, cured, and cared for (Titchkosky, 2011), which is used to justify sorting and separating children based on their differences from the norm.

Inclusion is usually defined "as a student with an identified disability, spending greater than 80% of his or her school day in a general education classroom in proximity to nondisabled peers" (Baglieri et al., 2011, p. 2125). In this article I question what this and other definitions mean in the reality of children's education through the lens of disability studies. What does inclusion signify? What does the existence of a *regular* classroom within a *general* education imply (e.g., what is *not* regular and general)? I argue that the terminal use of institutional language perpetuates and legitimates the inevitable: unquestioned *special* labels and placements. The term inclusion, although seemingly benign and even beneficial, is nevertheless the outcome of polarized and divided terminologies. As a result, says Baglieri et al. (2011), *inclusion* takes on the connotation of not belonging, such as in the frequently used slogan "inclusion kids" (p. 2123).

Institutional language, therefore, defines, perpetuates, and establishes how we perceive and judge the Other, how we act and make meaning within a social space (Titchkosky, 2011). The most intractable problem is that these meanings have become the unquestioned status quo. Like Tanya Titchkosky (2011), I suggest that we collectively wonder about how we arrived at the practices of determining who is in and who is out; how might we "treat disability as a way of perceiving and orienting to the world rather than conceiving of it as an individual functional limitation" (p. 3)? The deficit model of disability as a personal need[1] prohibits us from participating in a social understanding of disability because it represents all that is undesirable, and therefore all that can be excluded. Titchkosky (2011) calls the "politics of wonder" (p. 15) the questioning of how and what organizes bodies, places, meanings, and what has already been said and done. Looking at access as a "form of perception and thus a space of questions" (p. 15) allows us to remake meaning collectively.

While examining these invisible barriers to children's full inclusion and participation hidden within the terminology and practices of special education, I suggest how the arts might be a vehicle by which we reimagine disability within a social space, denaturalize that which appears natural, and invite diverse forms of embodiment. In the final paragraphs I narrow the discussion of disability within the so-called invisible disabilities, or neurological and cognitive difference, and how student empowerment and equality might be established in the art room. First, I present self-reflective responses from preservice teachers in a course called *Disability Studies in Art Education,* who wrestle with unexamined or unconscious notions about the autism spectrum. Priya Lalvani and Alicia Broedrick (2015) theorize that preservice teacher beliefs are entrenched in the medical model of deficit because of the beliefs of their inservice teachers "...then surely this raises questions about the ways in which *teacher*

[1] Titchkosky (2011) writes that students with disabilities are understood as a problem to be solved: "Understanding disability as a personal need which requires evaluation, services, or counseling, rather than collective action or exploration, requires us to engage disability in individual terms" (p. 12).

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educators are thinking about these same issues, and ways in which ableist assumptions are explicitly or implicitly communicated to teacher candidates" (p. 170). In order to destabilize ableist assumptions, I discuss how textual and visual disability autobiography, personal narratives, and stories are explored in this course as sources of preservice teacher epistemological investigation that legitimizes various ways of being in the world. Finally, I suggest that disability performance art is a particularly effective form of cultural production that bridges theoretical textual analysis with experience (Penketh, 2014). I present examples of performative interventions with autistic students and preservice art teachers as one way that the arts serve as transformative social practice while leveling the asymmetrical relationships between teacher and student, and between self and other. The ultimate question might be, as Claire Penketh (2014) asks, to what extent can "a study of disability deepen our understanding" of art education (p. 293)?

