

Institutional Ableism & the Politics of Inclusive Education: an Ethnographic Study of an Inclusive High School

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April 2012

*A thesis submitted in accordance with the regulations for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of London*

Abstract

This thesis explores some of the ways inequalities are maintained and legitimated within the context of reforms that are focused on them. In particular, it looks at the continued marginalization of disabled students in U.S. public Schools. Central to this is the development of the concept of *institutional ableism*, the idea that there are discriminatory structures and practices and uninterrogated beliefs embedded within society that subvert even the most well intentioned policies. This thesis is an attempt to examine this oppression on both the macro and micro-political levels.

Chapter three looks at how institutional ableism works at a policy level. Using a detailed deconstruction of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement act 2004 (IDEA), the first chapter examines the ways in which institutional ableism subverts the stated intentions of IDEA to maintain disabled peoples marginalised status within the education system. The chapter further deconstructs IDEA, focusing on its attempts to address the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education.

The Final three chapters look at the micro-politics of school level reforms. Based on a year long ethnography in an inclusive school in the western United States. Chapter four focuses on the relationship between teachers and disabled students examining the mechanisms used to maintain inequalities when traditional ableism has been made inaccessible. Chapter five focuses on peer relationships. It was found that in filling a gatekeepers role nondisabled students utilise the *governance of friendship* to preserve and regulate the hierarchical relationship between disabled and nondisabled students. Chapter six using case studies of several students looks at the school's disabled students' experience of the school, their teachers and their peers. It is clear from these cases that even with the extensive efforts to dictate and control the positioning within the school, disabled students are still able to create spaces for resistance.

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Word count (exclusive of appendices, list of reference and bibliography): 68,292 words

*When a system of oppression has become institutionalized
it is unnecessary for individuals to be oppressive.*

Florynce Rae Kennedy

For My Family

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Acknowledgements

I cannot begin to acknowledge every individual who impacted upon this thesis, but there are a number of people it would be egregious of me not to thank for their contribution to this project. First and foremost I am deeply indebted to the students and staff of Red Rock high school whose open and honest engagement with this project made this project possible. I am grateful to all the friends who were happy to see me whenever I showed up despite my anti-social and isolating behavior. Neek Alyani, Fernanda Bates, Vincent Carpentier, Neal Carr, Malini Chib, Simona D'alessio, Jarek Dydowicz, Stephen Harrison, Emmanuel Kanakis, Cate Knowles, Anjali Kothari, Alex Linkov, Kristin Long, Miriam Mareso, Cathy Tang and Chris Thompson all provided me with a connection to the world at times when it was most needed. There are two friends in particular whose contributions to this thesis are innumerable; Claudine Rausch and Nicola Rollock have been friends, confidants and most importantly critical readers. Their willingness to act as sounding boards and tell me which ideas needed more work and which were on target made this a better piece of work.

Thanks are owed to the institute's night time security particularly John, Lenny, Joe & Ade who made it possible for me to work when I was still nocturnal. I am also grateful for the kindness of all of the John Adams Hall staff particularly Angel, Bisrat, Lita, Marcel & Nesro. Many institute faculty members provided me with invaluable support, guidance and critiques during my time here and for this I am very much in debt to Felicity Armstrong, Anne Gold, Barbara MacGilchrist, Hiedi Mirza, Simon Warren, Geoff Whitty and Deborah Youdell.

Jennifer Evans, Jenny Corbett and Len Barton all retired while supervising this thesis (they have all assured me it was purely coincidental) but I am deeply thankful to each of them for the wisdom, advice and criticism they have provided me with, they are all scholars and people who I feel lucky to have had access to.

I must also say thank you to my former colleagues at City University of New York: Jan Valle whose scholarship, commitment and practical engagement with inclusive education continues to inspire and inform my work; and I must especially thank Linda Ware who has been incredibly supportive of both my

scholarship and my career, giving me the opportunity to teach disability studies in a dynamic but far too short lived program.

One person who I will never feel has been adequately thanked for his contribution to this thesis is David Gillborn as a supervisor and friend. He is the one person (including myself) who always believed in this project and its author. I am a better scholar and person for having worked with him.

Last but certainly not least I need to thank my family: my wife Ola, whose patience and love I am sure has been tested; my parents Gayl & Harold whose faith in me despite my glacial pace, has always made me feel safe enough to take the important risks such as this thesis; my sister Gaby who has been there for every second (except for those two minutes you abandoned me in utero). I will never be able to fully explain to the four of you how grateful I am.

All of these people have contributed to this thesis in innumerable ways. Much of the credit for the project is due to them, and while I would love for them to share credit for its flaws as well, I am afraid those are all mine.

Introduction

A growing number of researchers have shown that all research is to some extent subjective (Baglieri, et al., 2010; Brantlinger, 1997; Gallagher, 2001; Newmahr, 2008; Scheurich & Young, 2002) and that, rather than striving for an impossible to achieve objectivity, researchers should work at being more transparent about their subjectivities within their research. Research should make the researcher's positioning explicit not try to obfuscate it (Allen & Slee, 2008; Clough & Barton, 1995; Valle, 2011). With this in mind I have set out within this introduction to make my own subjectivity as explicit as possible. This chapter explains the overall shape of the thesis but I begin by tracing my own relationship to the conceptualization and experience of disability (a subject very much at the heart of this thesis) and how that relationship has shaped me as the person conducting the research. It is an approach which has been chosen very much through the influence of critical race theory (CRT); a field which, perhaps more than any other, has demonstrated the power of storytelling and autobiography to help reveal new perspectives.

Thesis as Self Exploration

This research has been a very personal exercise, as much about self exploration as about the research questions at the heart of the thesis. It has

helped me not only further my understanding of disability in the context of education, but also helped reshape my personal relationship with disability, and my understanding of myself as a disabled person. While I am now very comfortable and quite proud of this identity, it is not one I have consistently been easy with or in fact always felt a claim to. Disability is, however, something that I have always been fascinated by. Attempting to understand that fascination is more than anything what has taken me down the path that has led me to this research. During the process of upgrading from MPhil to PhD I was asked 'where' am 'I' in this research. To answer this question I thought that I would begin my thesis by positioning myself within the research, framing my own relationship to the subject matter in general and this project specifically.

Disability is something that has always been a part of my life. It was there long before I came to recognize myself as a disabled person. If it begins anywhere, it begins with Gaby; my twin sister (she's two minutes older and to hear her talk they were the best two minutes ever). I cannot ever remember other people (outside my immediate family) treating Gaby as anything but different. I was probably four or five years old when I asked my parents about it for the first time. Their reply was a somewhat diluted version of what the doctors had told them only a couple years before. My version did not include the detailed genetic explanation that they had received from Gaby's doctors, but it is where I first heard words like 'disability' and 'mentally retarded', things which had little or no meaning for me as a toddler, but which I could easily read as negative things. Our parents still did not have a firm grip on their understandings of what disability would mean in relation to Gaby and so their own language as they talked to me was a mixture of vague imprecision and repeated phrases they had heard from the doctors, all watered down for a child to understand.

What I did get from my parents was that Gaby was one of ‘us’ and ‘we love her’ and disability had no bearing on that.

My relationship with Gaby is the only sibling relationship I’ve ever known so I really have nothing to compare it to, but to me there was certainly nothing traumatic or negative or indeed out of the ordinary about it. We played together, ate together and for the most part got along. There were times when we annoyed each other (she would grab my favorite toy and start banging it against something just to see me react and I always knew I could infuriate her by staring at her with my eyes bugged out when we were sitting in the back of the car) but on the whole we got along pretty well. I was aware that there were things she could not do but they never seemed problematic to me. There was nothing wrong with the fact that Gaby didn’t learn to walk until we were four because our mom and dad were there to carry her (that’s what parents were for after all – although I’m not sure my mom’s tired arms would agree).

I think the thing that always struck me as most different was that Gaby never had any friends come over or visited any of her friends. She had friends that she talked about from the school she went to (a school I had never been to, one I was told was ‘for kids like her’) but none of them ever came to visit in the way my friends did. I also remember my friends keeping Gaby somewhat at a distance, occasionally asking ‘why does your sister speak funny?’, but never really trying to know her. I got into my first real fight when a friend of a friend called Gaby a ‘*retard*’. I had never heard the word before except as part of the phrase ‘mental retardation’ when my parents were explaining Gaby being disabled to me. But I knew instantly that this use of the word was different, that it had been an attack on my sister and that as her brother I should defend her. So not knowing how to fight I threw myself at the older taller child. When the nearby Grownups

came out and separated us, he started calling me a 'spaz', another name I had never heard before but one which I clearly understood as an insult. In many ways this was the first time I began to understand Gaby's differences as something that could be used to attack, denigrate or disadvantage her. Even to my childlike understanding of equity this seemed unfair. That said, I do not think I was the most reflexive of children and these thoughts really only occurred to me at those moments when Gaby was being treated differently.

My understandings of Gaby as a disabled person evolved slowly. Usually only at moments where it affected me personally. When I realized I could blame her for a mess I made without her defending herself (this was before she learned to speak and rat me out). When my parents had to take her to Minnesota for open heart surgery and I was forced to stay for a week with my Grandmother. I remember trying to understand the concept when I attended Gaby's primary school graduation and encountered some of her more visibly disabled classmates for the first time. During this time an understanding of disability as difference slowly took shape in my head. It was by no means sophisticated and very much tied up in a deficit model, but it was something I was trying to understand.

My recognition of that difference as artificial or socially constructed was slower in forming. I was aware that because Gaby was disabled she was treated in different ways. She could get away with behavior that was not acceptable from me. My understanding of this was somewhat confused. On the one hand I could see that other people consciously treated her differently and on the other heard them explain that treatment as being the result of something internal to Gaby. I may have grown to accept these inconsistencies if it weren't for the small moments that highlighted the lie of it all. The babysitter who would cut Gaby's food for her even though she

was capable of doing it herself; the initial unwillingness of a number of friends and family to believe that Gaby had learned to read - even after seeing her reading many would insist that she must have just memorized it. These attributions of deficit where there wasn't any was what first made me question how legitimate people's understandings of Gaby as disabled were. At this point, however, it was a far from nuanced understanding, and with no social model language to support it, I struggled to articulate it other than to express occasional contempt. My attempts to better articulate these understandings would take many forms over the years and would not truly develop until after I came to understand my own disabled identity.

Finding my disabled self

Seeing myself as a disabled Person is something that developed extremely slowly over many years. When I was a child and people would ask me about my relationship with Gaby there were two 'twin' questions that would inevitably come up. The first was what I like to call the brothers Karamazov question. 'Do you and Gaby have a link where you always know what's going on with each other?' The answer is not at all. The second question is one that seems logical to everyone who asks it but is something that always struck me as rather stupid. 'Do you ever wonder what if it had been you who was disabled?' I think about it now and I understand that this is related to most people seeing Gaby solely as defined by disability as well as a perception of disability as a negative thing. Therefore they wonder what if it had happened in the other twin instead. While I believe disability has played a significant role in shaping Gaby's life experience, I see disability as a part of who she is and not the sum total. I do not know if Gaby would be the same person who is currently extremely talkative, very sociable, open to every experience possible, and nose-y beyond belief, if she weren't disabled but nor do I know that any or all of these qualities would be gone in such a

situation. So when people have asked me the ‘what if it had been you?’ question, the short answer is ‘no I don’t really think about it.’ The longer answer is: ‘why focus on disability as opposed to what if I’d been the girl, or what if I’d been the one with blue eyes or the sociable one?’. When I have given either of these answers I have often received the reply: ‘Yeah I probably wouldn’t want to contemplate that either’. The thing is I’ve never had any problems contemplating the ‘what ifs’, it was just not something I found interesting. The interesting thing for me now is wondering why during many of those years being asked the ‘what if’ question, did I not see myself or feel *entitled* to see myself, as disabled?

In terms of the grades I received, I was a fairly poor student for much of my life. Beginning in first grade with Mrs. Potter, a teacher who called me ‘Turtle’ for how slowly I worked, through the early years of university where I nearly failed out, my relationship with education was somewhat strained. I cannot remember a single instance where I was able to finish a test before I had to turn it in. Helping me write compositions for my weekly sixth grade writing assignment led my mother to many a filicidal thought. By the time I was fifteen the frustration for my parents had gotten to the point that they requested that the school test me for learning disabilities. While this was going on I thought it was a waste of time. The only learning disability I had heard of at the time was dyslexia, and since reading was the only thing about school that I actually enjoyed, I was fairly certain that I wasn’t dyslexic.

At this point twenty six years later, the testing procedure is a bit of a blur, but I remember very clearly when the school psychologist gave me the results. She said that I had multiple learning disabilities the most significant of which she called dysgraphia. I remember that she seemed almost afraid that I might take this news as meaning I was ‘stupid’ and emphasized

several times that it did not. She explained dysgraphia to me as ‘an error’ in the way my brain processes written language. She said that somewhere between my brain and the paper, words and even whole ideas got lost. In many ways this was like looking in a mirror for the first time. She told me things about myself that I recognized even though I would never have been able to articulate them myself. She told me that the reason it takes me so long to write my thoughts is because by the time that I have written the first couple of words, I’ve forgotten what I wanted to say and I have to stop and reconstruct the sentence. She told me this was compounded by the fact that I was extremely distractible and that any thought, sight or sound might send my mind off on an irrelevant tangent. She said that my brain was moving much faster than my hands¹ and the words got lost as my hands tried to catch up. She also said that I had severe anxiety about anything related to math and that this might be the sign of something called dyscalculia but that she would not know for sure without more tests (which I found out later the school told her not to bother with). About a week after meeting the psychologist, the school Principal called my parents and me in to discuss the tests. He suggested that I might be better off at a school specifically geared to handling a ‘student with my particular problems’. My parents asked if I was being kicked out. He said no, but the school did think that another school might be better suited to teaching me how to compensate for my problems. My parents said all things considered (all things being the \$20,000 a year price tag of the school being recommended) I’d be staying put. I remember leaving this meeting feeling that I was clearly a problem, and that I’d better shape up before I caused more trouble.

Now while, as I said, the disabled label made sense to me instantly, it did not magically translate to a sense of myself as a disabled person. At first all

¹ This was 1985; personal computers were still in their infancy so I was still writing everything by hand.

it meant to me was that I got extra time on tests, that I was forced to take a typing course and that I had a label. I can't really say that having a label meant anything to me. There was no sense of the relief that I have heard others describe, and I did not believe it meant that I was stupid either. At most I felt a bit like a fraud whenever I found it necessary to cite disability to ask for extra time. I felt this way partially because there were more than a few teachers who told me that I was 'pulling a great con' on the school, that I was just being lazy, and partially because what I had been taught equity was, did not seem to justify my getting special treatment. Another factor in this was that everything that I understood disability to be, I also understood to be absent from myself. Disabled people had things you could see or recognize, they looked different; they were kids like Gaby, they were people with physical or sensory impairments. They were not me. The strange thing about it was that in growing up with Gaby, disability seemed a fairly normal part of life, different, but only in the way that blond hair or a big nose is different. In having the label applied to me I began to see that all along I had been taught that it is used to identify people as 'other', as different in ways that were significant even if I didn't know why.

The only thing that made the sense that I was a fraud, ebb from my consciousness was to not access disability, to not ask for accommodations. When I went to university this was my strategy. Even if I was refusing it as part of my own identity, disability was still very much a part of my life. In many ways it got me into university. I had been turned down by Syracuse, and was waitlisted at Bard (the only other school I had applied to). I went to Bard for an interview hoping that the ability I most valued in myself, the ability to talk, would save the day. The interview started somewhat blandly with small talk about what I thought of the campus, and then the interviewer started asking about the extracurricular activities listed on my application.

She was particularly interested in how I got involved organizing ‘the Special Olympics’ hosted by my high school as well as my experience volunteering at a special school. We spent much of the interview talking about these programs. When she asked me what attracted me to working with disabled people, I told her about Gaby and that led to what became a roughly two hour interview. Strangely enough I do not believe my personal relationship with disability even entered my mind during this period. When I left I could tell that I was going to be accepted, partially because the interviewer had seemed so positive at the end and partially because I came to understand that day that for many people my interest in disabled people was interpreted as evidence that I was a ‘good person’. What they had no way of knowing, what I had not admitted even to myself was that my interest in disabled people, Special Olympics, volunteering at the school were all about me trying to understand myself. Disability was a label that had been applied to me, but at that stage of my life it seemed much easier to try and understand it in others.

At Bard this type of exploration continued. I was a photo major to begin with, but the only subjects I had real photographic interest in were disabled people. I took photos of the kids at the school I used to work at, I took photos of the employees with Down’s Syndrome at the university cafeteria, I took photos of Gaby, and interestingly enough without seeing how it was related I took a series of self portraits. Eventually this singular focus led to my changing my major to psychology. The Photo Department wanted to see more out of me than photos of disabled people and I could not seem to find other subjects that interested me. Psychology was a bad fit as well. I had selected it because it was the only department where disability was even mentioned within the curriculum, but that was within a course titled ‘Abnormal Psychology’. The understanding of disabled people presented in

the course was not only very different from anything I was capable of recognizing in the world, it was something I found disturbing. I remember the class where Down's Syndrome was discussed. It sounded as if the professor was talking about something non-human. I remember words such as 'genetic mutation', 'birth defects', 'extreme cognitive deficits' and, of course, the old standby 'mentally retarded'. What outraged me the most, however, was when he told the class that 'patients with Down's Syndrome rarely live beyond the age of twenty-five'. I think the fact that Gaby was only few years short of his mythical deadline played a part in how sharply I blurted out the response: 'That's a load of crap'. After apologizing for the rudeness of my exclamation, I said 'I'm sorry but it's just not true'. He insisted it was and I explained to him that if he'd like I could take him to two communities² about an hour's drive from Bard in which he could meet a hundred or so³ senior citizens with Down's Syndrome.

After this I began to realize that Psychology didn't offer a way of looking at disability that appealed to me. After a short stint in a teacher training program, I finally settled into Bard's American Studies program⁴ and wrote a thesis exploring the interpretation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This was a first attempt at understanding a law that I have explored in greater depth within this thesis. IDEA was something that piqued my interest when Gaby and I were teenagers and my parents fought the school district over her placement for the coming year. Gaby had been in a segregated class in the Philadelphia public school system. The district recommended what at the time they were calling 'mainstreaming'. The

² Gaby was living in a Camphill community by this time and had recently gone to visit the two villages in upstate New York - Triform & Copake. I had visited her at Copake only a couple weeks prior to this and had been struck by the fact that unlike the community she lived in at the time, the majority of people living in these villages were in their fifties and sixties.

³ This may have been a slight exaggeration on my part, as I did know the exact population of these communities but I knew that if we did take the trip my point would be made.

⁴ An inter-disciplinary major which allowed me to tailor my degree to my interests (mostly Sociology, Political Science and History courses).

intention was for Gaby to attend the local public High School with a teachers' aide to assist her in class. They argued that it was important for Gaby to spend as much of her time as possible in school with nondisabled students.

My parents' objections to this placement had little to do with its academic strengths or weaknesses and wholly with a desire to protect my sister (Gaby had had some bad experiences with nondisabled students at her then current placement; teasing, someone convinced her to eat dirt, etc.). I first heard about the situation after my sister's Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting when my parents contacted an education advocate about fighting the placement. The advocate told them that the placement would not be difficult to fight. She said that they simply needed to get a 'disability expert' (an Educational Psychologist) to say that Gaby's lack of social skills made mainstreaming inappropriate for her and the city would be forced to find Gaby either another segregated class or if that was not available, pay for her to attend a private school.

My parents won the fight and Gaby attended a private special school for the rest of her formal education. For me, the merit of the two sides of the case barely registered, and even now with my politics firmly aligned with inclusive education, I can't condemn my parent's stance. What I do remember sticking with me from the whole experience was how easy it was for my parents to make their case. While I'm sure that factors such as 'white middle class privilege', and political will (or a lack there of in the case of the school district), played significant roles, I always wondered why the school couldn't just as easily manipulate the law to say the placement was appropriate. Was IDEA biased towards parents? Was it biased toward segregated placements? Did my parents have a better expert? These questions were the focus of my thesis at Bard.

It was in writing this thesis that I came across two texts that showed me the power sociology might offer my understanding of disability; Irving Kenneth Zola's (1981) *Missing Pieces: a Chronicle of Living with Disability* and Sally Tomlinson's (1982) *A Sociology of Special Education*. These books showed me that there was a way of looking at disability as something other than deficit. Zola's first person account of his life was the first place I can remember reading an exploration of the experience of disability that was not only from the perspective of a disabled person but also looked at disability as something more than the experience of deficit. Tomlinson's book seeded an idea that education not only shaped the life experiences of disabled students but also the way disability itself was constructed. It was also in Tomlinson's analysis of disproportionality in Tower Hamlets that I began to think about the ways in which disability and race intersect.