Disability Studies in Education

> Disability studies introduces contradiction into the polarized categories of weak and strong, normal and abnormal, revered and reviled, dependent and independent, expendable and essential. It reveals these as false dichotomies and reveals the epistemological underpinnings of the privileged position of each pair. (Linton, 1998, pp.185-186)

Critical disability studies is positioned to critique under-analyzed rehabilitative practices sustained in and driven by a network of political and economic policy in reaction to social needs rather than ideology. Initiated by disabled people, it began in contradistinction to the medicalized perspectives of disability and traditional curricula with the purpose of displacing the authoritative voice with the self-determination of disabled people. Rather than the practical approach of the applied fields, it is an inquiry-based study that questions the reliability of the categories and definitions of disability, particularly the narrowed view that the individual is the source of the problem and in need of intervention, remediation, care and/or cure.[ii2] Because of this lack in the applied fields, critical disability studies emphasizes the totalizing and oppressive effects of essentialist beliefs on the inevitability of biological destiny.

The deficit model is dominant in the applied fields, borrowed from the medical field that describes individuals' limitations and impairments rather than contextualizing disability in the broad category of the social environment. The medical definition of disability is conceived as an individual phenomenon, deviating from a supposed universal and neutral position (Baglieri et al., 2011; Linton, 1998; Titchkosky, 2011). Disability studies re-contextualizes these assigned pathologized roles of disabled people as constructs and products of social and political networks. It re-positions disability from a health or medical issue to a politically and socially oppressed cultural group, valorizes the individual in the context of identity and community and the field as a discipline of conceptual study. The minority group of disabled people is therefore not defined here by impairment but by its common oppression (Linton, 1998). The purpose of emphasizing the disabled from the nondisabled is not to further a bifurcated society, but to unify a "fragmented group and identify phenomena largely hidden by that fragmentation (p. 124).

Special Education, Inclusion and Social Justice

The irony of the term *special* to designate not only services for children, but also a profession and infrastructure, is not lost on educators such as Simi Linton (2010), which she suspects is unconsciously meant to contain and control children rather than allow them access. The dictionary definition of *special* belies the reality that neither the children nor the

[2] Disability is not located in the body alone, but as a conditional relationship between the body and its environment. Susan Baglieri and Arthur Shapiro (2012) differentiate impairment from disability, as do other disability scholars, disability being the condition in which impaired people do not have free access to opportunities and experiences. Baglieri and Shapiro explain further that the differentiation between impairment and disability emphasizes the distinction between the physical or sensory experience of a particular characteristic and sociopolitical oppression. "The term *impairment*, refers to the pathology; and *disability* refers to political and economic disempowerment that results from societal barriers to people with impairments. Describing characteristics as 'impaired' acknowledges a lack or limit of function, but highlights the experience of disability as one based on context" (p. 26).

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curriculum surpass what is common. Instead, the term thinly disguises a deep ambivalence, antipathy, guilt, or disdain (Linton, 2010). Freud's *reaction formation* is useful in explaining *special* as a collective response to obscure the opposite of one's real attitudes and feelings (Linton, 1998). The language of disability embedded in culture predisposes us to beliefs about disabled people, and ultimately policy. The literal and symbolic opposite of abled—disabled—is enshrined in our consciousness and precedes and shapes the initial meaning we make about a body. The very act of assigning the label or identity of disability to someone is an act of power (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012).

A movement is afoot to unmoor inclusion from special education toward a social justice (general) education so that a wider constituency may be accommodated under this essential and democratic notion of education. Disability studies in education (DSE), therefore, is not a progressive form of education, but rather a fundamental transformation of education philosophy and praxis (Lalvani & Broderick, 2015). Unexamined assumptions perpetuate the notion that inclusion must be tethered to the practical services of placement and labels. Rather than an alternative to or derivation of special education, inclusion might instead represent an *approach* to education. Educators such as Baglieri et al. (2011), Slee (2001, 2004), Broderick and Gustafson (2008), and Linton (1998, 2008) argue that the narrowing of the conceptualization of inclusion prohibits cultural transformation within the system of public education. They re-conceptualize the term within an international discourse of critical disability studies in which policy operates in the hidden form of a white ideology of institutionalized racism and ableism. Traditionally, schools are meant to maintain and reflect the dominant group, and therefore they are inherently political. Thus, disability must be problematized within other anti-oppression pedagogies in order to understand the broader bias in sociopolitical systems that produce inequality (Lalvani & Broderick, 2015). Priya Lalvani and Alicia Broderick call the absence of awareness about the oppressiveness of disability-based segregation *dysconsciousness,* a term coined by Joyce King (1991), which she defines as the distorted perception of the nature of inequity, "an uncritical habit of mind… that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (p. 135). Re-conceptualizing inclusive education would therefore mean the confrontation of a teacher's own dysconsciousness, which would not only include ableism, but also "racism, classism, heterosexism, and other discriminatory ideological systems that deeply inform our culture and therefore our schooling practices" (Lavlani & Broderick, 2015, p. 171).

Inclusion may not be an ideal educational setting for all—the Deaf community[3] in particular prefers a separate system—yet the right to inclusion, if desired, should be attainable (Linton, 1998, 2010). The *something wrong* way of thinking about minds and bodies under special education labels serves to divest individuals with disabilities of their rights in school and society (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). DSE unpacks how we have arrived at the appearance of the inevitability of special education, and analyzes unexamined social and cultural practices that have affected our beliefs about disability (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). The outcome of this shift is a new focus on the barriers in schools that negatively affect the freedom, mobility, learning, and socialization of children with disabilities. School is the gateway to the future inclusion or exclusion of people based on disability, race, poverty and gender, and therefore not an end in itself, but a means to an inclusive and humanistic society[4] (Baglieri and Shapiro, 2012).

[3] Deaf people with a capital "D" identify as a linguistic minority not having a medical pathology, emphasizing "their evolution of a separate language and a distinctive set of cultural rituals, values, and forms" (Mitchell & Snyder, 1998).

[4] Baglieri et al. (2011) assign the term *normative center,* or *normate* as coined by Garland-Thomson (1997), to define a self-sustaining practice that artificially de-centers students who fail to work within the rigid standards of the circumscribed norm. They compare the normate child to the concept of whiteness, which is the invisible and rarely discussed standard of what is non-white. "At the normative center stands the imagined and mythical normal child, an abstraction that has become deeply rooted in our collective educational consciousness" (p.2137). Diagnostic labeling implies that there is a scale according to which difference is located. The further from the standard, the more *at risk* or *severely disabled* is the student. These practices in special education are considered to be based on scientific methods, "and therefore made irreproachable within a positivist paradigm" (p. 2129). Restoring children to the closest approximation to the standard of normal is the goal of special education. Centering the normative child within special education makes meanings and assumptions about human difference. Below average students are considered at risk or disabled, segregated into special classrooms or with other provisions, while rarely attending to failures and biases of the school.

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Contained vs. Inclusive Classrooms

The debates over contained versus inclusive classrooms are considered pragmatically based on outcomes and accepted social practices rather than moral, historical or psychological considerations (Linton, 1998). Decisions about who may be included or segregated are based more on expedient means and rarely on theoretical grounds. One of the purposes of disability studies, according to Linton (1998), is to "critique weak arguments for a bifurcated society" (p. 124).

In her memoir, *My Body Politic,* Linton (2010) ruminates on her circumstances: she never experienced the segregation of the *severely* disabled,[5] in school because her accident, which left her paraplegic, came after graduating from high school. However, as a professor of education she supervised student teachers in special education settings. In these spaces, at the beginning of children's entry into society, meanings about disability are embedded into the curriculum and the daily social experiences of all children. "Beliefs about disabled people, our worth and potential, are inscribed in these texts" (p. 137); fiction, film, and history as well as the school curriculum are part of the contract that disabled people have seemed to voluntarily sign. Speaking about and setting the agenda for disabled people begins in these early years.

Organizing students in classrooms according to their assigned labels invites "procedures of surveillance and record-taking" (Foucault, 1977, p. 74), which invariably sets up an unequal power relationship based on naming, classifying, and determining futures. These processes of special education appear so natural that the possibility that they disempower the youth they aim to serve is hardly questioned.