One other significant event came out of writing that dissertation. I learned to write. Writing has always been and continues to be something that I find incredibly painful. It is a slow arduous process that has always pushed the limits of my ability to focus. For many years I thought this was why I was not a very good writer. I thought things got lost between my head and the page and never got put back into the paper. What I came to realize when I wrote my BA dissertation was that I had never really learned how to write a paper. The crafting and organization that went into a paper was something completely foreign to me. It wasn't until a friend suggested that I sit down with Professor Alice Stroup, the only professor to have ever failed me⁵ that I began to gain an understanding of how to construct a paper, rather than grow one. In many ways it is still a wonder that she is the *only* person to have failed me. My writing style to that point was what can only be described as free form. It utilized no planning and very little organization. I

⁵

A well deserved grade in a seminar at the end of my first year at Bard.

wrote whatever came into my head next. I think I believed that if I included all relevant information and my analysis made sense that was all I needed to do. Professor Stroup taught me things that now seem somewhat obvious but then were completely new to me. She taught me that writing a paper was not about showing how much I know as much as it was about convincing the reader of my argument; that if the argument you make is organized properly by the time you reached the conclusions your analysis will seem like the most logical understanding possible. She taught me to read my own writing critically so as to anticipate and hopefully answer criticism before it could be made. Besides the skills I learned I think this was the first time that I began to see that things that many people had attributed to my innate abilities (or in the case of writing – my deficit of ability) actually had to do with what I had been taught and not what I was capable of. This may well have been where I first began to understand myself as being artificially constructed as disabled, but I still had no way of articulating this understanding.

Disabled at last

A little over a year after I graduated from Bard I found myself at the Institute of Education⁶ doing an *MA in Policy Studies in Education*. This was when I first began to see a way to see myself as disabled. It was during this period that I first met Jenny Corbett and discovered her writing as well as the writings of a number of disabled scholars, including but not limited to Paul Abberly, Colin Barnes, Jenny Morris, Mike Oliver, Tom Shakespeare & Carol Thomas. Through these writings I first began to understand disability as socially constructed and separate from impairment. That these scholars ranged from proponents of the social model to critical friends allowed me to see both its strengths and its limitations. The value of

⁶ Institute of Education, University of London

understanding the ways in which disability was socially constructed made perfect sense and explained many of my experiences as well as Gaby's.

It was at the Institute that I began trying to accept a disabled identity as my own. I decided at the outset that it was more important to me to do my MA well rather than try and conform to the Institute's assumptions about how quickly a Masters degree should be completed. I remember being made to feel terribly deficient when I notified both my MA course tutor and the registry that I was planning on writing my MA dissertation in a second year. To an extent this response was as much a result of me being closeted (in regards to my disabled identity) as it was about anything. Admitting I would never fit the traditional finish-in-one-year student mold was about as honest as I had been with myself about impairment. Even in making the decision I did not identify myself to registry or the tutor as disabled, I lied and said that I needed the extra time to deal with some personal family matters. Even as I made this lie I remember trying to convince myself that it was for the sake of expedience, but being unable to shake the idea that I was still just a fraud. At the time I was reading a Jenny Corbett (1994) paper on what Gay Pride and Disability Politics had to offer one another. In it she points out the pain and frustration that goes hand in hand with passing and the power of coming out. Her description of passing was something I could easily recognize in myself:

The denial of our reality, if we are gay or lesbian or we are disabled, is a suffocation of what makes us exist as unique individuals. It disempowers and weakens us. (Corbett, 1994; p.347)

While I did not get up from reading Jenny's paper with a fully formed sense of myself as a disabled person, I was certainly beginning to understand the power such an identity could have.

My thinking about issues of disability and identity were also greatly influenced by my relationships with disabled people who I met at the Institute and elsewhere. One friend in particular, Malini Chib; an MA student whose own self exploration and memoir (Chib, 2011) played a great role in my decision to include this section in this thesis. Malini's existence as a disabled student and wheelchair user, at the Institute was something of a battle (one she describes very well in her book). The institute gave her grief about her registration status, her living arrangements and some accommodations she requested. What I came away with watching her fight (and win) most of these battles was a recognition of how many of the people she encountered attempted to force a very particular (helpless) disabled identity on her. I remember one time being in a lift with her and an institute administrator, who knew Malini, came in to the lift and asked her "Oh did you lose your mother dear?". Now Malini's mother was well known at the Institute having been a student there, but this was not about where her mother was, this was about imposing an identity on her that fit with the administrator's view of what was appropriate to someone with cerebral palsy. I don't know if at the time I was able to articulate it as well but it certainly helped me to be more aware of such impositions; it allowed me to recognize what I was seeing teachers do to students at Red Rock [the site for this ethnography]. In relation to myself, I began to see that, just as imposing a helpless identity on Malini was an attempt to make her seem incompetent, my own self-imposed denial of a disabled identity was making me feel just as incompetent.

Carrying out the research for this thesis was in many ways what led me to not only accept myself as a disabled person but also to feel pride in that identity. It made me see that my differences did not make me incompetent or a fraud they made me a unique thinker with a valuable perspective on the

world. This is hardly an earth shattering revelation, a number of scholars have explored the valuable perspective a marginalized identity can offer someone (e.g. Guinier & Torres, 2002; Rollock, 2012). But for me, having spent years trying to pretend disability wasn't a part of my life, it was something that lifted a weight from my shoulders; a liberation. It began to occur during my data collection, hearing some of my own experiences in the voices of students at Red Rock.

I heard this echo of myself very strongly in one particular student. Sean was a 15 year old 10th grader when I met him. Much like me, he loved reading, was extremely verbally articulate, but had difficulties with math and writing, he rarely turned his work in on time and his teachers consistently complained to him about both the quality and the quantity of his written work. My identification with Sean came largely down to two things; his teachers reactions to him and his own descriptions of how he experienced impairment and disability. With one or two exceptions Sean's teachers saw him as a con artist; someone who was trying to use disability to get special treatment. There was the implication (sometimes made rather explicitly) that disability was just a ploy.

He's no more disabled than I am. This [disability] is just something his parents concocted to try and get him a leg up. Listen to the kid, he's perfectly articulate when he wants to be, he just doesn't put in the time with his work. He may be lazy but he's not disabled.

(Mr. Celek, Science teacher)

These assessments were things I had heard about myself for much of my education. I also heard myself in Sean's accounts of experiencing impairment:

I've tried writing faster so I could write more. And then they complain about my spelling, or that words

are left out or that my sentences don't make sense.
(Sean, 15; 10th Grade)

Where Sean and I differed is in the comfort that he showed in carrying a disabled identity. Sean was at ease with an understanding of himself as disabled in a way I was only starting to approach. And while he was aware of his teachers' positioning him as 'lazy' and 'a con' he opposed them (with far more success than I ever had with my teachers or even his fellow students had) at every opportunity.

I know they [the teachers] think I'm lazy but it's not true. I have a learning disability. It doesn't mean I'm stupid it means I learn differently. When I ask for extra time it's because I need it. What does speed have to do with whether I can do the work?
(Sean, 15; 10th Grade)

Seeing how comfortable someone as young as Sean was in a disabled identity helped me commit to my own. Another factor in this process for me was seeing how many students were denied access to disabled identities (as I will discuss in detail in Ch. 4).

Writing this thesis has been both the most disabling and the most empowering experience of my life. This is not meant as a contradiction, they are simply two aspects of the whole experience. When I say that it was the most disabling experience I mean that I have never felt more constructed as problematic as I have during this experience. Not only through answering the inevitable and understandable 'are you done yet?' questions, but also in having to justify my continued registration to the Institute. For a long time this was something I found difficult to understand or even acknowledge, but as time went on and I realized that regardless of how dismissive people seemed of the time the project was taking, I was still passionate about it and still saw great value in the work. I came to understand that my own experiences of disability had shaped and contributed to the quality of work I

was producing and that no one else would have likely produced the same work. This is where empowerment comes into play. What I now know is that my own experience of disability is a strength of, and not a hindrance to this project.

As I said at the beginning of this section this thesis has been very much about self exploration. It is that exploration that has led me to produce this work and the most current version of myself. I hope this contributes to your understanding of both. I would now like to elaborate on and explain how I have structured the thesis.

The Thesis

When I returned to London from collecting my data I was still in the process of understanding the many things I had seen and heard. Right away I made an appointment to see my supervisor David Gillborn. When I walked in to the meeting, I had no sooner sat down when a variety of anecdotes, issues, themes, and half baked analysis began pouring out of me. When we had gotten past that initial onslaught (and Dave realized that I wasn't possessed and that this was simply my way of trying to organize my thoughts and understand everything I had encountered) he suggested that I go home (he swears it wasn't to get rid of me or because he was frightened) and write each theme, anecdote and issue on its own piece of paper and come back. Once I had done this I talked him through each one and as I did we pinned them to a large corkboard. In the process it became very clear how particular themes related to one another and we ended up with what appeared to be four overarching frameworks centered on disabled students, which we identified as:

1. *Things done in their name*: How policy shapes disabled students experience of inclusive education.

2. *Things done to them*: How teachers shape disabled students experience of inclusive education.
3. *Things done with and without them*: How peer relationships shape the experience of inclusive education.
4. *What they make of it all*: Disabled students' experience of inclusive education.

While I believe it has become more nuanced and I have of course added a literature review, a methodology and a conclusion, this structure still lies at the heart of this thesis.

The first theme can be seen in the policy deconstruction in chapter three, which introduces the concept of institutional ableism and details the ways in which it permeates the United States Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Showing how potent a form of discrimination institutional ableism is by pointing out the ways in which it enables other less legally acceptable forms of discrimination. The second theme became chapter four, which describes and analyzes how teachers' discourses about disabled students serve to limit and constrict their ability to shape and determine their own positioning within the classroom. Chapter five outlines the gatekeeping role nondisabled students play in disabled students' experiences, focusing in particular on some of the 'technologies' nondisabled students deploy to maintain their hierarchical positions. And finally in chapter six I closely examine the experience of three disabled students in relation to policy, teachers and nondisabled peers. The picture that I believe will be clear in all of this is of the multiple, sophisticated and covert ways in which ableism is embedded throughout the education system; with some hope offered by the equally sophisticated and resourceful means disabled students have found to resist the ableism they encounter.

In the next chapter I examine the literature that serves as both the context and foundation for this project.

1

Literature Review

Introduction

Over the past thirty-six years, Disability Studies has begun to emerge from the academy as a discipline in its own right. As a result there has been a growing interest in scholarship aimed at understanding the experiences of disabled people through this new lens. This thesis focuses on the experience of disabled students within the American education system in general and particularly within one inclusive high school. It is the aim of this literature review to contextualise this thesis within the relevant literature.

To that end this chapter will focus on the five primary areas of research that have informed this thesis; identity, intersectionality, critical race theory, disability and policy. In addition to situating this thesis within the existing literature reviewing these literatures will serve to make my own understandings explicit to the reader; a necessary task given the centrality of these topics to thesis as a whole. While each area is broad enough to support multiple volumes on its own, I focus only here on those areas relevant to this thesis.

Identity

In 1903 W.E.B. Du Bois wrote:

...the negro is sort of a seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

(Du Bois, 1903; p.3)

Du Bois was one of the first theorists to attempt to map out the construction of identity in marginalised people. Since Du Bois's Conception of "Double Consciousness", identity has been applied extensively to topics as wide ranging as race, class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality. It has so far only been explored marginally as a component of disability (e.g. Allen 1999a; Shakespeare, et. al, 1996, 2005). There are almost as many notions of what identity is as there are people writing on the subject, and so before continuing further I feel it is necessary to say something of the definition I will be operating under in this literature review.

While Du Bois recognised "two warring ideals in one dark body", the conception of identity I will be using is not as quantifiable and is far less structured. Identity:

"...refers to definitions of individual self and personhood, and how the inner sense of self is connected to the outer perception of self. Identity cannot be defined in isolation. Identities are relational. Individual and group cultural identities intersect.

(Dei and James, 1998; p94)

Du Bois's "Double Consciousness" recognises the sense of otherness that is inherent in marginalized identity but perhaps underplays the equally connected and in many ways inseparable sense of sameness.

Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. But it is also about your social relationships, your complex involvement with others...

(Weeks, 1990; p.88)

Identity and Postmodern Theory

Contemporary notions of identity have largely been developed by postmodernists as an acceptable, albeit problematic alternative to the earlier more structured Marxist notion of 'consciousness' (Bradley, 1996). While postmodernists have brought identity forward as an alternative to consciousness, it has none the less been a highly contested term within postmodern theory. For this reason there are a number of issues that I must address before moving on.

Postmodernism has emerged out of the idea that our societal views have been shaped, manipulated and controlled by the Enlightenment ideas of reason, rationality and progress. The Postmodernist critique of the modern world argues that in using our constructions of reason, rationality and progress to impose an order or a structure on our world, we have limited ourselves to knowing reality from a single highly subjective point of view (Giroux, 1991; Skrtic, 1995).

Postmodernity as is suggested by the term, is the period following modernity. The need for the demarcation between the two periods stems from the argument that society has become so complex, fractured and

pluralistic that these structures have begun breaking down (Bradley, 1996; Thompson, 1992). The next question is obviously, what does this have to do with ‘identity’?

Historically ‘identity’ as a concept has been tied to “essentialism” and as society has become more and more pluralistic, that single centre that had defined one’s ‘identity’ was dislocated and replaced by a plurality of centres (Hall, 1996; Laclau, 1990). It is an important distinction because often these multiple centres are contradictory and are in conflict.

The subject previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented, composed not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved identities.

(Hall 1992; p277)

This means unlike in earlier periods, it is no longer possible to assign a singular overarching master identity. Identity is continuously in a process of shifting and relocation (Billington, et. al.,1998; Hall, 1992, 1996). And so as Stuart Hall (1992; p.280) argues:

Since identity shifts according to how the subject is addressed or represented, identification is not automatic but can be won or lost. It has become politicized. This is sometimes described as a shift from a politics of (class) identity to a politics of difference.

This will be a key factor this thesis particularly when it comes to understanding intersectional nature of student identities in school.

The Mechanics of Identity: Agency, External Forces and Negotiation

Before moving on to disability, I would like to try and elaborate on what identity looks like with postmodern theory accounted for. Because it implies multiple, distinctly separate strands, the “plurality of centres” described above, I would argue is less accurate than a single shifting fluid mass;

similar to the centre of a 'lava lamp' with different colours and aspects coming to the fore in different circumstances. I prefer this description because it recognises identity's nature as "a process never completed – always in process. It is not determined in the sense that it can be won or lost, sustained or abandoned." (Hall, 1996; p. 2) and it more accurately represents the conflict involved with various forces pushing and in several directions at once.

This means that the particular aspects of an individual's identity that come to the fore in any given situation are influenced, shaped and manipulated by a multitude of contextual factors, including history, time, place and the individuals and groups surrounding the person (Bradley, 1996; Grossberg, 1996; Hall, 1992).

This produces the postmodern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. Identity becomes a 'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems that surround us... It is historically not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self'. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about. (Hall, 1992; p.277)

There is the danger in this conceptualisation of 'identity', of thinking of identity as passively being determined by external factors. A number of authors have shown that individuals can be active participants in determining their own identity. Stuart Hall (1996b) writes of 'transformation', Judith Butler (2006) in terms of 'subversion', Michel Foucault (1977) of 'transgression', and before that Antonio Gramsci wrote in terms of 'resistance' (1926/2003). All four refer to the active role individuals can play in determining their own identity.

Tony Jefferson (1996) uses the example of boxer Mike Tyson to illustrate this active participation. He explains how Tyson used first gang membership and then boxing to transform his own identity from that 'passive little boy' to 'the complete destroyer'. Jefferson argues that for various reasons (social and psychological) Tyson chose to actively pursue this identity, over other alternatives. He accentuates his point by contrasting Tyson's choices to that of Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X, both of whom had similar histories to Tyson's and both of whom made distinctly different choices in relation to their identity.

While Jefferson's description is one of transformation or transgression, others prefer to describe the individual's participation in terms of 'negotiating identities' (Bradley, 1996). While it would seem that both occur, negotiation recognises the interplay between the 'subject' and the contextual circumstances. Paul Willis' (1977) *Learning to Labor* offers an example of negotiated identities. While the book approaches the subject by looking at a more narrowly defined 'class identity', its description of the 'lads' clearly shows the interplay between their school environment, their 'working class' backgrounds and their own 'identity' related choices. Willis' own description of identity formation sounds very much like a process of negotiation:

Class identity is not truly reproduced until it has properly passed through the individual and the group, until it has been recreated in the context of what appears to be personal and collective volition. The point at which people live, not borrow their class destiny is when what is given is reformed, strengthened and applied to new purposes.
(Willis, 1977; p.2)

Gutierrez, et al.(1995) offer another example of negotiated identities in the classroom. They argue that power can be negotiated in the classroom

through teacher/student dialog, in a process they call scripting and counterscripting. They argue that by using this process to renegotiate the power relationship in the classroom students and teachers are also renegotiating their classroom identities. When one no longer sees identity as discrete or fixed another concept becomes useful; intersectionality.

Intersectionality, Disability and Critical Race Theory

There is a growing body of research focused on examining, drawing out and contesting the many ways in which the intersectionality of identity politics uses complex technologies to create, preserve and further inequalities (Bhopal & Preston, 2011; Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Youdell, 2011). The composites created at these intersections make discrimination more effective and harder to combat. It is for this reason that the identification of these composites is so important. Brah and Phoenix (2004) have defined intersectionality as:

signifying the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasizes that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands.
(p.76)

It is an important concept within this thesis. While much of the thesis will focus on *disability* in relation to student identities an understanding of the intersectional nature of identity allows us to recognize that identity is a concept that will rarely present itself neatly within a singular frame (Youdell, 2010).

Since the early 1980's there have been a number of scholars straddling disability studies, anti-racist scholarship and gender studies and critical

pedagogy who have driven intersectional work within education. Michael Apple (1988,1996, 2006) Christine Sleeter & Carl Grant (1986, 2008; 2010) and Sally Tomlinson, (1981, 1982; 1995; 2004) were among the earliest scholars in education to examine the intersectional nature of educational inequality and their collective work has served to push intersectional research¹ into a number of fields. Within Disability Studies in Education a number of scholars have recognized the value of intersectional work. For example Beth Ferri and David Connor (2006) have traced the development of special education to states attempts to resist the racial desegregation, Susan Wendell (1996) has examined the role of gender in shaping the construction of disability (See also Smith and Hutchinson, 2004; Fine and Asch, 1988). Asch (2001) argues that disability studies scholars would benefit from more intersectional work. She says that many of the experiences of oppression that disabled people find so frustrating have already been illuminated by scholars working in Critical Race Theory (CRT).

The writings of many critical race theorists suggest that what disability scholars, activists, and legal advocates find so discouraging in court decisions, lackluster agency enforcement and public opposition is exactly the institutional response that should be expected. (...) There are many valuable messages to be gained from post-civil-rights-era CRT... (Asch, 2001; p.392-393)

Asch is pointing out that there is no need to reinvent the wheel; with many issues (such as intersectionality) disability studies is struggling to understand phenomena that CRT has already figured. It is a Critical Race scholar, Kimberle Crenshaw, who is credited (Ali, et al., 2010) with coining the term Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Crenshaw was working

¹ I refer to this work as intersectional although it should be noted that much of this research predates the development of the term. All of the research cited, however is built around the intersections of disability, race, gender & class and engages with their composites and interactions.

to highlight how the compounded or intersectional relationship between race and gender served as yet another barrier to fighting racial subordination.

If any real efforts are to be made to free Black people of the constraints and conditions that characterize racial subordination then theories and strategies purporting to reflect the Black community's needs must include an analysis of sexism and patriarchy. Similarly feminism must include an analysis of race if it hopes to express the aspirations of non-white women. Neither Black liberationist politics nor feminist theory can ignore the intersectional experiences of those whom the movements claim as their respective constituents. In order to Include Black women, both movements must distance themselves from earlier approaches in which experiences are relevant only when they are related to certain clearly identifiable causes (for example, the oppression of Blacks is significant when based upon race, of women when based on gender). (Crenshaw, 1989; p.166)

There are any number of issues in which this same argument needs to be applied, including disability. Scholars are currently trying to develop a better understanding of the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education (Artiles, 2003; Reid & Knight, 2006; Sullivan et al, 2011), as well as intersectional issues around employment (Bound, 1996) identification as disabled (Bumiller, 2008) and genetics (Kahn, 2007); CRT perhaps more than most fields has developed a wide range of tools to do so. In the section that follows I explain what Critical Race Theory is, with a view towards what it can offer disability studies scholars.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory is an area of scholarship that emerged out of a dissatisfaction with the silence of critical legal studies in the 1970's and 80's on race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; West, 1996). A number of legal scholars, most notably Derrick Bell, Kimberle Crenshaw,

Richard Delgado & Angela Harris began developing new means and methods for illuminating racism and the processes by which it is maintained and furthered (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In recent years CRT has expanded beyond its legal origins into fields as diverse as Counseling (Mcdowell & Jeris, 2004) Public Relations (Pompper, 2005) Sport (Hylton, 2009) and most notably education which (starting with a seminal introduction by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate IV in 1995) has seen an explosion of work employing CRT (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Tate, 1997). It has since expanded outside the United States with a diverse range of international scholars applying the principles of CRT in a number of contexts (e.g. Gillborn, 2005, 2008; Preston, 2007; Rollock, 2011, 2012).