> Systems that support certain statements as Truth typically operate within contexts that have the capacity for serious social consequence. Special education is just such a context, for within this system lies the power to define normal and abnormal—the means by which a polarizing "discourse of difference" is created. (Baglieri et al, 2011, p. 2134)

The pithy slogan of "Career and College Readiness" is especially ironic given the loss of status, diminished power, and cultural capital that come with the more severe special education labels. Rather than the solution to the problem, the self-contained special education classroom, if not the problem itself, is nevertheless one of the barriers for the future integration of children with disabilities into society (Linton, 2010). At these early and critical stages of life, the social future of disabled children has been compromised, not by well-intentioned teachers,[6] but by the system of special education, unexamined communication, and the social and built environments.

As a doctoral student in counseling psychology, Linton (2010) found the research on disability almost exclusively limited to rehabilitation and special education journals focused on how to fix people with disabilities. These medicalized reports omitted the lived experience of disability from the community, which led her to make the connection between two domains: scholarship and personal experience, "the personal is not only political but the scholarly as well" (p. 115). In the following paragraphs, I suggest that the arts are primed for the intersection of these two otherwise disparate forms of scholarship. While the arts have not been as visible in disability studies as they might, I argue that they offer students and teachers an examination of personal experience of disability that merits intense investigation and produces interdisciplinary forms of self-representation and self-narrative.

Disability Studies in Art Education

How do art teachers challenge themselves as well as their students to look again at traditional under-

[5] Many testimonies exist from disabled adults who were in special education. DeFelice spoke of his experiences in the 1960s and noted that mainstreaming was available only if students had a parent who could get them to school and back.

> Now I think it [mainstreaming] means you have a lot of people who are on the payroll who help you seem as much like an able-bodied person as you could seem, until you finished with school and then you never get any assistance again. (DeFelice, in Mitchell & Snyder, 1995)

[6] Certainly all teachers are not well-intentioned, but those who are cannot be blamed for systemic segregation. Unconscious, or in the terminology of King (1991), dysconscious, teachers and profoundly biased teachers inflict their own kind of harm onto a problematic system. On the other hand, parents and caretakers may be shamed by stigma, and hide their child's impairments. Thus, the social level of exclusion and bias is quite complex, and a full analysis is beyond the scope of this paper.

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standings of disability as they are put forth in federal laws that *protect* children by employing, for example, the philosophy of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)? This notion seems beneficial, and the enactment of IDEA, under which LRE has become law is certainly progress. The laws, however, have defaulted into rationalizing and legitimizing ability-based segregation. Twenty-seven years ago, Doug Blandy (1989) suggested that federal law in art education promoted stereotypes of disabled students based on the medical model. He suggests that because of their labels, teacher expectations for disabled students are so low that art making opportunities are severely limited. In *Ecological and Normalizing Approaches to Disabled Students and Art Education*, Blandy (1989) writes that

> While such systems of categorization may provide expedient and effective medical treatment, their usefulness in an educational context is questionable. For example, these categories may be spuriously founded. . . . This passivity further debilitates the student by failing to reinforce the development of an independent critical consciousness. (p. 9)

I was immune to this nuanced understanding of federal law, which I explain in the subsequent paragraphs.

New York State mandates at least one course in special education in visual arts education at the undergraduate level. In 1999, I inherited a course called *Art for the Exceptional Child,* and had yet to learn of disability studies. The texts that accompanied the syllabus were written to teach the practical application of special education within the art room. The labels were methodically described according to the medical model and scientific research, and then dutifully applied to art projects that appeared to be within the physical, cognitive, or emotional capacity of the labeled student. These course work decisions mostly went unquestioned. None of the required texts challenged the dominant discourse of disability, with the exception of Viktor Lowenfeld's (1957) well known chapter, "Therapeutic Aspects of Art Education," which was omitted after the third edition of *Creative and Mental Growth.* Lowenfeld worked with children with disabilities in Austria before World War II, and by the time he migrated to the United States, he was aware of the importance of including all children in arts education well before the federal mandates, but also before the disability rights movement that led to academic study of disabilities. Nevertheless, his interest in the individual, not the individual's label, led him to discover significant misunderstandings about the way disability is understood if perceived only by *objective* observation. Lowenfeld might have been the first educator to separate the impairment, which he called the primary "handicap," from the disability caused by social stigma and environmental barriers, which he called the secondary "handicap."

My introduction to disability studies several years later, as well as to art educators (Blandy, 1989, 1991, 1994; Derby, 2011, 2013a, 2013b; Eisenhauer, 2007, 2008, 2010; Kraft & Keifer-Boyd, 2013) who advocated for the decolonization of orthodox special education in arts education, inspired the replacement of the former patronizing title of the course, which became *Disability Studies in Art Education,* along with major ideological shifts. Doug Blandy (1991, 1994) was the first to describe the significance of relocating what he called a *functional-limitations* model to a sociopolitical model in art education (Eisenhauer, 2007; Derby, 2011). Like Lalvani and Broderick (2015), Blandy (1994) suggested that the locus of a perceptual change in the nature of disability lay in preservice education, the most important of which could be found in the lived experiences of disabled students through field work. While Blandy's recommendations forecast a significant transformative disability ideology and practice in art education, Eisenhauer (2007) explains that critical disability studies is necessary in assuring the inclusion of the disabled individual's life experience, and therefore his or her expert knowledge. John Derby (2013a) points out that within the scarcity of disability research in art education academic journals, those that are written are usually by nondisabled educators who make recommendations based on the medical model.[7] According to Derby, the few recent articles that advocate for disability studies have yet to be integrated into mainstream art education research, nor have they made an impact on practice. Thus, the disabled

[7] Derby (2013a) noted that *Studies in Art Education* published seven articles related to disability from the passage of the ADA in 1990 until 2013.

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students have been spoken *for*, *to*, and *about* by art educators. But outside art education, a proliferation of first-person disability narratives in the past 15 years has provided an alternative to the dominant tragic disability narrative written by non-disabled scholars. They have come in the form of published books and articles, blogs, and art exhibitions, and invite us to recalibrate our collective assumptions and notions.[8]

Thus, first person narratives, biographies and essays, particularly autoethnographies by autistic writers (autie-biographies) became a significant and primary area of our research in the undergraduate class *Disability Studies in Art Education*. For example, Melanie Yergeau (2013), an assistant professor with Asperger's at Ohio State University wrote an autie-biography titled *Clinically Significant Disturbance: On Theorists Who Theorize Theory of Mind*. She discussed the ironies, injustices, contradictions, and paradoxes of life as a "high functioning Aspie"[9] academic. During her second week as a new faculty member she was involuntarily committed to the university psych ward. This painful and humiliating experience crystallized her position as the receiver of the cultural assumption about the internal life, capacities, and limitations of people on the spectrum, which she calls *neurological determinism*.

The Validity of Theory of Mind

Simon Baron-Cohen, Alan Leslie, and Uta Frith (1985) established theory of mind (ToM) as the marker of the superiority of the human species—of humanity itself. Yergeau (2013) asks, "Without a theory of mind, then, what is a body? What is an *autistic* body?" (p. 4). Autism, she writes, is an embodied experience and therefore penetrates every muscle, movement, and gesture of the body. The skepticism that non-autistic researchers have for the validity of autistic narration permeates and defines Yergeau's life as an academic. Most disturbing, she says, is that we are asking these questions now; ToM is pervasive, accepted by scholars, teachers and students without question. ToM is an epistemologically-bounded, reductionist term that Yergeau theorizes cannot exist without the autistic construct. We only know it exists because we have determined that in 2% of humanity ToM does *not* exist.