CRT is somewhat difficult to define. As Gillborn & Ladson-Billings (2010) have noted:

There is no single canonical statement of CRT the perspective is built upon a series of key insights which are constantly refined through their application analytically and practically. In this sense, critical race theorists view social theory as a work in progress.
(p.342)

For this reason it is necessary to note the key insights from CRT as I see them in relation to this thesis. This is by no means an exhaustive list. I believe if you asked any two scholars in the field to compile something similar while there might be overlap it would be unlikely to produce an identical list. This constantly evolving nature of CRT, while making it difficult to define, is one of the reasons it is so effective as a lens through which to view the world.

The Centrality of Racism

CRT views racism as a central feature of American culture and society. It argues that rather than being a marginal aspect of life in the United States racism plays a defining role. That understanding the nation is impossible without understanding racism (Bell, 1989, 1992, 2004, 2005; Delgado, 1995, 1996, 2003; Tate, 1997). Now while CRT sees racism as a central factor in American life it is important to note that it is not limited to a simplistic conception of racism as bigotry, hatred or ignorance; it is a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the ways in which race is systematically used to advantage and oppress (Zamudio, et al. 2010). An understanding of the centrality of racism does not preclude or diminish the significance of other types of social inequality as I have already mentioned CRT's concern with these other forms of subordination is what has led to the development of an understanding of intersectionality (Ali, et al., 2010; Razack et al., 2010).

The Permanence of Racism

Derrick Bell (1989) in his book *Faces at the bottom of the well* argues that racism is not a temporary condition we are making progress with, but that it is a permanent part of American Society.

Perhaps those of us who can admit we are imprisoned by the history of racial subordination in America can accept – as slaves had no choice but to accept – our fate. Not that we legitimate the racism of the oppressor. On the contrary, we can only *delegitimize* it if we can accurately pinpoint it. And racism lies at the center, not the periphery in the permanent, not in the fleeting; in the real lives of black and white people, not in the sentimental caverns of the mind.
(Bell, 1989; pp. 197-198, original emphasis)

Rather than see this as a cause for despair and hopelessness Bell argues that this understanding is central to any hopes of resistance.

Armed with this knowledge, and with the enlightened humility based commitment that it engenders we can accept the dilemmas of committed confrontation with evils we cannot end. We can go forth and serve knowing that our failure to act will not change conditions and may very well worsen them.
(Bell, 1989; p.198)

In pointing out the permanence of racism Bell establishes a realism in which meaning is not derived from a never achieved utopia, but rather from engagement and commitment.

Counternarrative

A number of Critical Race Theorists have utilized story telling techniques as a way of introducing counternarratives (e.g. Bell, 1987; 1992; 1998; Delgado, 1995, 2003; Gillborn, 2008, 2010). Richard Delgado (2000) argues that these counternarratives are necessary to compete with dominant group discourses. "...there is a war between stories, they contend for, tug at our minds"(p.62). These alternate pictures of the world are intended to disrupt and challenge the dominant racist world views.

By incorporating a counterstorytelling method based on the narratives, testimonios, or life histories of people of color, a story can be told from a nonmajoritarian perspective—a story that White educators usually do not hear or tell (Delgado, 1989, 1993). At the same time, counterstorytelling can also serve as a pedagogical tool that allows one to better understand and appreciate the unique experiences and responses of students of color through a deliberate, conscious, and open type of listening. In other words, an important component of using counterstories includes not only telling nonmajoritarian stories but also learning how to listen and hear the messages in counterstories.

(Delgado Bernal, 2002; p.116)

CRT counternarratives provide a potent means of opposing and potentially transforming dominant racist grand narratives. The prominent examples of the use of counternarrative have come from Derrick Bell (1989, 1992, 1997, 1998) & Richard Delgado (1995, 1996, 2003) who use storytelling to challenge and reframe discourses around race as well as to expose racial and social injustice. The power of this is in the way it engages the reader/listener in the alternative narrative.

The story invites the reader to alienate herself or himself from the events described, to enter into the mental set of the teller, whose view is different from the reader's own. The oppositional nature of the story, the manner in which it challenges and rebuffs the stock story, thus causes him or her to oscillate between poles. It is insinuating: At times, the reader is seduced by the story and its logical coherence – it is a plausible counterview of what happened; it has a degree of explanatory power.
(Delgado, 2000; p.69)

It operates very much around same principles as the counterscripting discussed earlier. Whereas Gutierrez et al. (1995) were focused on challenging and disrupting interpersonal narratives and discourses Bell, Delgado and other CRT storytellers are engaging the larger societal discourse.

Deconstruction

This may be the least cited of CRT's key insights however it may be one of its most effective tools. Perhaps because of its roots in legal scholarship, CRT has a long history of deconstructing policy, legislation and case law as a means of critically exposing the how racism is institutionalized within legal institutions, structures and discourses (Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1998). This is something I explore in much greater depth within chapter three but it is worth pointing out here that the strength of deconstruction lies in its ability to highlight the racist processes and structures embedded and

hidden within legal discourse by breaking it down to component parts and separating its rhetoric from its outcomes.

Whiteness and White supremacy

The study of whiteness is one of the most controversial issues CRT has engaged in (Bergerson, 2003; Leonardo, 2002). For many the primary concern has been located around the potential colonization of race research by white researchers (Kolchin, 2002; Leonardo, 2009; Preston, 2007). CRT scholars while wary of colonization have found value in certain types of whiteness research. As John Preston notes:

...in the 'third wave' of critical whiteness studies work has turned towards the destruction of categories and actualities of whiteness rather than their circulation and conflation. CRT in particular, seeks to problematise those whites who seek only to problematise whiteness without working towards a critical praxis. It privileges counter discourses of people of colour in terms of their own perspectives (including those on whiteness) as opposed to those of white people (whether they are critical of whiteness or not) which it considers majoritarian. Most significantly many of its adherents do not consider whiteness or white privilege to accurately represent the actuality of oppression in the lives of people of colour, preferring the term white supremacy. (Preston, 2007; p.11)

When CRT scholars talk about white supremacy it is important to note that they are not referring to the more traditional simplistic understandings of white supremacy associated with groups such as the Ku Klux Klan or Neo Nazis, but rather to a highly politicized system of white domination and non white subordination operating at every level of our society. Charles Mills (2003) suggests that:

A case can be made that 'white supremacy' should play the same role in critical race theory that

‘capitalism’/ ‘class society’ and ‘patriarchy’ respectively play in Marxist and feminist political theory: providing an overarching holistic reconceptualization of the polity as a system of group domination. In this way a diverse array of phenomena can be illuminatingly conceptually integrated as constituting different aspects of what is in fact a global system. (p.182)

This growing understanding of a pervasive system of white supremacy has significantly aided critical race theorists in recognizing and exposing the structures and means by which racist inequalities are preserved and perpetuated.

Interest Convergence

While I will examine interest convergence in greater detail in chapter three, it is important to note as one of the central concepts of CRT. Interest convergence is an idea that was first developed by Derrick Bell (1980, 2004). The premise being that any gains made by the African American community will only ever come when they coincide with white interests. It is a concept that Bell described to explain the decision in the US supreme court’s landmark desegregation decision in *Brown vs Board of Education Topeka Kansas*. Bell argued that the decision to desegregate was more closely tied to white cold war interests than to any concern for social justice.

...the decision in *Brown* to break with the Court's long-held position on these issues cannot be understood without some consideration of the decision's value to whites, not simply those concerned about the immorality of racial inequality, but also those whites in policymaking positions able to see the economic and political advances at home and abroad that would follow abandonment of segregation. First, the decision helped to provide immediate credibility to America's struggle with Communist countries to win the hearts and minds of emerging third world peoples. (Bell, 1980; p.524)

Since Bell first made the argument, the concept of interest convergence has been applied by a number of researchers and theorists to further understanding a diverse range of circumstances, policies and events (e.g. Aguire, 2010; Aleman & Aleman, 2010; Gillborn, 2010a.).

Critique of Liberalism

One of the more subtle yet important elements of CRT has been its ongoing critique of liberal belief in the law's ability to produce a just and equitable society. CRT scholars have noted that often any progress is undermined before a policy or law can even be implemented, a number of liberal programs, most notably those built around policies of color-blindness or meritocracy which have been shown to preserve racism within organizations by not acknowledging its existence. (e.g. Bonilla-Silva, 2010)

In the remainder of this review I intend to discuss the negotiation of identities in greater detail. I would now like to move on to the subject of disability and hopefully any remaining issues related to identity will be fleshed out in the course of the coming sections.

Disability

Disability is a highly contested subject with many different meanings. As a concept it has been used to oppress as well as to liberate, as a term of derision and pity as well as of pride and empowerment. These conflicting conceptions have all been produced by different models of disability. In this section of the review, I would like to start with a brief exploration of the three primary models of disability that I will be looking at. They will be the 'medical model' the 'social model' and the 'social justice model'. I would then like to look at the implications of these different models in regard to identity and policy. All three have influenced 'Disability' as an aspect of

identity and all three play major roles in the construction of the policy of inclusion under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The Medical Model

I have chosen to begin with the medical model of disability largely because it has been the dominant model during the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, and as such it has had a great deal of influence in shaping the discourse of disability. The medical model offers an essentialist conception of disability. It defines disability as physical, mental, or developmental impairments residing within the individual that serve to restrict or marginalise that person (Linton, 1998; Sandow, 1994; Oliver, 1990).

The model which has been criticised for being overly patriarchal (Corbett, 1993), uses these 'essential' differences to connote inferiority. In locating disability within the individual the model set the various impairments up as individual problems to be treated, fixed or solved. The model gives the power to change the individual to the medical establishment and the related professions (Linton, 1998; Biklen, 1992).

Special educators usually describe their work as clinical; they treat individuals. If their work is with groups they nevertheless usually attempt to individualize their 'interventions'. They are presumed to possess current expert knowledge and they are expected to exercise professional judgement in each case they handle. They recommend and sometimes have the power to require a particular treatment. (Biklen, 1992; p.83)

This conceptualisation of an expert knowledge that none of the rest of us possess, has led to a great deal of power over disabled people's lives being placed in the hands of doctors, psychologists and special educators. It has also meant that, since disability has been seen as something to be treated, diagnosis takes on greater importance (Reiser and Mason, 1995).

In relation to disability, diagnosis is synonymous with labelling. The argument is that there is a need to clearly identify the nature of the disability in order to treat it. It is seen as a tool. This view has particularly strong support within education, where it is claimed that a classification system is necessary to enable educators to cater to the special needs of disabled students (Salend, 2005). Many of its critics argue that labelling pigeon holes disabled people by defining them solely by the label, making their disability the sum total of who that person is (Linton, 1998; Soder, 1992).

The label might from the perspective of the labeller, be seen as a neutral, descriptive or scientific diagnosis, but in fact is something much more. It puts a person in a category that is loaded with social meanings and preconceptions. As a result diagnosing disability is far more than simply describing some peculiarities in that person's behaviour. It is putting him in a special category, making him a special person. The characteristic of being disabled is ascribed to the whole person and all his other characteristics become interpreted in light of his disability.
(Soder, 1992; p.248)

It is an issue that I hope to explore in greater depth as I continue in this section. For now I would like to move ahead with the discussion of the medical model of disability.

The medical model's underlying assumption that disability is a *problem* located within the individual has set up a number of portrayals, views or perceptions of disabled people (Reiser, 1992; Biklen and Bogdan, 1977).

Biklen and Bogdan (1977) identified ten of these stereotypes found regularly in the media.

- *Disabled person as pathetic or as an object of Pity*

This view of disability is perhaps the most easily recognised of the stereotypes. Its origins go back hundreds of years and can be seen in our society in everything from literature (Tiny Tim – A Christmas Carol) to charity advertising (Reiser, 1992). The concept comes directly out of the medical model's view that disability is a problem people *suffer* with, therefore making them worthy of pity (Drake, 1996)

- *Disabled person as victim*
- *Disabled person as a burden*
- *Disabled person as incapable of participating in everyday life*

These three stereotypes are closely interconnected. They all are rooted in the view of disabled people as being child-like or as lesser human beings than non-disabled people. It is a view that is in many ways rooted in the original stereotype of disabled people as objects of pity. Drake (1999) argues that in promoting disabled people as pitiable, charities set them up in these roles as powerless, and incapable of doing for themselves.

- *Disabled person evil or as punishment for parent's evil*

The roots of this stereotype go at least as far back as ancient Greece (Edwards, 2010). It can be found in Shakespeare's Richard III, as well as countless films and cartoons with disabled villains. A variation of it even appeared recently as the beliefs of the (then) England Football manager who said that he believed disability to be a punishment for an individual's evils

in another life. It serves as another way for non-disabled people to view disabled people as lesser humans.

- *Disabled as non human (ie. freak or atmosphere)*

This stereotype is also about allowing non-disabled people to regard disabled people as lesser. It can be seen in the freak shows which far from disappearing, have grown in popularity in recent years (e.g. The Jim Rose sideshow). It is also visible in the atmospheric characters in films such as the blind news agents, musicians or beggars (Mitchell & Snyder, 2001) (examples can be found in films and television shows as wide ranging as ‘O brother where art thou’² and ‘The Watchmen’³).

- *Disabled person as ‘Super Crip’*

The “Super Crip” stereotype involves the portrayal of disabled people as super achievers; ‘brave’ souls who defy the assumed limits imposed by their impairment. From stories about wheelchair athletes, to those about children with Down’s syndrome who receive their Confirmation or Bar Mitzvah, the news media in particular have contributed to this stereotype. The problem with this stereotype lies in its presentation of disabilities as internal problems for individuals to ‘overcome’. It in many ways has the effect of lowering the standard by which disabled people are judged, by interpreting a

² <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0190590/> (accessed on 11/19/11)

³ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0409459/> (accessed on 11/19/11)

fairly ordinary achievement such as having a Bar Mitzvah, as an extraordinary feat.

- *Disabled person as object of humour*

From Mr. Magoo⁴ to Eddie Murphy's early impressions of Stevie Wonder to the film *Something about Mary*⁵, the belittling of disabled people is a rather common comic motif and is not limited to the media. I witnessed a situation in which a friend who is disabled woman using a wheelchair asked a non-disabled woman to open a set of doors for her to pass through (a fairly common courtesy accorded most people disabled or nondisabled). As the non-disabled woman held the door she announced to the room at large "Nursing Services here", with a broad smile on her face to indicate that she was trying to be funny. The humour becomes a tool for oppression (Billig, 2005).

- *Disabled person as own worst enemy*

The most clear cut example of this stereotype can be found in John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" in which the main character is a disabled man who despite the best intentions could not help but get himself into trouble because of his disability. This again offers the picture of disabled people as being inferior to nondisabled people. A variation of this can be seen in portrayals in which a disabled person's anger or self pity is seen as

⁴ A cartoon a blind cartoon character in which the character's blindness served as the primary source of humor and plot. (for an example see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=XbB7mo9dbEo> accessed 11/19/11)

⁵ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0129387/> (accessed on 11/19/11)

the only things preventing the individual from overcoming the “problem” of their disability (e.g. Lt. Dan in *Forest Gump*⁶)

- *Disabled person as non sexual*

It has been suggested (Shakespeare, et. al, 1996) that this stereotype is a byproduct of the nondisabled need to view disabled people as lesser people. The argument being that because sexual agency or independence is seen as an essential characteristic of full personhood, and disabled people are already viewed as being incomplete people by reason of their impairment, there is a need to conflate the impairment with asexuality.

All of these stereotypes have influenced the ways in which disability is shaped as an aspect of people’s identity. Identity is very much affected by the way in which the individual is viewed; in the moment and in the society. It is what Du bois (1903) called the veil and Foucault (1986) refers to as the gaze. Outside influences have a very deep impact on the way in which individuals view themselves (Bradley, 1996). Goffman (1956; 1963) and Becker (1973) showed numerous ways in which how others view individuals effects the ways in which they both view and present themselves. This is not meant to deny the individuals own agency in shaping their own identities, but rather to show that how others (particularly those

⁶ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109830/> (accessed on 11/19/11)

from more dominant social groups) view an individual, does have a very deep influence on both personal and group identity.

As Oliver (1990) and Linton (1998) have pointed out disability can be viewed as a political grouping by which individuals with a disparate range of impairments can gather under the same political tent, with the collective power of the group being far greater than the marginalised power of the individual. Because the medical model of disability individualises impairments, it serves to further marginalise disabled people, by separating them from each other (Swain and Cameron, 1999).

The separation of disabled people into impairment specific categories has also served to reinforce the impact of the individualizing discourse, creating a situation in which people have identified themselves as more or less disabled. The less disabled an identity that someone has of herself, the more she has been able to aspire towards 'normalcy' and the less bound she has felt herself to associate herself in her own mind with other disabled people.
(Swain and Cameron, 1999; p.76)

It roughly amounts to a divide and conquer strategy.

This phenomenon helps to illustrate why identity is such an important issue in relation to disability. Identity politics are central to issues of marginalisation and power, equality and inequality, and exclusion and inclusion (Apple, 1996; Bradley, 1996; Hall, 1990). It is something which has long since been recognised in studies of 'Class' (e.g. Willis, 1977;

Macleod, 2009), Gender Studies (e.g. Hey, 1995; Butler, 1990; Youdell, 2006,2010), Race and Ethnicity studies (e.g. Gillborn, 1995; Fordham, 1990; Youdell, 2003) but has only recently begun to be fully recognised in relation to disability (e.g. Allan, 1999a; Benjamin, 2003; Priestley, 1999). To explore this issue further however I feel it is first necessary to look at some of the other models of disability.

The Social Model(s) of Disability

Dissatisfaction with the medical model's dominance over disability related issues has led to the development of a number of challenging models, the most prominent of which is the social model of disability. This prominence stems largely from its position as the dominant conceptualisation of disability within the disability rights movement (Linton, 1998; Barnes & Mercer, 2010; Oliver and Barnes, 1998). It has developed slowly over many years and can be broken into two segments 'Social Constructionism' and 'Social Creationism' (Barnes, 1996). While I will make the distinction between the two for the purposes of clarity within this literature review, it is not one that is commonly made and both are generally referred to simply as the social model.

The central tenet of the social model of disability is the recognition of the distinction between *disability* and *impairment* (Abberly, 1996; Oliver 1990, 2000). By separating the two concepts which have traditionally been

portrayed as singular, a new understanding emerges; in which ‘impairment’ refers to individual limitations (i.e. the inability to walk or hear) and ‘disability’ is the problematization artificially constructed by society around these impairments (i.e. not being able to walk or hear being made problematic by socially created factors such as built environment – steps; and the use of spoken language rather than sign language)(Barnes, 1997; Hughes & Patterson, 2006; Oliver 1990). It has been a very powerful tool and has great importance within the disability rights movement because it enabled the rejection of medicalized understandings of disability which viewed disability as a problem located within the individual.

The social constructionist view, emerged largely as a criticism of the medical model, and argued that rather than being an individually located problem, disability was a societally constructed oppression (Abberly, 1987) in which various impairments are used by society as the basis for group marginalisation (Ridell, 1996; Oliver, 1990). It contends that the power the medical model places in the hands of the medical establishment is used to maintain that marginalisation, as it comes from the disempowerment of disabled people (Drake, 1999; Oliver, 1989). It should however be noted that several theorists while recognising a social construction do not wholly dismiss the value of the medical establishment. Linton (1998) while critical of medicine’s role in constructing disability recognises that the medical focus on disabled people has had numerous benefits for disabled people’s

health and wellbeing. Corbett (1993;1996) argues for a reconceptualisation of the medical discourse surrounding disability in which the power dynamic is inverted giving disabled people control over their own bodies and health care.

Recently a number of researchers have traced the construction of disability to the issue of meanings (Corker and French, 1999; Drake, 1999; Linton, 1998).

The medical meaning making was negotiated among interested parties who packaged their versions of disability in ways that increased the ideas' potency and marketability. The disability community has attempted to wrest control of the language from the previous owners and reassign meaning to the terminology used to describe disability and disabled people. This new language conveys different meanings, and, significantly, the shifts serve as metacommunications about the social, political, intellectual and ideological transformations that have taken place over the past two decades.
(Linton, 1998; pp. 8-9)

As Simi Linton rightly points out language and meanings are very much at the heart of the conceptualisation of disability, and to allow the language and meaning to go unquestioned, amounts to blindly acceding control of the concept of disability to nondisabled people.

The issue of meaning is very much connected to the previously mentioned topic of labelling. It has been argued that what we call something in many

ways serves to define it (Soder, 1992), but more recently it has been answered by the argument that when names are changed the old value or meaning simply tends to reattach itself to the new name (Mason, 1996) (Oliver, 2000; Slee, 1996).

“Labels are not the problem however it is the values we attach to the labels which matter. Disabled people know that, like black people we have to keep the label and change the values. This is the only way that we can become proud of who we really are(...)We have reclaimed the right to define ourselves, as have people with learning difficulties and mental health system survivors. Euphemisms such as ‘differently abled’ or ‘special needs’ only serve to add to the confusion that surrounds our issues.”
(Mason, 1996; npn)

There is truth to both arguments. I would argue that they are not mutually exclusive, and that while language should be carefully selected, the values and meanings attached to that language should be just as carefully guarded.

The Social Creation model of disability is for the most part complimentary to the Social Construction model. The two merely have different foci. Social Constructionism is centred on how disability is constructed, while Social Creationism focuses on *why* (Barnes, 1996). Largely an adaptation of Marxist theory to explain disability, Social Creationism argues that in an industrialised society, all goals and functions within the society are determined by economic or material interests, and that disability serves one of these functions (Ridell, 1996). It then follows that how that society positions disabled people, be it through their inclusion or marginalisation, or through the devaluation of disabled contributions to the work force, is also a function of those interests (Tomlinson, 1995; Oliver 1990). A number of social creationist theorists have argued that the progressive development of

the labour market helped create something of a disabled underclass (Abberly, 1996; Finkelstein, 1980) and that the disability serves as an indispensable “instrument of the state in controlling the labour supply” (Stone, 1984;p.179).

While much of the criticism of the social model has come as a defence of the medical model, there is a growing body of work emerging from disability studies scholars offering their own critiques of the limitations of the social model. Critics of the Social creationists claim that they reduce everything to class conflict and meeting the needs of capitalism (Fulcher, 1999). Others have gone further criticizing social model proponents for ignoring the very real experience of impairment in disabled people’s lives (Hughes & Patterson, 2006; Shakespeare, 2006; Thomas, 1999, 2007) as well as for the seeming contradiction of rejecting impairment as a sufficient condition for disability, while at the same time making impairment the sole qualification for status as a disabled person (Tremain, 2002).

The social model of disability is central to this literature review as it provides my working definition of disability, and heavily informs the analysis in the thesis. The social construction of disability helps shape identity but is also shaped in turn by identity.

The discourses that disabled children encounter in a mainstream high school and the discursive categories they acquire in the process, contribute both to their own identity development and to the construction of disability as a social concept.

(Priestley, 1999; p.93)

This is very important, as it is quite easy to fall into a trap of seeing students as things to be acted upon with very little influence, agency or power of

their own. As will become clear as I look at the literature on inclusion, there is an interplay between agency and construction but its extent and mechanics are very much under-explored.

The dominant narratives of ‘charity’, ‘treatment’, ‘provision’ and ‘abuse’ suggest non-reciprocal processes in which disabled children are more acted upon than acting. They are often stories of passivity, surveillance and confinement. (...) However children are not simply passive recipients. They are also social actors responding to discursive practices, resisting and reconstructing them to fit their own experiences and priorities. Disabled children in mainstream schools need to continually work out ways of placing themselves within and without the discursive categories of ‘disability’ and ‘special need’. Yet we know relatively little about how this happens in relation to disability.
(Priestley, 1999; pp93-4)

It is this interplay that lies at the heart of this review, and indeed, this thesis. In the policy section I will look at the extent to which this has been explored, as well what questions arise from that exploration.

The Social Justice Model

The final model of disability I intend to look at is the Social Justice model. The basic premise of the social justice model of disability is that if the formal and legal barriers of societal oppression are lifted, the path will be clear for disabled people to move in from the margins of society. Disability then becomes an issue of social justice, citizenship, and rights (Slee, 2001). It is then important to note that none of these three things is static or unchanging. For this reason, it is a model that offers great flexibility as it can change with the times (Nussbaum, 2007).

It is the theoretical basis (if not always the practical basis) for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), the

policy I will be examining in chapter three, and as such has had a great deal of influence over disability as an aspect of identity. It is not incompatible with social constructionist models as it is a prescriptive model as opposed to social construction's descriptive model, and it has been suggested that the two combined would provide a stronger challenge to the dominance of the medical model, than either presents on its own (Slee, 1996). What are its effects on identity; its proponents say it is emancipatory (Meekosha and Jakubowicz, 1996; Ramsey, 1993).

Such an education would be richer, more diverse and more stimulating education, and a more appropriate preparation for post school life in an egalitarian community not only for those students who are disadvantaged by the current arrangements, but indeed for all students.
(Ramsey, 1993; pp. viii-ix)

Its opponents criticise it for being utopian and not being grounded in reality (Abberly, 1996).

In terms of identity, the social justice model offers a means of resisting the individualised problematic constructed by the medical model. In casting all people in the role of citizen it allows for the shedding of the false dichotomy of able (or whole) and disabled (less than whole) (Nussbaum, 2007). Before moving on to the policy section, I would like to try to explore disability's place within the concept of identity.

Disability as an Aspect of Identity

Erving Goffman's 1963 treatise *Stigma*, although not limited to disability, offers one of the earliest examinations of disability as an aspect of identity. Goffman conceptualises disability as a (stigmatising) factor which spoils identity, weakens an individual's perceptions of self, as well as the ways in which others perceive that person. This is in marked contrast to more recent

accounts, in which disability has been offered as a source of pride and strength (Shakespeare, et. al. 1996; Corbett, 1994).

While Goffman (1963) allowed some leeway for individual agency in shaping one's own identity, he argued that much of this was limited to the influence of (what he saw as) essential characteristics of the individual such as disability. In Goffman's view, identity could be divided into two, virtual and actual identity.

Thus the demands we make might better be called demands made 'in effect', and the character we impute to the individual might better be seen as an imputation made in potential retrospect – a characterization 'in effect', a *virtual social identity*. The category and attributes he could in fact be proved to possess will be called his actual identity. (Goffman, 1963; p.12; original emphasis)

While this is clearly a more simplistic understanding of the concept of identity than I have been using, Goffman's work on stigma does offer insights into one aspect of disabled identity. Goffman (1963) argued that when there was an ascertainable discrepancy between virtual and actual identity, society marked or discredits the individual; a stigma. He argued that this affected the individual's own perception of self, the way others perceived that person, as well as how they both interacted. Goffman's conceptualisation of actual identity could be construed to place him firmly within the medical model of disability, in which disability is seen as a problem located within the individual. This would be a misappropriation of his argument as he clearly recognised stigmatised attributes as a social construction.

The term stigma will be used to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting, but it should be seen that a language of relationships not attributes is really needed. An attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither creditable nor

discreditable as a thing in itself.
(Goffman, 1963; p.13)

Goffman argued a stigmatised attribute such as a disability could cause an individual to feel invisible to others, ashamed, could get them to try and pass or hide the attribute. He also claimed that others used stigmatising attributes to assume other characteristics for the stigmatised individual based solely on the stigmatised attribute. Over the past thirty-six years, the dating of Goffman's theory hasn't meant that these things have disappeared, only that they have become more complex.

Goffman, who gave relatively little recognition to individual agency as a factor in shaping identity, saw disability as an attribute which society stigmatised almost without fail, unless the person was somehow able to pass themselves as nondisabled (a subject we will be discussing in greater detail later in this review). Recent evidence however has suggested that while disability can still be stigmatised, it is not necessarily the automatic occurrence that it once was perceived to be (Allen, 1999; Hogan, 1999; Shakespeare et. al. 1996). Carol Thomas (1999) argues that the construction of personal narratives and counter-narratives has enabled many disabled people to shape their own perceptions of self as well as the perceptions others have of them.

Perhaps the key point is that without the counter-narratives of others who challenge social 'norms' we as isolated individuals, are trapped within the story-lines of the prevailing narratives. If we do re-write our own identities then we strengthen the counter narrative, and the dominant and oppressive social narratives begin to crumble...
(Thomas, 1999; p.55)

In reality disability like any other aspect of an individual's identity is shaped by a combination of both personal agency and external factors. It has been

theorised by Foucault (1988) that increasing an individual's own agency in regard to identity can be quite emancipatory and can enable people:

to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and a way of being so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality.
(Foucault, 1988; p.88)

There has recently been a great deal of evidence to support this claim particularly in regard to disabled people (Allan, 1999a; Priestley, 1999; Swain and Cameron, 1999; Shakespeare et. al, 1996). All of these authors have looked at specific ways in which individual agency has been able to influence and affect identity formation. In focusing on the specific, however, they have often failed to show the broader picture of the interaction between individual agency and external forces and the way in which they affect each other. In the next section, I will be looking at the United States' inclusive education policy (IDEA), with a particular focus on how it was shaped by the three competing models of disability and its roles in identity formation.

The Policy Process and Identity Formation

Policy is shaped and acted upon at many levels from the macro to the micro (Bowe, et. al, 1992). It makes sense then that as an external force, policy acts upon individual and group identities at multiple levels. There is what appears to be a growing understanding of this. It can be seen in numerous authors from a wide range of subjects such as Race (e.g. Gillborn, 1995; Fordham, 1990; Youdell, 2006), Gender and Sexuality (Rasmoussen, 2006; Youdell, 2006, 2010), Class (Bradley, 1996; Evans, 1995), Age (Bradley, 1996; Commacchio, 2008) and more recently, Disability (Benjamin, 2003;

Allan, 1999a). It has meant that in order to examine identity formation, disability or in fact anything acted upon by policy, researchers must look on a myriad of levels, rather than simply the Macro or the Micro levels discretely (Drake, 1999; Bowe et. al., 1992).

The ways in which various education policies are said to shape and influence identities are too numerous to mention. Instead I would like to focus on one particular education policy; Inclusive Education, looking at how the different models of disability have shaped it, and then at what we know about how it affects disability as an aspect of identity.

Inclusive Education, Disability and Identity

As will be discussed in chapter three, many assume that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) and its previous incarnations going back to 1975 promote a system of inclusive education. It is an assumption that arises out of IDEA's requirement to educate disabled students in the *Least Restrictive Environment Appropriate (LRE)*. While chapter three will touch on whether or not this assumption is accurate, here I would like to examine what inclusive education is and its role in identity politics.

Len Barton (2001) has described inclusive education as:

Inclusive education is concerned with understanding and challenging all forms of barriers to participation. It is thus antagonistic to all forms of discrimination and exclusion and the consequent assaults upon identity, self worth, and collective well being. It is concerned with change and thus will necessarily engage with political issues, power relations, and forms of inequality. It is not an end in itself but a means to an end. That of the struggle for and a realisation of an inclusive nondiscriminatory society.
(NPN)

This understanding is important as the inclusive ideal, it is not however the understanding of inclusive education that is being deployed within the school that is the focus of this thesis, nor is it the model of inclusive education that many have extrapolated from IDEA. Those conceptions focus almost exclusively on disabled students; and as we will see in much of this thesis this limitation is significant.

While they do not operate by Barton's ideal the understanding of inclusive education as pertaining disabled students has a substantial history. The research in this area is diverse. It has not always used the same terminology or even the same meanings but all have referred to some extent to the education of disabled students in the regular education setting.⁷ This research has focused a great deal on disabled identity and the experience of inclusive education policies.

In 1989 Adrienne Asch produced a thorough examination of disabled students experience of IDEA. While limited to individuals with physical or sensory disabilities, there is very little reason to assume her findings cannot be extended to individuals with developmental and learning disabilities as well.

She found an education system that left disabled students still rather socially and academically (although not physically) segregated and unequal.

Running throughout my conversations with disabled students, parents or professionals is the message that today's education is still largely separate and rarely equal. Separate means not only the segregated school or class but the separate standards used to measure the opportunities provided or the progress made. Whether speaking of such 'basics' as reading, writing, mathematics, science labs, organizing ideas and organizing time, or such 'frills' as

⁷ Terms such as 'inclusion', 'mainstreaming', 'integration' and 'inclusive education' have been used interchangeably by many even while using a wide range of definitions.

physical education field trips (...)or enrichment programs, the nations disabled students are deprived. In many instances, standards of attendance, discipline, participation, and performance are different and lower for disabled students than for nondisabled members of the same class, grade level, school district or state.

(Asch, 1989; pp.183-4)

The disparity in standards and treatment found by Asch is an important factor in shaping peer interactions, self perception, as well as peer perceptions. As Mark Priestley (1999) points out in a more recent U.K. study with similar findings:

Children have a keen sense of fairness and the differential application of discipline or punishment rarely goes unnoticed in the classroom. Students with special educational needs are frequently distinguished from their nondisabled peers by formal and informal practices. This kind of ritual and very public 'othering' reinforces powerful discursive messages in the minds of pupils. Based on a cumulative experience of small incidents, they begin to build discursive categories of 'special needs' or 'disability'. (Priestley, 1999; p.96)

Such disparities in treatment leave students with disabilities feeling patronised (Asch, 1989) and nondisabled students feeling alienated (Priestley, 1999; Vlachou, 1997) and are clear examples of ways in which external forces affect identity.

In regard to friendships and socialising between disabled and nondisabled students Asch found that when it occurred it was largely due to a great deal of hard work on the part of parents and educators and students to create situations conducive to social interaction. Even when friendships were formed, most of the students she spoke to felt that their in-school friendships rarely translated into friendships outside of school. Friendships have long been recognised as a central area in which identity is negotiated (Derrida,

2005; Hey, 1997; Pahl, 2000; Shakespeare, 2005). It is at least partially for this reason that the much of the research into inclusive education has focused on social rather than academic integration and it is also why peer relationships feature heavily in both Chapter five and six of this thesis.

Anastasia Vlachou (1997) in a U.K. based primary school study looked at nondisabled students and teachers attitudes towards disabled students and inclusive education in general. What she found very much supports Goffman's arguments, discussed earlier, on stigma and identity. She found that just by looking at a photograph of an unknown child with Down's Syndrome, nondisabled students could construct whole personalities right down to attributes as specific as maths skills and gymnastics ability. She also found that in some students these constructed or perceived identities, were enough for those students to decide that they would not like to have that person (the child in the photo) as a friend.

Vlachou also found that the teachers had their own well constructed assumptions about students with disabilities, and in some cases these assumptions determined whether or not they believed they were capable of teaching students with disabilities. This is not only important as an example of teachers constructing students identities, but also because as Vlachou points out:

Through their own experience, some teachers learned that attitudinal responses toward disabled people were key determinants of their inclusion not only within education but within the wider community as well.
(Vlachou, 1997; p114)

This statement begins get at some of the centrality of identity formation to the inclusive education debate.

Julie Allan (1999a; 1999b) looks at disabled students personal agency in shaping their own identity. Using Foucault's (1977) concept of transgression, Allen shows how disabled students transgress in and out of disabled identities in given situations. As Foucault describes it:

Transgression then is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open are of a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust. Perhaps it is like a flash of lightning in the night which from the beginning of time gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies, which lights up the night from the inside from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised singularity; the flash loses itself in this space it marks with its sovereignty...

(Foucault, 1977; p.35)

Transgression is in many ways the perfect way of looking at personal agency in identity formation, because it allows one to recognise the complexity of practices of resistance. In resisting the external constructions, the children Allen is observing are in many ways highlighting them. It also allows for a broader recognition of resistance. It allows Allen to recognise the resistance implicit in a student's transgression into rather than out of a disabled identity.

Allen (1999a) offers the one of the first detailed glimpses of the interplay between personal agency and external forces, involved in the negotiation of disabled identity. Describing mainstream pupils as 'inclusion gatekeepers', she offers a clear portrait of the power relationships involved in the interactions between disabled pupils and their mainstream peers. In these power relationships, mainstream pupils hold most of the keys to inclusion,

and disabled students' transgressive practices are their part in the negotiation process over how, when, and if those keys will be used. In many ways Allen sets up identity negotiation as the lynchpin to inclusion. Allen (1999a) clearly recognises that is not an all or nothing proposition. It is neither a free choice to be made by students with disabilities nor is it wholly externally imposed.

Conclusion

The interaction between identity, disability and the policy of inclusion has only just begun to be explored. In reviewing this literature it has become quite clear that there still is no broad picture of how the three fully interact. Some researchers have shown the role of personal agency in negotiating identity (Allen, 1999a; Priestley 1999), others have shown external forces power to construct identities (Vlachou, 1997), and still others have tried to look at the effects that policies have on the process in general (Lipsky and Gartner, 1997; Asch, 1989), but none have offered a bigger picture.

There are several omissions in this review of identity, disability and the policy process in relation to inclusive education. Some of these may come from my own error, but the vast majority, are absent due to the lack of quality research in this area. The roles of policy discourse, teachers, nondisabled peers, and disabled students themselves, must have a great influence in the processes I have described, and are all in need of exploration. In this research I gather all of these loose ends together to present a picture in which one can see both the forest and the trees.

2

Methodology

Introduction

The previous chapter, explored the foundation of research underlying this thesis. It is a varied literature that has shaped the questions at the heart of the project. In this chapter I would like to discuss the methodological choices and experiences that constructed this thesis. This methodology is one that I must admit I have put off writing for some time, not because it was unimportant, but rather because I understood how very important it was. My understanding is that as fascinating or groundbreaking as any thesis may be, its strength, validity and credibility rests on how solid a methodological structure it is built around. Done well a methodology can strengthen the claims and arguments of a thesis, done poorly it can undermine the reader's reception of the work. It is with this in mind that I approach this chapter.

I will begin by examining my research questions entering into the project and how they influenced my methodological approach. I will not argue that this approach was the only possible way to answer these questions, but that it was the means of answering them that was most satisfactory to my intent in asking the questions.

The sections that follow will examine the practical and logistical aspects of carrying out this research. Examining how the research case study school

was found, how access was negotiated and reflecting on both experiences. This will be followed by a detailed examination of my role as researcher on the project, the particular research methods I employed for the project as well as an account of issues that arose during the data collection. The chapter ends with a discussion of the ethical issues raised by the project and a reflection on the experience.

Research Questions

After completing my literature review it became clear that there were certain questions that I wanted this thesis to answer. Each of these research questions in turn led to a number of sub questions. In this section I will look at these questions and how they shaped my methodological choices. It would be ridiculous to argue that these were the only possible choices that could be made to examine these questions, but I hope to show the thinking behind the choices I have made.

Having reviewed the literature, there was one broad question that I felt I wanted to address within this thesis:

How are the social relations of disability, race, class and gender shaped and influenced by 'Inclusive Education'?

I was under no impression that this thesis would answer this question definitively, but as with any thesis it was my aim to significantly contribute to the production of knowledge around it. As is stated above there are many possible ways to approach this question and, in constructing my own approach to it, I had to contemplate what type of answers would satisfy this question for me. Reading that last sentence it seems a bit ambiguous, I was not thinking about what answers I wanted from the research but rather what type of information. I knew that the data would generate the answer, but

before that could happen, it was necessary to think about what type of answer would satisfy the question.

In the foreground of this process was always the definition of inclusive education mentioned in the previous chapter that I was using.

Inclusive education is concerned with understanding and challenging all forms of barriers to participation. It is thus antagonistic to all forms of discrimination and exclusion and the consequent assaults upon identity, self worth, and collective well being. It is concerned with change and thus will necessarily engage with political issues, power relations, and forms of inequality. It is not an end in itself but a means to an end. That of the struggle for and a realisation of an inclusive non-discriminatory society. (Barton, 2001, NPN¹)

Given this understanding of inclusive education, there were a number of sites at which my research question could be approached including the policy level, the school level, the community level and the family level. I chose to focus on the policy and school levels, primarily because I believed that they were the areas in which inclusive education was being most actively engaged.

In many ways figuring out how to approach policy was the most difficult for me. There are numerous approaches to examining policy; some have focused on the intentions and understandings that go into the making of policy (Ball, 1990; Gewirtz & Ozga, 1994) some have focused on the structures created by policy (Fulcher, 1999; Gandin & Apple, 2002) others have engaged the politics and philosophies underlying policies (Apple, 2006; Gillborn, 2008). Even examining something more specific, such as the factors affecting educational outcomes, has led to numerous approaches; including longitudinal studies (Desimone et al., 2002) quantitative

¹ No page number.

investigations of test scores (Haney, 2000) and graduation rates (Losen et al., 2004), and qualitative studies of individual actors connected to a particular policy (Bowe, et al., 1992; Troman, 2006) - the variations are numerous.

In the end this required the development of a sub-question to the original research question: *'What does this policy (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement act of 2004 – IDEA 2004) do? And how does this affect inclusive education programs?'* While this question does not read as well as the question offered at the beginning of this section, it did push me to think about what the policy does and, more specifically, how I can look at what it does. There are in fact a multitude of approaches to this but the one that made the most sense to me was to focus on the discourse constructed by the text of the policy itself. My reasoning being that while policy is acted upon at many levels by many actors (Ball, 2006; Bowe, et al., 1992; Fulcher, 1999) at the foundation of all of these encounters with policy is the textual discourse of the policy itself and the surrounding political discussions that re/contextualize it. It is a part of the policy process that often goes relatively unexamined (Peters, 2006). It would be a mistake to negate the active role that policy texts themselves play. A large amount of policy research does not explicitly look at the specific textual language of a policy. They often summarize the requirements of a policy without necessarily examining how, in what way, or in some cases even, if the requirements they describe are actually required by the policy (Codd, 1988) and quickly moving on to focus on other aspects.