Students in *Disability Studies in Art Education* read Yergeau's article and posted questions about it, including explanations, reflections, and disclaimers. For example, Alison[10] wrote questions that reflected common stereotypes, but then included a disclaimer about her language as she ruminated about Yergeau's article:

> What challenges would you face when designing a lesson plan to fit a child's needs with Asperger's? Would you avoid using jokes and idioms? How do you keep the child engaged?
>
> *It's actually kind of hard to write these questions and phrase them in a non-biased way. This shows how I come to the table with preconceived ideas of what "normal" is. I keep having to re-phrase these questions, and not view the child as "disabled" or "breaking from the norm." Even "different" sounds negative. An example of this is, "How would the normal layout of a classroom affect a child with Asperger's? (Putting the word "normal" in there indicates that changing the classroom would make it abnormal). How do we deal with the challenges of eloquently speaking about disabilities? (personal communication, September 9, 2014)

John questioned the humanity of making assumptions, using labels, and acting upon them.

> I understand that we as humans can theorize and study the aspects of the mind that make us different and unique at the same time, but why would studies into ToM go on to imply that people with autism lack some humanistic thought process, thus making them "incomplete" if you will? I take offense to this assumption; who are we to classify or judge the content of humanism in people with autism if we aren't even sure what makes

[8] Performance art was established as a powerful use of self-narration in the film *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back* (1995), which took place at the first disability arts in the humanities conference "This-Ability: Disability in the Arts," at the University of Michigan.

[9] Yergeau identifies as an *Aspie*, which she and others prefer over the term Asperger's syndrome. She also parodies the notion of *high functioning* as an ableist concept.

[10] Student names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

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> us "typically" human? (personal communication, September 9, 2014)

Yergeau's article achieved its goal of questioning the credibility of ToM, evident in Marilese's response.

> I continually questioned what the theory of mind actually is. If it's considered a "theory," why is it used so heavily? Is ToM meant to put people with autism in their place? In other words, do we use ToM to remind others that they are unworthy, or inhuman? (personal communication, September 9, 2014)

With these self-reflexive attitudes, students were ready to re-visit presumptive expectations about the capacities, skills, and knowledges of students with disabilities, particularly as these new meanings motivated more collaborative, and less teacher-directed, art making.

Interventionist Performance Art: Art as Social Practice

> Disability in the art classroom is not only about inclusion, defined as appropriately accommodating students with disabilities, but is also about the exploration of disability culture and the sociopolitical issue of ableism in arts curriculum. (Eisenhauer, 2007, p.10)

The visual arts narrative affords the maker an alternate way to tell his or her life story, and storytelling is especially dynamic in performance art. Visual arts educators, such as David Darts (2006), John Derby (2011), Jack Richardson (2010), and Robert Sweeny (2004) use interventionist strategies to interrupt—or disrupt—public space, invite dialogue, and reclaim art teacher education as a social and political activity. Performance art has been appropriated by the Disability Arts Movement for these purposes: as interventions in ablest practices in public and private spaces. For example, Jennifer Eisenhauer (2007) explores disabled performance artists Carrie Sandahl, Mary Duffy and Petra Kuppers "as a progressive, emancipatory force at both the individual and social levels" (Barnes & Mercer, as cited in Eisenhauer, 2007, p. 7). The artists use performative autobiography through verbal testimony to reverse both the personal gaze and the daily responses from street encounters. Their bodies are also wrested from the medical gaze wherein they become "denigrated to sub-texts in the master narrative…" (Eisenhauer, 2007, p.18).

Eisenhauer (2007) makes the distinction between "disabled people doing art and disability artists" (p. 9). The former, when included in the art curriculum, suggests that these artists are capable of making art worthy of their non-disabled peers. The latter invites a critical examination of the way disabled artists are viewed within an ableist framework. The visual arts, in these autobiographical forms, afford the opportunity to enter into the lived experience of disability. Disability performance art appropriates the normalized *stare* as an act of othering, transforming *looking* in a reconstruction of disability (Eisenhauer, 2007), disrupting the asymmetrical power relationship between abled and disabled by reclaiming how disability is conceived, represented, and performed.