This thesis does not advocate doing away with one approach for another (indeed much of the thesis is predicated on examining the ways in which policy is acted upon) rather it looks for a balance by examining how, as Stephen Ball (2006) puts it: 'Policies pose problems to their subjects'(p.21).

In doing so I have tried to take an approach advocated by Jenny Ozga (2000):

...it is also useful to think about policy text as carrying particular narratives; that is, they tell a story about what is possible or desirable to achieve through education policy. They are thus able to be read as any narrative is read: they may be scrutinized for their portrayal of character and plot, for their use of particular forms of language in order to produce impressions or responses; they may have an authorial 'voice' or seek to convey the impression of multiple viewpoints. (p.95)

The usefulness of this approach is that it opens up an understanding of policy as something more than its intended meaning; that policy language itself may have unanticipated repercussions.

In answering the question about policy I have tried to deconstruct these narratives as a means of shedding light on the many ways in which they constrain, obstruct or in some cases open up the policy process. This deconstruction of policy texts presents a useful if often overlooked aspect of the role of policy. It does not give the whole picture of how policy shapes the experience of inclusive education, that is something that I hope will emerge in my approach to inclusive education operating at school level (focusing on those acting on policy).

In engaging the micro-political school environment, I wanted to present a more nuanced account of the role of teachers and students; to achieve this I have chosen an ethnographic methodology. A detailed account of the actual techniques and methods utilized in collecting the data will be offered later in this chapter. For the remainder of this section I would like to discuss why I have chosen ethnography as a means of answering these questions.

Why ethnography?

As a term ethnography carries a number of different meanings (Atkinson & Delamont, 1995; Denzin, 1997; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). According to Geertz (1973):

...ethnography is thick description. What the ethnographer is in fact faced with (...) is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which he must contrive to grasp and then to render. And this is true at the most down-to-earth levels of his activity; interviewing informants, observing rituals... (pp.9-10)

He continues by stating that, more than just these acts of data collection, a central aspect of ethnography is the act of writing and, within writing, interpretation, because all ethnographic writing is the ethnographer's interpretation of the data (ibid, p.19-20).

While the term ethnography is still a critically disputed concept in the years since Geertz 'thick description' a more nuanced understanding has emerged. As Stephen Ball (1993) has argued:

...the choice of ethnography carries with it implications about theory, epistemology and ontology. Ethnography not only implies engagement of the researcher in the world under study; it also implies a commitment to search for meaning, a suspension of preconceptions, and an orientation to discovery. In other words ethnography involves risk, uncertainty and discomfort. (p.32)

It is this complexity, the ability to connect theory, epistemology and ontology that makes ethnography so appropriate for this project. Going to my original research question: *How are the social relations of disability, race, class and gender shaped and influenced by 'Inclusive Education'?* it is

a broad, messy question that could not be wholly answered in a thousand PhD theses. Any attempt to answer it will be broad and messy as well, a neat simplistic answer would not be worth writing much less reading. It requires a cacophony of data, not neat quiet statistics or other quantified answers. That is not to say that there is no value to quantitative research, but that to get at this particular question quantitative research is inadequate. The benefit of ethnography is that it allows researchers to make sense out of the messiness, to frame and highlight particular constructions of reality. As Norman Denzin (1997) has argued ethnographic research allows authors to create:

...texts that are aware of their own narrative apparatuses, that are sensitive to how reality is constructed and that understand that writing is a way of “framing” reality. Messy texts are many sited, intertextual, always open ended and resistant to theoretical holism, but always committed to cultural criticism. (...) Such writing refuses to impose meaning on the reader; the text becomes a place where multiple interpretive experiences occur. (pp.224-225)

This is the value of ethnographic research. In constructing the narratives Denzin refers to, ethnography allows for a more nuanced understanding on the part of the author, but more importantly on the part of the reader. In terms of this thesis, ethnography has allowed me to bring multiple narratives around the experience of inclusive education together in a way that presents an appropriately complex answer to my research question.

Finding Red Rock

With the research questions identified, and a plan for examining those questions written and approved by my supervisors and the department research tutors, the first practical step towards carrying out the research involved identifying an appropriate case study school. Because the research

questions focused on 'inclusive education', a highly contested term which has been articulated in a variety of ways and practiced with even greater diversity, it was decided to seek a school that was being put forward as a model of inclusive education, because this would offer an opportunity to see the issues arising even in a program recognized as successful.

The process of finding such a school was by no means straightforward. First I contacted three internationally recognized academics working in inclusive education to ask them if they could point me towards a model inclusive school. Two of them told me that their own PhD students were in the schools they were familiar with, the third suggested that I call yet another academic who was working in a school district that was strongly promoting inclusive education. The fourth academic was very helpful and put me in touch with a vice principal at a school that was very much interested in my research and told me that if I was given approval by the school board, he didn't believe his principal would have a problem with having me at the school. At this point I began the process of applying for district approval (filling out three forms and finding out where to get an FBI background check). Just as I was about to send off the application I received an email from the vice principal saying that the principal had been promoted to deputy superintendent and the person who had been appointed to be the new principal had told him that he didn't want anyone researching the school while he was still settling into the job. After a fruitless call to the new principal, in which he assured me that it was 'nothing personal' but he didn't 'want the faculty to have to worry about a researcher while they were adjusting to new leadership', I began the search for a second time.

The second time around I decided to avoid any territoriality with other academics by contacting several inclusive schools networks. One wrote back saying that their focus was on sharing good practice among their

member schools and that they couldn't recommend a particular school as a 'model'. At the same time a second network contacted me to suggest I contact the director of special education services for a particular state's department of education. The director of special education told me that he could recommend two schools, a high school and a middle school. I told him that I was looking for a high school and he suggested I contact Mrs. Dawkins the head of special education² at Red Rock³.

Negotiating Access

Gaining access to an organization for research purposes is rarely a straightforward process. It often involves negotiations at multiple levels and with many agendas. Besides one's own agenda a researcher often needs to negotiate not only with organizations, but also with their governing bodies and the individuals within the organizations (Buchannon et al., 1988; Robson, 1999). Often the agreements forged are about blending the researcher's own agenda with those of the other parties involved, this can be as simple as agreeing to a background check or as difficult as setting parameters on the amount of time and number of people a researcher has access to (Hammersley & Atkinson (2005). Access to Red Rock was negotiated on many levels.

My first contact with the school was a phone call to Mrs. Dawkins, the head of the school's Assisted Education Department. During this conversation I introduced myself and the research. It was a conversation I would repeat many times with many people early in the project. I began by introducing myself as a PhD student from the Institute of Education at the University of London. I told her that my research focused on the culture of an inclusive school and that the state's director of special education had recommended

² He referred to the position as Director of Special Education. At Red Rock the job title was Head of the Assisted Education Department.

³ A pseudonym as are all the names attributed to all of the research respondents in this thesis.

Red Rock as ‘a model of a school working across the board to be more inclusive’. I then explained that it was my hope to spend the year at Red Rock, observing and interviewing teachers, students, and administrators. This was a very important moment in the research, not only because it led to me getting approval to carry out my research at the school but because it in many ways played a very large role in shaping (for good and bad) the access and cooperation I would receive at Red Rock. While I am not the first to remark upon the far ranging implications that access negotiation play in shaping a research experience (cf. Duke, 2002, Reeves 2010) I need to admit here that I do not believe I fully understood the extent to which these negotiations shaped my experiences in the school until I began to look back on them in writing my data chapters and this methodology.

When I spoke to Mrs. Dawkins that first time she told me that she would be ‘very interested’ but that before anything could proceed she would need in the very least the approval of the school’s principal Mr. Snider. When we spoke the following day she informed me that Mr. Snider had said that he had no objections to the project but that it would need school district⁴ approval, and of course would be subject to my passing an FBI criminal background check. I then went about meeting these requirements. I went to the local Police station to get fingerprinted for the FBI check. I waited a week for the results and submitted an application petitioning the school district to allow the project. Three days later I was informed that the school district had approved the project and a meeting was arranged with Mr. Snider, Mrs. Dawkins and Mr. Lurie (the Vice Principal) to discuss the practical arrangements required for the research.

Having Mrs. Dawkins as my introduction/introducer to the school served the research very well for the most part. Entering the school through a well

⁴ The US equivalent of a Local Education Authority

liked and well respected teacher minimized some of the distrust that other researchers have described when they enter organizations having been introduced by the management or administration team (Reeves, 2010; Shah, 2004). As Reeves (2010) has noted, the relationships of the person introducing a researcher to organization or institution usually plays a significant role in shaping a researcher's access as well as the research experience. I certainly benefitted from the respect and good standing Mrs. Dawkins enjoyed in the school. Mrs. Dawkins' support was not only a factor in my access within the school, but I was also informed by the superintendent of the school district that it played a significant role in gaining the approval of the school board to carry out the research.

You should really thank Mr. Snider [the Principal] and Mrs. Dawkins. Their support was really why we approved your project. They seem to think that it will be very useful to what Mrs. Dawkins is doing with her inclusion work.

(Mrs. Clarke, School District Superintendent)

This is not to say that negotiation of access ended with Mrs. Dawkins or that I encountered no suspicions in the school. One of the first students to approach me after the research began asked me if it was true that I was 'an expert from England here to fix the school'⁵. The only instance of suspicion that deeply troubled me as a researcher, and had an impact on my access at the school, came in my encounters with Mrs. Romo (another of the assisted education teachers). I believe, although I have no way of knowing for certain, that the issues with Mrs. Romo were tied to both the narrative I used to introduce my research to the school (that I was researching the culture of an inclusive school) as well as to the fact that Mrs. Dawkins was associated with my entry into the school.

⁵ My reply was that the English have no business telling anyone how to fix a school until they figure out how to fix their own, and then I asked him if the school needed fixing.

Mrs. Romo was the teacher for Red Rock's only self contained class⁶. When she wasn't with this group of students (two periods on certain days) she was one of the assisted education teachers allocated for team teaching.

According to a number of her colleagues, despite her work as a team teacher, she had expressed deep reservations about Red Rock's move toward inclusive education. Naturally for all of these reasons she was a person I was very much interested in observing and interviewing. She agreed to allow me to observe the English class she team taught with Mrs. Aldrych but would not agree to an interview or to allow me to observe the self contained class. When asked why she said: 'I simply don't feel comfortable with it'. I repeated the request once more later in the year, and received the same response. At the time I found it very distressing for several reasons; it was the only instance during the entire year in which someone refused to be interviewed or observed. Some people had placed conditions on their participation, such as the amount of time they could spare or the number of classes I could observe, but no one had refused. I also saw it as being potentially damaging to the research, and because it seemed as if she had some sort of personal animosity towards me and my research.

A few of her assisted education colleagues suggested that her 'distrust' (their characterization) of me may have something to do with me being there to look at the 'school culture of an inclusive school'. They said:

⁶ A group of seven students often referred to by teachers as 'the severe kids'. I was told that their disabilities varied but that all of them had communication impairments. Although one or two of the students participated in the occasional activity outside Mrs. Romo's classroom the majority of their contact with the rest of the school took place in the cafeteria. When Mrs. Romo and her assistant took them to the cafeteria, they sat at one table (always in the corner) and ate their lunch. No other students sat at the table or even approached it unless they were Mrs. Romo's students from other classes she taught. Other than assistance with eating there was very little engagement between students and teachers during this time and both looked rather bored.

She's (Mrs. Romo) very protective of that severe class. You're looking at inclusion and she probably... I mean she may see your work as a threat to them (the students) or to her position.

(Mrs. Bergey, Assisted Education teacher)

Others suggested it may have been related to my entry into the school through Mrs. Dawkins:

Tina's (Mrs. Romo) relationship with Brianna (Mrs. Dawkins) is a bit tense. They work together yeah but if Tina thinks you're working with Bree she won't trust you.

(Mrs. Aldrych, English teacher)

Nadai & Maeder (2008) and Reeves (2010) have noted that the negotiation of access is something that occurs at multiple levels. Reeves in particular, argues that gatekeepers at all levels can have a huge impact on the shape of research. I have no way of knowing how, or in what ways, observing the self contained class or interviewing Mrs. Romo would have changed this research but not doing so clearly had an effect on it for both good and bad. While I believe the research would have benefited from observing the class and hearing from Mrs. Romo, the experience was beneficial. It reminded me of something that I had probably heard in numerous methods classes; that access is negotiated *throughout* a research project (Duke, 2002; Cohen, et al., 2007). It was also a reminder that no one owed me cooperation.

For the most part, however, my introduction to the school made the negotiation of access easier. That the school had been selected because it had been recommended as a model of inclusive education was something that seemed to ingratiate the project to both staff and students. For many it seemed to affirm the pride they had in the school's inclusive identity.

The state said that?... It's nice to know that they take notice of those things like that. All we usually hear

about from them are things like test scores.
(Mr. McCoy, Math Teacher)

This is the guy from England. He's here cause we're like the best school. He wants to see how it should be done... Isn't that right?
(Neil, 17; 11th Grade – Introducing me to his friends)

This is not to imply that negotiations of access began and ended with my introduction. Access was something continuously being negotiated throughout my time at the school, including in the middle of observations and interviews. Everyone I interviewed was told before each interview that they had no obligations to answer any questions, that if at any time they felt uncomfortable, they could refuse to answer a question or end the interview all together. Both occurred on more than one occasion. In some cases the subject used the situation to clarify the terms of their participation:

I'll tell you anything you want about the school, but I'd rather not talk about myself if that's okay. It's not something I feel comfortable sharing. But as I said, anything about the school.
(Mrs. Bednarik, Economics teacher)

In the two instances where teachers chose to end their cooperation with the study it was after multiple interviews and observations, and both teachers expressed no ill feelings about the research but felt they could not afford to give it more time. This provided me with a practical lesson in research project management. It taught me how important it was not to fatigue the participants in the research with too frequent requests for interviews (observations seemed to be perceived as less onerous and therefore less problematic) and reminded me that my access was contingent on the school community's continued goodwill.

The final issue related to access that I would like to discuss here is tied to the researcher/subject relationship. Rapport with research subjects is

something that numerous ethnographers have taken great pride in (Lincoln, 2010; Springwood & King, 2001). It is not, however, an unproblematic part of negotiating and maintaining access to both a research environment and research subjects. As Peter Metcalf (1998) notes:

Ethnographers pride themselves on the personal relationships that they forge in fieldwork, as contrasted to the superficiality of surveys and questionnaires. There is nothing counterfeit in this; these relationships often provide much needed emotional support to the insecure researcher and create a genuine bond with his or her hosts or companions. This is the case whether the researcher is working close to home or on a different continent because (...) our methods inherently impose a certain vulnerability. (pp. 326-7)

I would like to try and problematize the act of engagement in such a relationship. I do this not because I wish do away with notions of rapport but because I feel that these are difficult, often highly tenuous relationships and as a researcher I found aspects of maintaining rapport to be highly problematic.

Rapport has often been cited as part of any good ethnographic research strategy (Angrosino, 2007; Basit; 2010; Lincoln, 2010). Over the past thirty years however a number of scholars have highlighted issues of rapport. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) raise concerns about the danger of 'over-rapport' which they argue can place severe constraints on a researcher's ability to collect useful data. Springwood & King (2001) have argued that the development of rapport must be tempered by criticality and must necessarily be subordinate to the researcher's political project.

The difficult question is, How do researchers, writers, feminists, activists, or critics ethnographically engage those folks who are implicated in the (re)production

of those very sites and practices they seek to excavate, deconstruct or reconstruct, and perhaps challenge and eliminate? Wherein is rapport? Mutual collaboration? (...) how does one collaborate with a signifying practice? Or a sociocultural landscape? Or a racist? A capitalist? A misogynist? Even when the folks whom an ethnographer seeks to engage are much more ambiguously located in terms of the prevailing, oblique relations of power, will they “collaborate” with the researcher’s social, political, and theoretical project?
(Springwood & King, 2001; p.410)

In relation to this project this meant keeping a certain distance from the students, teachers and administrators in the school. We were friendly to one another (there was no reason not to be) but I always tried to keep in mind my role there, I was not there as there as a friend or colleague, I was there to answer my research questions. Reading this paragraph the research process seems somewhat mercenary and perhaps it is to some extent. However, being at Red Rock I felt my greatest value was as a researcher (listening, observing and engaging the narratives I encountered). I believe that this was central to the continued negotiation of my position at the school as both insider *and* outsider. An insider in that I had access to almost every aspect of school life and my research was actively supported by the school; and an outsider in that I was neither a student nor faculty. Sherif (2001) describes this type of positioning as advantageous to research as well as being a difficult, sometimes uncomfortable, position for a researcher to maintain. She argues that it can provide opportunities for incredibly rich data but that it can also be a deeply isolating experience. This would certainly describe my experience at Red Rock. It was also a somewhat precarious position to maintain. As I have stated, access was something that needed to be negotiated throughout my time at Red Rock and my own positioning was in many ways central to that negotiation. I will discuss this positioning in

greater detail in the section reviewing the role of reflexivity in the research (below).

'Red Rock High School'

Red Rock High School is located in the western United States in a metropolitan area of approximately 130,000 people. Established in the early 1980's it is one of several high schools in the school district. The school has won numerous awards for its inclusive education program from both the state and number of disability charities. The program had been going on for five years at the time of the project and had been generated by particular teachers and supported by the school administration. The school served roughly⁷ 900 students between fifteen and eighteen years of age, across grades ten through twelve. According to the school⁸ the demographic breakdown was 95% Caucasian, 4% Hispanic, .6% Native American and .2% Asian. Students the school had identified as disabled comprised roughly 8%⁹ of the school population.

Participants

The data collection involved both group and individual interviews with students, faculty and administrators, as well as three parents who were involved in the PTA (Parent, Teachers Association'). Observation of classes, disciplinary actions, Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, extra-curricular activities and informal gatherings also provided a significant amount of data. Due to my interest in the school's inclusive

⁷ Enrollment numbers changed throughout the year this was the number I was given on the first day I was at the school.

⁸ I am using the school's terminology and numbers here. The categorizations were determined by federal data collection requirements. There are two reasons the numbers do not add up to 100%. First because .1% were listed as unclassified, meaning either the school had no demographic data on them or that they had chosen not to identify to the school. School officials indicated that part of the discrepancy may be the result of the rounding of numbers during their compilation.

⁹ This was slightly below the district numbers but according to both the school and the district this was a naturally occurring fluctuation and that in previous years the school had been above the district numbers.

education program, I consciously chose to begin the research focusing primarily on observing and interviewing students and teachers participating in the many team taught classes¹⁰. I applied some of the principals of grounded theorizing (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) by analyzing the data throughout the data the project, as particular narratives emerged from the data, I sought out other students, teachers and administrators as necessary to engage these narratives.

Reflexivity

The account of my personal history with disability found in the introduction to this thesis is part of a commitment I made very early in this project to make this research reflexive. While reflexivity has been espoused by many methodologists as an essential research quality control mechanism (Denzin, 2009; Siraj-Batchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 1997), it is a term that has had numerous meanings applied to it (eg. Abraham, 2008; Gewirtz & Cribb, 2006; Hammersley, 2008). The approach I aspired to take in this thesis was similar to one best articulated by Julie Allan & Roger Slee (2008):

We think we now understand reflexivity, through our engagement with the researchers, and with Foucault (...) to be a kind of practice of the self, an intense scrutiny of one's interests, motives, desires, becoming a reader of one's own self. (p.98)

I would love to say that I had a deep appreciation for the importance of this self scrutiny from the outset of this project, but I need to say that my appreciation of the value of reflexivity was something gained rather painfully, learned primarily from my own mistakes. There is one incident in particular, from early in the data collection, that showed me this value more than any textbook could have. It is not an account I offer out of pride, it is a

¹⁰ A detailed description of both the nature of the interviews and the mechanisms of observation utilized in carrying out the project is discussed in their own sections later in this chapter.

moment in the research I am embarrassed to own, but it was instructive and for that I am grateful.

I was interviewing Luisa a seventeen year old girl who was in the eleventh grade at Red Rock. We had been talking about the adjustment she had to deal with in coming to Red Rock from a school in Mexico. An interview earlier that same week had covered similar territory and the student in that instance had been extremely assertive in identifying his experience of that adjustment as 'racism'. This is the context with which I approached this interview with Luisa, and in doing so I made assumptions about her and her experience. As our discussion progressed I asked if she had experienced anything she would call racism 'from the white students' at the school. She looked a bit confused and said 'The white students?' and clearly indicated to me that she identified as white. I apologized for making assumptions about her identity and asked her if she would like to continue with the interview; she was very gracious in accepting and we continued talking for another ten minutes.

There were many lessons I learned from this experience. Firstly I got a powerful reminder that a concern for social justice does not make anyone immune to deploying an oppressive force like whiteness. This was the most painful thing for me to recognize. I realized that interrogating whiteness and ablism in the actions of others was not enough if I was ignorant of my own engagements of them. It also gave me an understanding of reflexivity that was much more in line with the definition offered by Allen and Slee above. I had built opportunities for reflection into the project, most significantly the personal research journal I wrote every afternoon when I returned from the school. But what I had not thought through until that point was just what it was that I needed to reflect on. To that point my reflection had focused almost exclusively on the data I was collecting, and where what I was

hearing should take the research. Other than a few self-critical moments ('I could have worded that question better' or 'why didn't I ask a follow up to that?') I rarely directed my reflection at my own actions, thoughts or assumptions. Learning to read myself critically became in many ways the most difficult aspect of the whole project. Critically engaging and understanding one's own subjectivities is rather counter intuitive. We are taught from an early age to trust our instincts and our perception of the world, in many ways this is something I needed to unlearn, to question everything about myself in this role of researcher. I learned to read myself, my motives, my understandings and my positioning. This is not to say that the rest of my experience at Red Rock was untroubled or that I have never since deployed whiteness, ableism, sexism or any other form of oppression. Reflexivity is no magic bullet that allows a researcher to transcend their positioning, privilege or biases. As Pillow (2003) points out this belief is a real danger for many researchers.

Prominent in much qualitative research is the idea that the researcher, through reflexivity, can transcend her own subjectivity and own cultural context in a way that releases her/him from the weight of (mis)representations. Self-reflexivity can perform a modernist seduction – promising release from your tension, voyeurism, ethnocentrism – a release from your discomfort with representation through a transcendent clarity. (p.186)

What makes it so seductive is that we want to believe that we have nothing to feel guilty about; that as researchers we have transcended the oppressions we are investigating. Reflexivity, however, does not enable transcendence. It merely helps the researcher locate themselves better within the research.

In practice this meant spending a great deal more time engaging with and reflecting on my own involvement in the project. Examining the roots of my

understandings of students, teachers and school processes to identify what came out of the data, what came from personal experience and what personal and cultural biases might be influencing me; how my own identity was influencing my understanding of others. This was not intended as an exercise in naval-gazing, the self-scrutiny was built around a belief that all research is highly subjective and that, if I wanted this project to be credible and valuable to other readers, my own subjectivities must be made transparent. For this reason, when I reviewed my interview tapes and field notes each night, I spent as much time focusing on my own involvement as I did on the data generated.

At the time I began this new regimen, I merely felt it would safeguard me. Hopefully prevent me from causing any harm to another Luisa. In hindsight I believe I came away with much more than this. This reflection gave me far greater comfort with my own identity. I have already written about the fact that this project played a major role in my coming to value my own disabled identity. Reflecting on my own identity issues as part of this project was invaluable to the continued negotiation of my access to both the school and the students. I realized this after an incident in which one student (Jimmy), who I knew well and had interviewed on several occasions (and who therefore knew me fairly well), outed me as being Jewish to another student (Doug) who identified as being a neo nazi & skinhead¹¹.

Jimmy: So you're a nazi?

Doug: (nodding) Uh huh.

Jimmy: So that means you hate Jews?

Doug: And Mexicans.

¹¹

He used both these terms interchangeably sometime also referring to himself as an Aryan.

Jimmy: But you talk to him (gestures to me) and he's Jewish.

Doug: (looks at me) Is that true?

GB: Yeah. I mean I can't say I'm very religious but, yeah.

Jimmy: Do you hate him?

Doug: No he's okay.

Jimmy: Why?

Doug: He's treated me straight, doesn't lie. Doesn't look at me like I'm going to blow the place up. He's ok.

I offer this scene as an example of my self-reflection paying off. Prior to my interview with Luisa I would reflect on the things I wanted to ask about in my interviews, but rarely would I contemplate what *I* might be asked, let alone how I would respond. However, in my post-Luisa routine this was something I thought about frequently. When I first came across Doug and asked him if I could interview him, I also began to contemplate how I would present my own identity to him. Shortly before our first interview, and after brief consultation with my PhD supervisor, I decided that while I would not out myself to Doug, neither would I hide my religion if the question arose. I believe in this instance my self-reading more than anything else was what enabled my continued access to Doug. We had many more discussions following this meeting including him seeking me out after he had been expelled from school to explain his version of what led to his expulsion.

The final benefit of reflexivity can be found in the samples of my reflection that have been written into this thesis. These moments of reflection, in this chapter and others, serve to foreground my subjectivities for the reader in a way that allows them to make informed judgments about the validity,

credibility and relevance of what they are reading. For this reason, I would now like to discuss my role as a researcher in the school.

Role of the researcher

One of my roles at Red Rock was as an observer. This is a role with a long tradition within ethnographic research (Androsino, 2007; Basit, 2010; Rock, 2007). In this role I was engaged in all areas of school life including observing classes, IEP meetings, faculty meetings and sporting events. I did not work for the school but I was a part of it for the year I was there. During this time I also filled another role conducting numerous confidential interviews with students, teachers and administrators of the school.

Only one teacher refused to be interviewed (Mrs. Romo who I have mentioned earlier in this chapter). She said that she did not feel comfortable participating. I asked again later in the year and received the same answer. When I asked if there was anything I could do to alleviate her concerns, she very firmly stated 'No!' which I took as a definitive answer and did not repeat the request. She did not, however, raise any objection to my observing the English class that she team taught with Mrs. Aldrych. My relationship with the rest of the faculty could be described as friendly. We did not socialize outside of the school but often, when I was not conducting interviews or observing the students at lunch, I would eat with various members of staff either in the staff room or outside the school. Having read numerous school ethnographies, I have to admit to being somewhat wary of the agendas of some of the faculty, and while many of them did have their own agendas within the school, I can't say any of them approached my research with a clear ulterior motive. In fact, if I had to characterize their engagement with this project, I would say they were very open and extremely cooperative. The school's administrators and clerical staff were

also friendly and supportive; agreeing to interviews, assisting me in locating particular teachers or students, and sending home permission slips with students so I could look at student files.

The students were also extremely supportive of my presence and not one refused an interview. If anything, they were *more* interested in what I was doing. They were far more likely to ask questions about the project and about myself. Their questions ranged from ‘Why did I choose Red Rock?’ to ‘Are you married?’ and ‘Do you believe in God?’. They were interested in what kind of things I wrote in my field notes and they all had suggestions about who I should interview and what it was important for me to know about the school.

As I mentioned earlier I spent a great deal of time reflecting on my positioning within the school. At first it was somewhat difficult for the students to understand that I was an adult at the school but that I did not work for the school. My understanding of this came through small incidents; a student would curse and the other students would turn to see if they were going to get in trouble; or a student’s angry denial when his friend mentioned to me that the two of them occasionally went for a smoke in the brush behind the school. I explained that I didn’t work for the school and that I had no power to get anyone in trouble, but that if I thought someone was doing something that was going to get them or someone else hurt I would have to report it, but that outside of something dangerous, everything they said or did would be kept confidential.

In examining my own experience I found that, with the odd exception, I very much liked both the staff and students. I believe they were genuine and honest in their engagement with the project. This is not to say I was not critical of them; a fact that will be more than evident in the chapters to

follow; but as critical as I may be of some of their actions, my critique is always framed by an understanding that there were no villains in this school. None of the teachers, students, or administrators were bad people. I also became aware in my time at the Red Rock that I shared an ideology and political project with many people at the school; a focus on inclusive education. We may have held different understandings about what it should look like, but the underlying social justice goal was just as strong for many of them as it was for me. And I believe this is an area where I often felt a common purpose with the people at Red Rock.

Observation

Teachers were very cooperative with my requests to observe their classes. Occasionally it was suggested that I wait until after an exam, but on whole I was made to feel very welcome. The Principal and Vice Principals made sure I was notified and invited to all staff meetings. The assisted education teachers asked parents to allow me to observe IEP meetings. To everyone I observed I explained that I did not work for the school and that everything I observed or heard would be strictly confidential unless it involved someone getting hurt. Given the focus of the project, the first classes I sought to observe were the team taught classes that served as the primary mechanism of the school's inclusive education initiative. As time passed and various narratives emerged I observed other classes as a means of tracking them further, e.g. following students and relationships to classes such as the English as a Second Language (ESL) class and the 'at risk' class. Often the decision about which class to observe would come from my reflection on the data as it was collected. Other times it was recommended that I observe a class by a student or teacher who thought I should see something particularly good or bad.

When I began an observation, I always started with a seating chart. The purpose of this was to keep track of where everyone in the room was (including me). Atkinson & Delamont (2005) have critiqued the lack of detailed accounts of the physical environment and location in ethnographic reportage, and this is likely a fair criticism of this thesis as well. An understanding of space and place was, however, always a part of my field notes and in this way always contributed to my analysis. It was something I found invaluable when reviewing my notes, aiding in both my recall and my reflection.

There are many techniques that have been put forward to aid in observation, including charting observations on graphs, delineating actions over particular time periods, keeping track of and classifying particular actions observed, and writing a narrative account of a researchers' observations (Angrosino, 2005; Basit, 2010; Chung & Choi, 2009). For this project I chose to write a narrative account of my observations in my field notes. I chose this technique because I felt it was the most appropriate for generating the type of data needed to answer my research questions. Observations continued throughout my year at the school. I rarely observed more than two or three classes in a day. I found that this limit made it easier to trace and keep track of the different issues I was encountering. Discussing this as a limit on my observation is, however, somewhat misleading, as everywhere I went in the school was a site for observation, and I took notes throughout the day.

I have specifically identified my role as that of an observer; not as a participant observer or non-participant observer. While some have tried to make distinctions between participant observer and nonparticipant observer, this bifurcation has been criticized for its inaccuracy. Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) make the case that an observer can neither be a full

participant nor can any observer truly be a non-participant. The presence of an observer always has an effect. Understanding this meant that any and all readings of my observation data, including but not limited to my field notes, needed to be read with this effect in mind. That is not to imply that observer affect can always be accounted for or understood, simply that one must attempt to (Salkind, 2010).

Interviewing

During the course of my year at Red Rock I conducted ninety-eight interviews with students, teachers, administrators and parents. They ranged between ten and sixty minutes in length.¹² All interviews were tape recorded. Participants were told in every instance that interviews were completely confidential and that I would be the only one that would have access to them. They were also told that they had the option to end the interview at any time for any reason. With two exceptions¹³ all interviews were carried out on school grounds, usually in whatever room was unoccupied for a given period. Interviews were semi-structured, meaning that I went to each interview with particular questions that I wanted to ask but I was open to following other tangents generated within the interview. This choice was made because it enabled me to keep focus on particular areas of interest while allowing me also to follow up threads generated by the informants. This flexibility was invaluable and there are sections throughout this thesis that would not exist without it.

¹² I would estimate the average interview at 30 to 40 minutes. I tried to limit the length of interviews so as to not fatigue the participants.

¹³ One took place after a student had been expelled from the school and was conducted at the student's place of employment. The other took place at a student's home when the student's mother, having heard from Mrs. Romo about my project and that she had kept me from interviewing the woman's son, in the self contained class, kindly offered to allow me to interview her son at home.

Interviews were in many ways the most collaborative aspect of this project. This was an unequal collaboration but it was a collaboration. This becomes evident when one recognizes the interview as a process of knowledge production (Holstein & Gubrium 1997; Youdell, 2006). Both questions and answers direct this production, and the questioning was not always one way. Almost all the informants had questions for me, and many suggested questions I should be asking and paths the research should take. The unequal nature of the collaboration showed itself in the fact that I was the one who decided which knowledge created in these interviews made it into this thesis.

Documentary and secondary data

In an effort to corroborate, contextualize and triangulate the data being generated by the observations and interviews, a great deal of documentary and secondary data was collected. These included, but were not limited to, IEP reports,¹⁴ school handbooks and policy documents, school-generated statistics, school district reports, local and school newspapers and the school yearbook. It was necessary to be cautious in using many of these documents because of confidentiality concerns, in particular the need to maintain the anonymity of the research site and participants.

Analysis

The themes and narratives presented in this thesis emerged from a thorough and continually repeated review of all the data generated. This was a process that began as the data were generated and continued throughout the compilation of this thesis. While some of the themes stayed the same from beginning to end, most grew more nuanced with each additional reading.

¹⁴ Access to these documents required a permission slip from a student's parents. Permission slips were sent out in both Spanish and English as appropriate. 42% were returned signed. The rest were not returned. One parent called to ask Mrs. Dawkins about the project, before she signed.

This painstaking process that involved carefully organizing pieces of data by theme, along with notes on each quote or observation and how it related to the theme, what it could mean, how it tied in with other data and findings. The major themes that emerged were ‘institutional ableism’, ‘transposition’, ‘the regulation of identity’ and ‘the social construction of disability’. Further reading of these threads led to the structural framework of the thesis. As it was roughly formulated early on this framework read:

1. What is done in their name (policy and disabled students).
2. What is done to them (pedagogy and disabled students).
3. What is done with and without them (nondisabled peers and disabled students)
4. What they make of it all (disabled students on inclusive education)

One thing that is immediately evident is the centrality of disabled students in this structuring in a way that was not manifested in the original research question. This is something that emerged very early in the analysis, while data was still being collected. In reading the data, even early in the project, it became very clear that Red Rock’s understanding of inclusive education was focused almost exclusively around disabled students and, therefore, disabled students were central to understanding the social constructions being employed there. It is very much out of this realization that another analytic choice was made; the decision to present chapter six using a series of case studies. To be clear, a case study is defined by Robson (2002) as:

A well established research strategy where the focus is on the case (which is interpreted very widely to include the study of an individual person, a group, a setting, an organization, etc.) in its own right and taking its context into account. Typically involves

multiple methods of data collection. Can include quantitative data although qualitative data are almost invariably collected. (p.178)

The power of the case study lies in the depth of analysis it enables (Simmons, 2009; Wyness, 2010; Yin, 2008). It is a powerful tool that makes it possible to present a more detailed and intimate picture of the issues introduced in the three preceding chapters. The chapter contains three individual case studies focusing on three disabled students. These students were all marginalized within the school, and placing them at the center of the narrative allows the reader a somewhat broader perspective.

Ethics

Throughout the conduct of this research I adhered to the ethical standards laid down by the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2011) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011). There are a number of ethical concerns that were at the foreground of my thinking throughout this project. First and foremost was confidentiality. It is for this reason that all names contained within this thesis (including the school's) are pseudonyms. In some instances this issue has forced me to leave out particular corroborating data for fear that information contained within it might be so particular as to identify the participant.

It was out of both ethical and legal concerns that I did not examine any individual student files without the signed permission of the student's parent. Permission forms were translated into both English and Spanish¹⁵ and sent home with students. When a signed permission slip was returned the school kept the original and I received a photocopy.

¹⁵ I was told by the school that this would cover all of the parents of students I was requesting even if these weren't the first language of all of them.

Another ethical concern, and one that was not as easy to resolve, involves the concerns raised by numerous disability studies scholars about the ableism embedded within a great deal of the research about disability. As discussed in the literature review, the theoretical development of disability has been largely dominated by the medical and related sciences. In relation to research, this dominance has translated into a large body of positivistic research that presumes a deficit understanding of disability (Moore, *et al*, 1998; Priestley, 1997; Rioux, 1994). Mike Oliver (1996) suggests that a new model is needed for disability research; one that recognises the socially created nature of disability and incorporates the lived experiences of being disabled. What has emerged out of these concerns is what has been called emancipatory research (Oliver, 1992). As Barnes and Mercer (1997) explain it:

emancipatory research in the disability context should be enabling not disabling. It must be 'reflexive' and self-critical lest a new orthodoxy is established which turns 'doing disability research' into a technical routine. Disability research must not deteriorate into propaganda: it must be politically committed but rigorous. (p.7)

I have already written (above) about the emphasis I placed on critical self reflection. A great deal of this has been focused on not only my role as a disabled researcher but also on my role as researcher engaged in research with disabled participants. This was important for me in helping me to recognize that being a disabled researcher did not preclude me from deploying ableism against others, that my only means of preventing such an act was vigilant self scrutiny. I cannot make any claims as to whether or not this thesis is emancipator or even if research can be emancipatory. I do believe I have adopted a critical stance that hopes to advance social justice issues (especially around disability, race, class and gender).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the processes by which this research was carried out. Using my research questions to shape how I approached the project allowed me ultimately to illicit the type of information I was hoping to generate. I need to make it clear that I do not mean that I was trying to produce any particular results but rather I am referring to the quality of data I was trying to get out of the project. It was with this in mind that I chose to do an ethnographic study. Ethnography enables the production of rich multilayered data that allow for a nuanced analysis. In addition to the qualitative research methods I was employing, such as interviewing and observation, the project demanded constant thorough and critical self reflection. The nature and quality of this reflection as well an understanding of strength and value of the various data sources will be evident throughout the analysis chapters.

3

The Song Remains the Same: Institutional Ablism, Transposition and IDEA

Introduction

We must recognise and acknowledge (at least to ourselves) that our actions are not likely to lead to transcendent change and, despite our best efforts, may be of more help to the system we despise than to the victims of that system that we are trying to help.
(Bell 2004, 192)

This statement by Derrick Bell is not intended to remove all hope of progress in the fight against discrimination. Bell is taking note of the historic lessons of the civil rights movement; a history in which all victories or progress have been almost immediately undermined through systemic mechanisms that serve to maintain existing discrimination. It is meant to take note of the power of institutional racism to create racist outcomes out of even seemingly strong stands against racism, such as the ruling in *Brown v. the Board of Education*¹. As Bell (1992, 92) notes, ‘Understanding the true nature of racism would equip us to weather its myriad harms’.

The intersection of disability and race as a means of discrimination in the United States has a long history dating back to the beginnings of the

¹ *Brown v. the Board of Education* is the landmark civil rights case widely credited as ending formally segregated education in the United States. A detailed history of the case can be found in Kluger (2011).

eugenics movement (Reid and Knight, 2006; Selden, 1999; Valencia, 1997). It is a juncture that is most prominent today in the disproportionate representation of minority² students in special education.

The disproportionate representation of minority students in special education is as clear an example of a racist outcome as one can find. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) formally recognises such disproportionate representation as a problem in special education.

- (A) Greater efforts are needed to prevent the intensification of problems connected with mislabeling and high dropout rates among minority children with disabilities.
- (B) More minority children continue to be served in special education than would be expected from the percentage of minority students in the general school population.
- (C) African-American children are identified as having mental retardation and emotional disturbance at rates greater than their White counterparts.
- (D) In the 1998–1999 school year, African-American children represented just 14.8 percent of the population aged 6 through 21, but comprised 20.2 percent of all children with disabilities.
- (E) Studies have found that schools with predominately White students and teachers have placed disproportionately high numbers of their

² This is IDEA's terminology rather than my own. It is used consistently throughout the law. The law refers to minority groups, minority children, children with disabilities from minority backgrounds, and racial and ethnic groups. All of these terms appear to be used interchangeably within the law. There is little recognition that disproportionate representation affects some minority groups and not others, although African Americans are mentioned as one group significantly impacted by disproportionality. There is no mention of the historical context of racism in public education that has contributed to this. It is not even asserted that disproportionality is not a natural result of individual deficiency. The law merely asserts that disproportionality is something that needs to be queried to determine causality.

minority students into special education.
(P.L. 108-446, 2004, p.5)³

The disproportionate representation of minority students in special education is not a new issue. Overrepresentation was addressed in the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA and has been identified as an issue special education for almost 40 years (Artiles et al., 2003; Losen and Orfield, 2002; Tomlinson, 1981,1982, 1985, 2004).

This chapter focuses on the way the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) and a combination of institutional ableism and racism are used to discriminate against students – a violation of the stated intent of the law. First, I define institutional ableism. Then, I deconstruct the meanings and understandings of disability contained within US case law, public law, and policy interpretations that have been built around IDEA. I illustrate how the very components of the law that prohibit discrimination against disabled and minority students, in fact, actively contribute to and maintain existing discrimination. Further, I demonstrate that this is a mechanism for transposing societally and legally acceptable ableist outcomes for less acceptable racist goals. Lastly, I will use two concepts developed by critical race theorists, ‘retrenchment’ and ‘interest convergence’, to offer an explanation of why this has occurred in the way it has.

Institutional Ableism

I believe that the body of scholarly work to be discussed in this section collectively establishes the existence of what I refer to as ‘institutional ableism’. Specifically, I contend that discriminatory structures and practices, as well as uninterrogated beliefs about disability that are deeply ingrained

³

P.L. 108-446 (2004) The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, p. 5.

within educational systems, subvert even the most well-intentioned policies by maintaining the substantive oppression of existing hierarchies.

I would argue that scholars within both disability studies and inclusive education – without coining the term ‘institutional ableism’ – have begun over the last thirty-one years to make an argument for the existence of such a mechanism in relation to disability. Vic Finkelstein (1980), Mike Oliver (1981, 1983) and Irving Kenneth Zola (1981, 1982), for example, were among the first to apply an understanding of a social model of disability to larger societal practices and structures, illuminating a multitude of the barriers encountered by disabled people in US and British society.