Returning to *Disability Studies in Art Education*, the art projects and their corresponding lesson plans in the former course were re-examined for their assumptions about what and how disabled children learn through the visual arts. We looked at activist/interventionist performance art and flash mobs as a way of leveling the playing field for a diverse group of ages and abilities, and posed the question, "How can teachers and students engage in inquiry-based relational projects that are fun?" We set out to examine interventionist and relational aesthetics, the creative disruption of everyday life on campus, and later as the content of lesson plans.

Two students from a local high school were invited to lead our class in spontaneous interventions (flash mobs). Neil, who has dyslexia, led his group to the student union where he choreographed the preservice teachers. The open atrium, multi-level space helped him to achieve a sense of time-lapse and ambiguity as he positioned half of the preservice teachers (the dancers) on the lower level and half on a level directly overhead. The preservice teachers above held invisible

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Figure 1. A preservice teacher on the atrium's first floor, moving according to the directions of the preservice teacher standing above.

Figure 2. Neil on the first floor of the Atrium moving in response to preservice teachers above.

strings that gave the impression of moving the bodies of the dancers below (see Figures 1 and 2).

Audie, a student labeled with Aspergers, preferred to step aside during the brainstorming discussion in his group, so the preservice teachers learned a dance that they performed in the University's museum and in the campus food court (see Figures 3 and 4). Later, returning to the classroom, we critiqued the performative interventions asking which spaces were more accommodating to our needs, what we might have done differently, and how aligned our expectations were with our experience.

This project included many modalities that might capture the personal interests of students with labels. Although these interventions were not overtly political acts of activist art, they were an intentional disruption of predictable campus life—to break down unspoken barriers based on a "collective desire to make something new" (Thompson, 2015, p. 45). Nato Thompson (2015) calls this ambiguous use of space a radical break from coercive and totalizing structures that not only allowed "each member to produce cultural forms—they also allowed them to participate in the production of themselves" (pp. 45-46). Additionally, the opportunity to lead, to plan, perform in groups, and move through spaces both inside and outside the classroom, are important aspects of art education (Wexler, 2011). Performative/activist/intervention can be understood and enjoyed on these levels. In this case the two young men were invited to take command of the physical, social and cultural environments as active players in an intentionally inclusive classroom.

Figure 3. Preservice teachers perform in a flash mob in a cafeteria on campus.

Figure 4. Preservice teachers perform in a flash mob in the Samuel Dorsky Museum on campus.

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Conclusion

The term *inclusion*, with its multiple underlying ideologies and meanings, often obscures historical and problematic power relations. The visual arts afford preservice teachers and students a way of disrupting the trend of appearing to be inclusive yet unintentionally excluding full participation in a system in which children have limited agency. Learning at the preservice level is crucial if this cycle is ever to be broken (Blandy, 1994; Lalvani & Broderick, 2015). Special education practices must be taught critically and tested with other forms of engagement, such as with the arts, which offer spontaneous and informal instances of making and performing in which students articulate their own meanings. A change of teacher perspective is usually made during these artistic encounters in which the individual-as-the-problem disappears and reappears in a more complex set of meanings "located in cultural processes" (Titchkosky, 2011, p. 47) that require collective solutions.[11] The arts afford preservice and inservice teachers a pretext in which they can become part of a community of learners. The ambiguous use of space puts the individual in a position of "self-production" (Thompson, 2015, p. 47), an inherently political act in the face of overwhelming visual imperatives. "The desire for real open-ended meaning—and everything vulnerable and embarrassing that comes with it—can thus be read as a reaction to a visually and socially manipulative environment" (Thompson, 2015, p. 47). Finally, a performative intervention is one example of how teachers might use the arts to reorganize visual sensory information into products and performances based on children's desires rather than their labels.

[11] Titchkosky (2011) writes "we need a more complex story and we need to complicate the stories that we already have....this means understanding that we are never alone in our bodies....since even the most individualized disability experience is fully enmeshed in cultural representations of disability" (p. 47).

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