In 1981 and 1982, Sally Tomlinson looked at the materialist structures and policies that artificially constructed West Indian students in England as educationally subnormal. Tomlinson’s *Educational subnormality: A study in decision-making* and *A Sociology of Special Education* are arguably the first major disability studies in education texts and were also two of the first books to challenge the belief that disabled students’ inequitable position within the education system is the result of their individual and inherent deficits.

Barton (1986) examined the underlying politics and unquestioned beliefs that shaped educational policies and practices in England, arguing that they served as a built-in obstruction to more traditional educational pathways – a ‘safety valve for the mainstream system’ (283). This was an early development within a much larger body of work (e.g., Barton 1988, 1996, 2003, 2005; Barton and Slee, 1999; Barton & Tomlinson, 1984) that focused upon identifying intended and unintended discrimination and oppression built into educational systems. This task has been furthered by a number of researchers, most notably Roger Slee (1993, 1996, 1999a; 2011)

and Gillian Fulcher (1999). Tomlinson (Forthcoming) has shown that much of this is perpetuated by the need of what she calls the SEN industry to maintain and justify its own existence. Mel Ainscow (1989) and Nirmala Erevelles (2005) both charted the ways in which discrimination is built into the curriculum. This was an important step as, until this point, the inclusive education/integration/mainstreaming⁴ debate had largely focused on the issue of location as the main institutional barrier to disabled people accessing education. Since this time, research has begun to elaborate on the discriminatory effects of pedagogy (Allan, 1999a, Benjamin, 2002; Vlachou, 1997), education reform (Bowe, et al., 1992; Peters, 2002; Slee, 1993), management practices (Armstrong, 1998; Nutbrown, 1998), school funding practices (Marsh, 1998), and teacher education (Barton 2003; Valle & Connor, 2010). Collectively, this body of work establishes the existence of what I refer to as ‘institutional ableism’: that is, *the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their disability. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behavior that amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and ableist stereotyping which disadvantage disabled people.*⁵ This is the idea that there are discriminatory structures and practices and uninterrogated beliefs about disability deeply ingrained within societal systems and institutions that subvert even the most well intentioned policies and maintain the substantive oppression of existing hierarchies.

⁴ Different writers have used these terms in a variety of ways. At times, they have been used interchangeably; at other times, they have been argued as distinct from one another. While throughout this thesis, as has been discussed in my literature review, I focus on inclusive education, and use it as distinct from mainstreaming and integration, in this sentence I am highlighting the blurring of the terms within the overarching debate.

⁵ I have closely adapted this definition, from the definition of institutional racism offered by the Macpherson report on the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence in the United Kingdom.

Critical Race Theory, deconstruction, and disability studies

In 1967, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton first posited that racism operated in more complex and covert ways than just explicit and deliberate hatred and discrimination. Over the years, a number of scholars have refined the concept of institutional racism. In 1999, the United Kingdom's official inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the subsequent police investigation⁶ defined the phrase as:

The collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. (Macpherson 1999, 28)⁷

The importance of the concept of institutional racism lies not only in its recognition that racism is more than just individual prejudice, but also in its understanding that individual intent is irrelevant when seeking to critically identify racist structures and actions. Even if an institution attempts to eradicate racist outcomes, if it does not succeed it may still be institutionally racist.

In reaction to the widespread recognition of institutional racism, many scholars of race and racism turned to the burgeoning field of 'Critical Race Theory' as a means of interrogating this phenomenon (Gillborn, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Critical race theorists deconstruct meanings and

⁶ The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry was the official investigation into the mishandling of the investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, a young black man who was murdered by a gang of white youths while waiting for a bus in London. The Inquiry's report led to the first official recognition of the existence of institutional racism by the UK government. For more information, see Macpherson, 1999.

⁷ It should be noted that the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry's definition of institutional racism has been criticised by some as too narrow a definition. John Solomos (1999, 3) has argued that 'the report is in many ways not concerned with defining the meaning of institutionalised racism in any depth'.

understandings of race embedded within both case and common law to better understand how those meanings and understandings re/create existing inequities (Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker and Stovall, 2004).

One of the ways that critical race theory can serve this end is to generate informed perspectives designed to describe, analyze and challenge racist policy and practice in educational institutions. The connection between critical race theory and education would entail linking teaching and research to general practical knowledge about institutional forces that have a disparate impact on racial minority communities. (Parker and Stovall, 2004; p.174)

Critical Race Theory formalises the application of a number of practices and uses them to place understandings of race at the centre of the analysis of particular policies (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker and Stovall, 2004). None of these practices are exclusive to critical race theory; in fact, all are used extensively throughout social science research. Narrative/counter-narrative has been employed in relation to class, race, and gender by the likes of Michael Apple (1999), Carl Gutierrez-Jones (2001) and bell hooks (2000). Deconstruction has been used by a range of theorists and researchers, from philosophers such as Jacques Derrida (1982, 1989) to feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous (1986).

Disability study scholars have also begun to utilise these same means to place disability at the centre of a number of areas of theory and research. The work of Jenny Morris (1989,1996) and Carol Thomas (1999) uses the narratives of disabled women to gain an understanding of their experiences of both disability and oppression. Marian Corker (1999) used deconstruction as a way of understanding competing discourses within disability studies, while Felicity Armstrong (2003) deconstructs the meanings and

understandings of ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ to gain new insight into the positioning and experience of disabled people within the English and French educational systems. It has been argued that such deconstructive strategies allow for an understanding in which both macro and micro level perspectives become clear.

Deconstructing IDEA

I would like to deconstruct the ways in which the meanings of disability embedded within IDEA 2004 actively construct disabled students’ marginalised positioning within schools. Derrida expands upon both the analytical and the transformative power of deconstruction:

When I first met, I won’t say ‘deconstructive architecture’ but the deconstructive discourse on architecture, I was rather puzzled and suspicious. I thought at first that this was an analogy, a displaced discourse, and something more analogical than rigorous. And then ... I realised that on the contrary the most efficient way of putting deconstruction to work was by going through art and architecture. As you know, deconstruction is not simply a matter of discourse or a matter of displacing the semantic content of the discourse, its conceptual structure or whatever. Deconstruction goes through certain social and political structures, meeting with resistance and displacing institutions as it does so. I think that in these forms of art and in any architecture, to deconstruct traditional sanctions – theoretical, philosophical, cultural – effectively you have to displace ... I would say ‘solid’ structures, not only in the sense of material structures but ‘solid’ in the sense of cultural, pedagogical, political, economic structures. (Derrida 1989 quoted in Armstrong 2003, 75–76)

While Derrida is speaking in relation to his own examination of art and architecture, I apply deconstruction to the structures, institutions,

mechanisms, and discourses built around IDEA. I have no delusions of this process displacing structures, as Derrida suggests, but hope that some understandings and perceptions of IDEA will be troubled; this may be a necessary first step in the wider process of critical reform.

Since its inception, IDEA has been portrayed as an anti-discrimination law in the same vein as the civil rights laws of the 1960s:

For far too long children with disabilities were closed out of those kind of opportunities, trapped in a system without guideposts, influenced by stereotypes, dominated by assumptions that people like Josh couldn't take the course that he just enumerated. In 1975 Congress began to change that when the IDEA was enacted. It has meant the right to receive an education that all children deserve. It has given children who never would and never have had it, the right to sit in the same classrooms, to learn the same skills, to dream the same dreams as their fellow Americans. And for students who sat next to them in those classrooms, it has also given them a chance to learn a little something. To get rid of the baggage of ignorance and damaging stereotypes, and to begin to understand that what we have in common is far more important than what divides us.

(President Bill Clinton, 4 June 1997,(1999) on the re-authorisation of IDEA, p.700)

IDEA may be about civil rights, but can it be called anti-discriminatory? It is an improvement on the non-educational institutions and asylums it was designed to replace, but being an improvement on institutionalisation is hardly a grandiose claim. What does it do, and how does it do it?

The 1975 passage of IDEA was a case of the government trying to catch up with the law. In 1971 and 1972, US district courts agreed to two consent decrees which declared that in states guaranteeing a right to education, denying disabled students an education amounted to a violation of the equal

protection clause of the 14th amendment. IDEA formalised the right to education that the courts had recognised, and attempted to fund it (Colker, 2009; Gilhool, 1997; Rothstein, 2000).

IDEA is a funding bill. States accepting money under it are required to adhere to certain principles. There were five principles in the original act⁸:

(1) All children with disabilities, regardless of the nature of their disability, have a right to and must be provided with a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

(2) All children with disabilities will have a right to and must receive an Individual Education Program (IEP) that is tailored to address the child's unique learning needs.

(3) Children with disabilities must be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

(4) Students with disabilities, must have access to all areas of school participation.

(5) Children with disabilities and their families are guaranteed rights with respect to non discriminatory testing, confidentiality and due process⁹.

For the purposes of this thesis I have chosen to focus only on the principle of least restrictive environment (LRE) as a significant factor in the institutional ableism within the US public school system. This is not to imply that the other requirements are not deeply involved in embedding ableist discrimination within the law. In chapter six of this thesis I will

⁸ Other requirements have been added in the subsequent re-authorisations (including two significant additions in the 2004 act that focus on attorney fees and the reduction of paperwork).

⁹ P.L. 94-142 (1975). The Education for all Handicapped Children Act.

discuss the ways in which institutional ableism operates within the structures and requirements of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and in other work I have explored embedded within IDEA's due process requirements (Beratan, 2006). The LRE provision, however, is very much the cornerstone of the law; it is the main reason that IDEA is seen as civil rights legislation and, as I will demonstrate in the next section, it plays a dominant role in enabling discrimination.

The least restrictive environment and its qualifiers

While IDEA does not specifically mention the concept of inclusive education, the principle of LRE has been taken by many to imply it. As stated in the 2004 authorisation, LRE requires:

(5) LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

(A) In general - To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (P.L. 108-446, 2004, p.118)

The view that IDEA encourages or promotes inclusive education originates in this definition of LRE, which implies preference for educating disabled students in the same environment as nondisabled students. While much of the literature has focused on the meaning and interpretation of 'least restrictive environment' (e.g., Daugherty, 2001; Lipton 1997), the words that dominate the clause are 'to the maximum extent appropriate'. The word 'appropriate' serves as a qualifier that overshadows the rest of the section.

The law itself does not say what is appropriate. As Henderson (1993, 94) has pointed out:

This term is much broader than mainstreaming in that the LRE for a student with a profound or multiple disability might be a self-contained special class located in a neighborhood elementary or secondary school. The key here is the term ‘appropriate’, which requires an individually designed educational program (IEP) based on the child’s specific educational needs. If the IEP can only deliver the needed resources by means of special classes staffed by special educator and related service personnel ... then that becomes the LRE for that child.

The importance of the word ‘appropriate’ comes in the implication that what the law refers to as ‘the regular educational environment’ is not appropriate to the same level for all children. This is important, for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the assimilationist intent implicit within IDEA. In other words, the onus is on disabled students who, given the necessary ‘supplementary aids and services’, must find a way to fit into ‘the regular educational environment’. This is by no means exclusive to IDEA. Slee (1999b) has described the same phenomenon within the Australian context:

Predominantly unchanged practices are described in new terms. Inclusion is practiced by the same people who presided over exclusion. The aim is to have ‘othered’ children fit schools we provide with a minimum of fuss and without disrupting the institutional equilibrium. This is assimilation.
(p.127)

One of the problems with an assimilationist approach is that it establishes an instant hierarchy between those being assimilated (in this case, disabled students) and those students for whom the system was designed. This hierarchy is reflected in a reading of the least restrictive environment clause, which ends with a statement to the effect that if a disabled student cannot

reasonably fit into the existing system, then it is acceptable to segregate them. There are a number of things built into IDEA that serve to complement and augment this hierarchy. Most notable is the law's definition of disability:

(B) CHILD AGED 3 THROUGH 9.

The term 'child with a disability' for a child aged 3 through 9 (or any subset of that age range, including ages 3 through 5), may, at the discretion of the State and the local educational agency, include a child – (i) experiencing developmental delays, as defined by the State and as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures, in 1 or more of the following areas: physical development; cognitive development; communication development; social or emotional development; or adaptive development; and (ii) who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

(P.L. 108–446, 2004, pp. 6–7)

This definition operates wholly from within a deficit model understanding of disability. The conflation of impairment and disability¹⁰ is something that has long been criticised within both disability studies and disability politics (Corbett, 1996; Oliver, 1990; UPIAS, 1976). Proponents of the social model of disability argue that by not distinguishing between impairment and disability, disabled people become constructed as problematic. As I noted in chapter one deficit understandings do not account for or recognise disability as socially constructed; rather, disability is conceptualised as an internal deficit located solely within the individual (Altman, 2001; Oliver, 1990, 2004).

¹⁰ As I noted in chapter one the distinction between disability and impairment has emerged largely out of the disability rights movement and the field of disability studies (for more, see Barnes 1996; Finkelstein 2004; Oliver 1990; UPIAS 1976).

A number of social model theorists argue that the act of problematising individuals amounts to a form of oppression (Abberly, 1996; Swain, et al, 2003; Oliver, 2004). In adopting deficit model understandings of disability, institutions and laws privilege this oppression (Oliver, 1990). Embedded within IDEA is a conception of disabled people as ‘less than’ in comparison to non-disabled people, and therefore not always worthy of equal treatment under the law. Looking again at the phrase ‘to the maximum extent appropriate’, it becomes clear that its intended interpretation is to the maximum extent appropriate to an individual’s deficit. This is one example of how IDEA establishes a form of ableism into the educational system, regardless of the intent of the individuals within that system.

Case law interpreting the LRE clause has been inconsistent (Colker, 2009; Henderson, 1993; Rothstein, 2000). While almost all of the LRE cases have determined that the law implies that the regular educational environment is not always the least restrictive environment, there have been significant disagreements in the courts over how and on what basis this is to be determined. Case law interpretation is important because it is the courts interpretation of the meaning of IDEA from which schools and school districts must take their cue. Just as the actual wording of IDEA has constructed ableist institutions, so has the judicial interpretation of IDEA.

In *Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Amy Rowley*, the Supreme Court, focusing upon the free appropriate public education requirement (FAPE), expounded on what they saw as the proper interpretation of the term ‘appropriate’. Justice Rehnquist wrote on behalf of the majority:

Thus if personalized instruction is being provided with sufficient supportive services to permit the

child to benefit from the instruction, and the other items on the definitional checklist are satisfied, the child is receiving a 'free appropriate public education' as defined by the Act.

(Board of Education of Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley, 458 U.S. 176, 1982)

The ruling establishes the bare minimal standard of educational benefit as the final arbiter of appropriateness. Rehnquist argues that this interpretation stems directly from legislative intent:

By passing the act, Congress sought primarily to make public education available to handicapped children. But in seeking to provide such access to public education, Congress did not impose upon the states any greater substantive educational standard than would be necessary to make such access meaningful. Indeed Congress expressly 'recognized that in many instances the process of providing special education and related services to handicapped children is not guaranteed to produce any particular outcome.' ... Thus the intent of the act was more to open the door of public education to handicapped children on appropriate terms than to guarantee any particular level of education once inside. (Ibid)

It is important to remember that Supreme Court rulings are the law of the land regarding how any particular law is to be interpreted. This ruling says that states need only meet a standard of, 'educational benefit' for a program to be deemed appropriate. The ruling also reinforces a hierarchy between disabled and non-disabled students whose education is held to a higher standard, particularly in light of recent standards-based reforms such as No Child Left Behind¹¹. While the ruling does not prohibit states from holding a higher standard, very few states have attempted to do so.

¹¹ No Child Left Behind is the law passed by the Bush administration in 2001. It is based on the belief that a standardised testing regime will hold schools accountable and thus lead to an improved education system. It was been widely criticised, not only for its rationale (Hursh, 2005; Darling-Hammond,

It is worth noting that the dissenting opinion, offered by Justice White, considered the majority's opinion akin to unequal treatment. In fact, Justice White disputed Rehnquist's interpretation of legislative intent:

If there are limits not evident from the face of the statute on what may be considered an 'appropriate education', they must be found in the purpose of the statute or its legislative history. The act itself announces that it will provide a 'full educational opportunity to all handicapped children'. ... This goal is repeated throughout the legislative history in statements too frequent to be 'passing references and isolated phrases'... These statements elucidate the meaning of 'appropriate'. According to the senate report for example the Act does 'guarantee that handicapped children are provided equal educational opportunity'. ... Indeed, at times the purpose of the act was described as tailoring each handicapped child's educational plan to enable the child 'to achieve his or her maximum potential'.

(Ibid)

If Justice White's assertion is believed¹², it becomes clear that the majority opinion embeds yet another layer of ableism within IDEA by allowing schools to provide lesser standards of education for disabled students than for non-disabled students.

Other cases have affirmed the interpretation that the regular education environment is not always appropriate (e.g., *Walter v. Roncker* 1983; *Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education*, 5th Cir. 1989), while still other cases have established who gets to determine what is appropriate. For example, in *Hartman v. Loudon County Board of Education*, the 4th Circuit Court of

2004), but also for discriminating against many groups of students (Fusarelli, 2004; Giroux and Schmidt, 2004).

¹² White's opinion was joined by Justices Brennan and Marshall. The ... within the quote represents citations from the congressional record, which White uses far more extensively than Rehnquist in making the case for legislative intent.

appeals found that responsibility for determining the appropriate placement belonged to the school's IEP team rather than to the courts. The significance of this is in its recognition of the privileging that IDEA gives to professional expertise. It is noteworthy that 'expertise' does not apply to the entire IEP team; only the professionals on the team who have the 'right to apply their professional judgement', not the students or their family members.

This privileging was formalised even further in *Schaffer v. Weast* (2005), when the court determined that if a student's family wishes to challenge an IEP team's decision the burden of proof lies with the family; the school's determination is presumed to be correct until proven otherwise. This creates yet another hierarchy, in which professional expertise is officially valued more highly than the knowledge, insights and expertise of disabled students and their parents. A large body of work within disability studies has examined the oppressive nature of this hierarchy of expertise (Biklen, 1992; Corbett, 1996; Tomlinson, Forthcoming). For many of these professionals, their professional identity is strongly tied to the deficit understandings of disability discussed earlier (Reiser, and Mason, 1995; Tomlinson, Forthcoming).

It is clear that ableist understandings and mechanisms are firmly entrenched within IDEA. I have focused only on one clause within the law; however, I would suggest that ableism runs throughout IDEA. Its level of involvement in the LRE clause alone should raise alarms for anyone concerned with equity. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the interplay between institutional ableism and institutional racism in IDEA's attempts to address racial disproportionality in special education.

Disproportionality and the transposition of racist outcomes

Institutional ableism alone is insufficient to understand the disproportionate identification of minority students under IDEA. An understanding of institutionalised racism must also be brought into the picture. The importance of the concept of institutional racism lies not only in its recognition that racism is more than just individual prejudice, but also in the understanding that the material outcome of actions and processes is the crucial factor in determining the existence of inequity, individual intent is irrelevant. Even if an institution attempts to eradicate racist outcomes, if it does not succeed, then it may still be operating in an institutionally racist fashion.

In relation to disproportionality, institutional ableism (as will be discussed shortly) is very much a factor; however, it is impossible to take institutional racism out of the equation. It is difficult to find a more clearly racist outcome than the disproportionate segregation of minority students from general education. If ableism alone were involved, one could expect to find similar levels of representation across racial and ethnic groups. The combination of institutional ableism and institutional racism serves to make both racism and ableism stronger than they would be on their own. In effect, society's willingness to perceive discrimination against disabled people as being the result of individual deficiencies is used to make racism more palatable. As Reid and Knight (2006) point out:

the historical construction of difference makes institutionalized racism, classism, and sexism seem natural in their conflation with disability, defined as oppression based on ableism...

Much of the focus on institutional racism in education has been around the resegregation of public schools through a variety of covert mechanisms, including white flight (Johnson and Shapiro, 2003), testing (Brown et al., 2003; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000), 'color-blind' policies (Bonilla-Silva,

2010) and pedagogy (Gillborn, 1990). However, the use of ableist segregation of special education allows for a legal, overt, and systematised means of achieving the same end. IDEA, legally and overtly, achieves the racially segregated system that the courts attempted to do away with in the *Brown* decision.

The 2004 incarnation of IDEA expands upon the attempts of earlier versions to address disproportionality. Whereas the 1997 version of IDEA stopped at requiring local education agencies (LEAs) to report, review and, if necessary, revise policies, practices and procedures aimed at preventing the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education, the 2004 version of IDEA mandates LEAs:

...to reserve the maximum amount of funds under section 613(f) to provide comprehensive coordinated early intervening services to serve children in the local educational agency, particularly children in those groups that were significantly overidentified under paragraph(1).
(P.L. 108-446, p. 94)

This *full-funding trigger*, located in section 618d (B) of IDEA, is written in a way to suggest that it is intended to give more funds to LEAs for the purpose of fighting existing disproportionality. Although there is no reason to question this intention, an understanding of both institutional ableism and racism means that intentions are irrelevant and there is a need to focus on outcomes. While it is too soon to determine the consequences of this clause, there is enough evidence to speculate upon possibilities.

Anything that triggers maximum funding for a school or local education agency is an incentive. In this case, rather than discouraging the disproportionate identification of minority students as disabled, the clause serves as a bounty that actively encourages or incentivizes overidentification

as a means to higher funding levels. Greene and Forster (2002, 7) found that bounty funding¹³ systems in special education led to far greater growth in special education than lump sum funding systems (no incentives):

The average special education enrollment rate for states that had lump-sum systems at any time during the study period grew from 11.1% in the 1991–92 school year to 12.4% in the 2000–01 school year, an increase of 1.3 percentage points. In the same period, the average special education enrollment rate for states that maintained bounty systems for the entire study period grew from 10.5% to 12.8%, an increase of 2.3 percentage points.

Although Greene and Forster (2002) focused upon the effects of bounty systems on the identification of special education students, there is no reason to suggest that a bounty targeting minority students would have a different outcome.

It could be argued that any incentive would be nullified by additional costs related to a student being identified as needing special education services. Greene and Forster (2002) have also answered this claim by pointing out that there is actually a relative benefit tied to increased identification of students:

Some services that a school would have provided to a particular child no matter what can be redefined as special education services if the child is placed in special education; these services are not truly special education costs because they would have been provided anyway. For example, if a school provides extra reading help to students who are falling behind in reading, the school must bear that cost itself. But if the same school redefines those students as learning disabled rather than slow readers, state and federal

¹³ Bounty funding in this context refers to any system of funding that attaches to particular students. Greene and Forster (2002) for example were comparing the growth in special education systems which used funding mechanisms that apportioned funding in lump sums with those that distributed funding attaching a monetary figure to each disabled student (a bounty).

government will help pick up the tab for those services. This is financially advantageous for the school because it brings in new state and federal funding to cover 'costs' that the school would have had to pay for anyway. Furthermore, there are many fixed costs associated with special education that do not increase with every new child. For example, if a school hires a full-time special education reading teacher, it will pay the same cost whether that teacher handles three students a day or ten. However, the school will collect a lot more money for teaching ten special education students than it would for teaching three. (p.4)

The funding mechanisms in terms of both funding received and relative benefits becomes an institutionalised mechanism of inequity. Is this a form of institutional ableism or institutional racism? It is both. In this instance, the two are indistinguishable. Neither offers sufficient explanation on its own. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989) argues in her analysis of the intersections of race and gender that focusing on either construction as discrete from the other

...creates a distorted analysis of racism and sexism because the operative conceptions of race and sex become grounded in experiences that actually represent only a subset of a much more complex phenomenon.
(p.140)

Disability and race are similarly conjoined in IDEA's disproportionality clause. It is ableist, in that students' opportunities and experiences are being limited by mechanisms and structures built around constructions of disability; but it is also institutionally racist in the way it targets students by their membership in racial and ethnic minority groups. The racist outcomes could not be achieved without the ableist mechanisms. Returning to a focus on outcomes, racism would seem to be the primary operative. I put forward an argument similar to that identified in ongoing research by D. Kim Reid

and Michelle G. Knight (2006), that an ableist mechanism (in this case IDEA's full-funding trigger) has been *transposed* to create the racist outcome of disproportionate representation of minority students in Special Education.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2005) defines the word 'transpose' as: '*to write or perform (a musical composition) in a different key*' (p. 761); the main effect of this being that, while the sound changes, the song remains the same. In this case, racism was the original key, and it was replaced by the form of discrimination that was the least assailable: the legally accepted ableism of IDEA. The deficiency changes, but the inequality remains the same.

The accessibility of ableism as a means of maintaining racial discrimination is not merely a debatable matter of perception, but a legal distinction mandated by the supreme court. In *City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Centre, Inc.* (473 US 432, 1985) the United States Supreme Court held that mental retardation and other types of disability are not a suspect class and therefore are not entitled to a 'strict' or even 'heightened' scrutiny standard of judicial review¹⁴ under the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment; there must only be a rational basis for exclusion to occur. What this means is that it is legal to discriminate against disabled people, as long as there is a rational basis for the discrimination (Blanck et al., 2009; Colker, 2007; Minow, 1990). When this is compared with racial discrimination, which is held to a strict scrutiny standard, it is clear that

¹⁴ These are the standards established by the supreme court guiding judicial review of the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment. Strict scrutiny is the most rigorous standard for evaluating a policy under the clause, to pass strict scrutiny it must be shown that there is compelling state interest in the policy and that the policy has been constructed as narrowly as possible to achieve this interest. Heightened scrutiny as laid out by the Supreme Court in *Craig v. Boren*, 429 U.S. 190, 97 S. Ct. 451, 50 L. Ed. 2d 397 (1976), holds that a policy meeting a heightened scrutiny test "must serve *important* governmental objectives and must *be substantially related* to the achievement of those objectives. According to the court to pass the rational basis test one must show that a policy has rational basis rather than an arbitrary one. It is weakest standard of scrutiny and therefore the easiest to meet.

discrimination against disabled people is far more acceptable and accessible in US society. This makes disability the perfect conduit for the transposition of racial discrimination.

History would also seem to support this analysis. It is no coincidence that the initial push to recognise that disabled people have a right to education began in the early 1960s, as states were immersed in addressing the desegregation mandate of *Brown v. the Board of Education*. Many would identify, and have identified, this development as a natural attempt by disabled people to build on the civil rights gains made by African Americans (Ferri and Connor, 2006). In fact, Attorney John W. Davis, while arguing for the state of South Carolina in *Brown*, made this connection:

May it please the court, I think if the appellants' construction of the Fourteenth Amendment should prevail here, there is no doubt in my mind that it would catch the Indian within its grasp just as much as the Negro. If it should prevail, I am unable to see why a state would have any further right to segregate its pupils on the ground of sex or on the ground of age or on the ground of *mental capacity*.
(Friedman 2004, 51, emphasis added)

While there is little question that much of the motivation for the activists fighting to extend the principles of desegregation to disabled people were inspired by the success of the civil rights movement in *Brown*, disabled people's success in achieving this extension may be tied to *Brown* in a very different – and much less progressive - way, as I explain in the following section.

Interest convergence: retrenchment and disability rights

Ferri and Connor (2006) trace a shift from discourses of race to discourses of ability following the *Brown* decision. They argue that this shift has allowed the resegregation of schools that we see today (Bell, 2004;

Clotfelter, 2004; Orfield and Eaton, 1997). How and why did this happen? The answer may lie in two concepts that have been developed within the scholarship of Critical Race Theory; the concepts of ‘interest convergence’ and ‘retrenchment’.

Retrenchment is a concept that was developed by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw (1988). It describes the process by which any civil rights gains are almost immediately nullified, either through the political process or through the execution of the very policy or court rulings that are meant to provide those gains. It is a process that has been documented extensively by critical race theorists such as Derrick Bell (1989, 1992, 2004) and Richard Delgado (2003; Delgado et al., 2007).

In his (2004) book, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform*, Derrick Bell argues that the permanence of racism in American life has led to the use of a myriad of methods to undermine and undo the progress represented by the stated intent of the Brown decision.

I believe that the need for a retrenchment of the gains offered by Brown was a driving force behind the development of our system of special education. In this way special Education presented an opportunity for what Derrick Bell (1980, 2004, 2005) has termed ‘interest convergence’. As Bell (2005, 35) articulates it:

This principle of ‘interest convergence’ provides: the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites.

In the case of special education, the need for retrenchment was the perceived white interest; and it converged, not with the black interest of racial equality, but with the interests of disability activists and parents of

children with disabilities who wanted the principles of Brown extended to disabled people.

It is no coincidence that Congress first established a Federal Office of Special Education in 1966, 11 years after Brown, just as foot-dragging over desegregation was beginning to show segregationist approaches to ‘all deliberate speed’ for the obstructionism that it was. Ferri and Connor (2006) have argued that the gradualism represented by states’ approaches to Brown’s ‘all deliberate speed’ mandate enabled the shift from a discourse of race (under which segregation was prohibited) to one of ability (under which it was maintained):

Unfortunately the various reactions to Brown demonstrate how gradualism has been used to subvert the original intent of the law. It is important to remember that although IDEA mandates a free and appropriate public education and stresses an environment as close to general education as possible, it does not mandate inclusion. This, in and of itself, allows a perpetual state of gradualism to exist. (Ferri and Connor, 2006; 70)

When seen as part of this overarching shift from discourses of race as deficit to discourses of deficit of ability, the development of special education can be seen as primarily serving the white interest of reformalising segregation; the disabled interest in a right to education becomes merely a useful conduit. This offers not only a glimpse of interest convergence at work, this time *against* the interest of minority students, but also another example of transposition. What becomes clear is that the Brown decision made the discourse of race legally inaccessible, and so the more readily accessed and unquestioned discourse of ability was used to maintain the segregation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the ways in which ableist understandings and mechanisms are embedded within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. They can be found in the Acts deficit model definitions of disability; in the qualifiers attached to the most significant rights recognized within the law; and in the case law interpreting the Act. The institutional ableism built into IDEA's LRE clause serves to legalise the discrimination that it was intended to alleviate. With this legal and accessible discrimination at its disposal, the special education system offers the general education system a means of maintaining the race discrimination that *Brown v. the Board of Education* made illegal. The disproportionate identification of minority students as disabled becomes the means of transposing disability discrimination in place of racist discrimination. Understanding this makes it easier for us to recognise the explicit connection between the development of special education and White America's interest in recouping its losses from the Brown decision.

IDEA's attempts to address the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education today presents us with a glimpse of how policy itself serves to maintain inequities within the education system, even when those inequities are superficially judged to be unacceptable, inaccessible and illegal. Mechanisms such as transposition enable alternate routes of access. Understandings of race and disability as being wholly detached from one another enable a sleight of hand within the policy that serves the dominant interest of maintaining the inequality.

In the macro policy context in which IDEA was created, discrimination against disabled people is scrutinised far less, and is therefore much more accessible than discrimination based on race. In transposing ableist mechanisms to achieve racist outcomes, IDEA has created a powerful institutionalised inequity. Society's acceptance of disability

discrimination enables the acceptance of the otherwise unacceptable racial discrimination. Camouflaged in the language of good intentions, IDEA is protected against charges of either racism or ableism. Transposition is a context-specific mechanism that can occur in multiple ways at many levels of policy execution and interpretation. In the next chapter while focusing on the micro (school) level, we see that in a self-avowedly inclusive high school (i.e. a situation where ableist mechanisms had been made inaccessible to teachers) racism, sexism, and class-based discrimination (all of which received less scrutiny and were therefore more acceptable in the particular context) were utilised to achieve the same ends. My analysis suggests that it is necessary for researchers in disability studies and Critical Race Theory to cross borders and engage with this interaction in order to address the inequities. As long as there is insularity between the fields, neither will be adequate to the task.

4

‘You are who they think you are’: Teachers, Ablism & Transposition

Introduction

That our understanding of particular concepts can affect, alter, and reshape policies is not a new concept. The emergence of Disability Studies over the last three decades and more is at least partially a result of this knowledge (Corker & French, 1999; Drake, 1999; Linton, 1998). During this time however, disability studies has for the most part just begun to look at the particular effects peoples understandings of disability have on policies affecting disabled people (Drake, 1999).

In this chapter I would like to focus on the micro (school) political level and show how the way disability is understood is reshaping, and effectively subverting even the most well intentioned policies. I will look at how teachers’ actions use the malleable landscape of student identities, in ways that work against the stated aims of a particular school’s inclusion policy. They do this through what I term the *‘transposition of deficiencies’*. Just as transposition worked in a policy context (see the previous chapter) it is a strategy in which one deficiency model (for example disability) is operationalised in place of another deficiency model (such as race), with the net effect being the maintenance of the inequalities that inclusion policies are attempting to address.

It is also important to look at *why* teachers are transposing the deficiency models that they are applying to student identities. I argue that this is not an arbitrary process, but that there are markers which teachers are identifying in students, and using to classify them in one of three ways; ‘acceptable’, ‘unacceptable’, and ‘impossible’ learners¹. At the root of this is a need to maintain and legitimate existing inequalities that originate in an institutional ableism located on a level where even the most well-intentioned policy can not touch it, in the unquestioned beliefs and assumptions people hold around what disability is and means. The mechanism of ‘transposing deficiencies’ is deployed because while the school’s inclusion policy is focused on erasing the inequalities faced by disabled students the basic understandings of disability, which have contributed to these inequalities, have not been addressed.

The acceptable, and the unacceptable

What has constituted the educated subject has changed considerably throughout history (Fendler, 1998). The educated subject now, is very different from what it was considered to be, in the past:

The educated subject of Plato's discourse is virtually unrecognizable by current standards. The educated subject of the 1990s is not only assumed to be teachable, but has individual characteristics such as "learning style" and "developmental stage" that specify the nature of teachability. This way of thinking would have been utterly alien to both Socrates and Protagoras.
(Fendler, 1998; p. 42)

In recognizing this it becomes clear that what is seen as the educated subject is very much a social construct; malleable and changeable rather than

¹ As will be discussed later in this chapter these classifications are not my own, rather they are adapted from Youdell (2003, 2006).

naturally occurring and internally innate. A perspective not always recognized by educators.

Disabled students are the perfect example of this. Over the years they have been constructed as ‘inbred’, ‘backwards’, ‘ineducable’ and ‘unteachable’ (Race, 2002; Corbett, 1996;). The courts in the U.S. today have determined that no one is ‘ineducable’ or ‘unteachable’². That the courts have determined this does not mean that the social constructions have disappeared but it does signify that they are no longer officially sanctioned by U.S. law and policy. Tacit understandings of what constitutes an educated subject however are still brought to bear on both disabled and nondisabled students in ways that both privilege and oppress:

the educated subject has become individualized and identified according to populational referents. This assumption is evident in the commonplace ways of labeling individuals as “woman”, “intelligent”, “learning disabled”, “at risk”, “developmentally normal”, and so on. Lastly - and this is a relatively recent development -the educated subject is one who takes pleasure in becoming educated and desires to be self-disciplined.
(Fendler, 1998; p. 40)

Labelling can privilege (e.g. ‘gifted and talented’) but in the case of disabled students it has more often than not been used to oppress (Smith, 2001; Corbett, 1996). Smith (2001) notes the effects that labelling has had on African-American males:

Once an African-American male is labelled ‘special education child,’ teachers create a stereotype, causing a blurring of focus that results in the child feeling intimidated and often psychically destroyed.
(Smith, 2001; p. 110)

²

In *PARC v. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 343 F. Supp 279 (1972)

The damage that labelling does to disabled students is a by-product, an effect of othering them, thereby differentiating these students from students who more closely approximate a notion of what Howard Becker (1970) called the 'ideal client'. The idea being that schools operate with an unstated understanding of what their 'ideal client' is. By labelling, and othering disabled students, these students are being marked out from that ideal.

The label might from the perspective of the labeller, be seen as a neutral, descriptive or scientific diagnosis, but in fact is something much more. It puts a person in a category that is loaded with social meanings and preconceptions. As a result diagnosing disability is far more than simply describing some peculiarities in that person's behaviour. It is putting him in a special category, making him a special person. The characteristic of being disabled is ascribed to the whole person and all his other characteristics become interpreted in light of his disability.

(Soder, 1992; p.248)

What this means is that a disabled student's actions and interactions are interpreted through a lens of disability. A number of sociologists (Youdell, 2003; Gillborn; 1990; Sharp & Green, 1975) have found these similar processes to be self-confirming:

In the labelling process there is a hidden prophecy by the agent of social control that this deviant will remain a deviant for the normal time span of the agent's interest. This prophecy will tend to be confirmed as the agent's actions in concert with those of his colleagues structure the deviant's possibilities into a career of deviance rather than normality. This sort of explanation has been offered or implied in the analysis of various types of educational failure...

(Sharp & Green, 1975; p.125)

This is not to be confused with being inevitably self-fulfilling. It is merely that all interactions and observations are interpreted to confirm pre-existing perceptions. Becker (1970), Sharp & Green (1975) and Gillborn (1990)

have all noted that the further a student is perceived to be from the imagined ideal, the more likely they are to be seen as difficult, disruptive, problematic or challenging:

Professionals depend on their environing society to provide them with clients who meet the standards of their image of the ideal client. Social class cultures, *among other factors* may operate to produce clients who in one way or another, fail to meet these specifications and therefore aggravate one or another of the basic problems of the worker client relation. (Becker, 1970; p.149; emphasis added)

While Becker focused on social class, others have noted this effect in relation to race (Gillborn, 1990) gender and sexuality (Youdell, 2003). In his City Road study, Gillborn found that something as seemingly benign as a style of walking used by some of the Black boys in the school, was interpreted by teachers as hostile, challenging and inappropriate:

What should be noted is that a behavioural style rooted in the ethnicity of Afro-Caribbean pupils was without exception interpreted by their white teachers as being inappropriate to school. This reflected a more general tendency among staff to devalue anything that did not conform to their own (white) expectations and experience. (Gillborn, 1990; p.29)

Youdell (2003; 2004) develops the “Ideal Client theory” further by arguing that a wide range of both formal and informal processes are deployed to identify students as “acceptable” and, “unacceptable” learners and that this process operates to limit and control the identities available to students:

Constellations of identities are connected in and constituted through discursive chains that render some identities accessible and some identities inaccessible or even unintelligible. Of particular significance are the ways in which discursively embedded relationships between biographical or subcultural identities and learner identities

trap students within particular learner identities which seem almost impossible to escape.
(Youdell, 2003; p.19)

There is a growing body of research to support this. Julie Allan's work has shown that teachers both assist and inhibit students attempts to transgress in or out of 'disabled' identities. With greater resistance being directed at student attempts to transgress into identities that teachers deem less appropriate (Allan, 1999a; Allan 1999b):

...teachers saw (...) transgressive actions as posing a direct threat to (...) achievement of independence. They gave no indication of seeking to understand other possible motives behind practices, for example as a means of cultivating affection among (...) peers or as a response to the inability of others to deal with (...) disability. Instead staff had dismissed them as countermanding their own incontrovertible goal of independence.
(Allan, 1999a, p. 67)

There are echoes here of Youdell's (2003), Gillborn's (1990) and Sharp and Green's (1975) arguments that students' actions are often viewed solely through the lens of their perceived identities.

At Red Rock the amount of agency students were allowed in negotiating their own identities varied depending very much on location, with the classroom offering the least mobility. Both disabled and nondisabled students felt that teachers had fixed understandings about their identities, and that these understandings determined how they were perceived as well as how they were allowed to perceive themselves in that setting. As one student put it:

In class you are who they [the teachers] think you are. Cause no matter what, they won't see you any other way. They've got it into them thinking '*good student*', '*bad student*', '*jock*' whatever and that's who you are to them. Outside with your

friends and other kids its different, although after a while they set their minds about you too, but at least they do it, on who you are with them
(Jason, 17; 11th Grade; emphasis added)

There are striking parallels here between the ‘good student’/ ‘bad student’ identities that Jason says teachers impose, and the ‘acceptable’/ ‘unacceptable’ learner categories.

Acceptable learners

So who are these acceptable students? Are they the same students everywhere? They differ with the context and the discourses of each school. The “acceptable learners” are the students most closely approximating the teacher’s perceptions of the ideal (Youdell, 2003). At Red Rock these students were generally the seen as White middle class nondisabled students, they participated in the school’s extra-curricular activities, they got good grades, and as individuals they were rarely perceived to be taking up exorbitant amounts of teachers time for either behavioural or academic reasons.

The really good students are the ones you really just need to serve as a guide for. They get good grades, because they *want* to be here and they listen to you. They’re generally good kids from *good* families. They don't get into trouble much because they don't *cause* trouble.
(Ms. Colson, Math teacher)

The implication of this statement is that whether a student is seen to be good or not, is determined by the grades they receive (determined by the teachers), how easy they are to teach, their family (some families are clearly perceived as better than others), and their behaviour.

The School's staff sees the position that these students hold as being meritocratically earned rather than as the result of privileging.

I believe that this school is one of few places in our society our students will encounter a meritocracy, and I'm really proud of that. Our students know that their success or failure comes down to their own actions. (...) we're not perfect, but I think we get it right most of the time.

(Mr. Cardon, Vice Principal)

A number of authors looking at the middle class (Apple, 1995; Ball, 2003, 2008; Brantlinger, 2003; Power, et al, 2002) have argued that the concept of meritocracy, is often used as a tool to camouflage middle class privilege. This privileging however is not exclusive to whiteness or the middle-class and is very much contextually located. It can be seen in the construction of particular groups as model minorities, such as Indian students in England (Gillborn, 2008) and Asian-Americans in the U.S.:

under the label of 'model minority' Asian-Americans are 'known' to be 'better educated, to be earning as much as any group, to be well assimilated, and to manifest low rates of social deviance' (Chun, 1995, p.95). Further the media have portrayed this population as having succeeded despite past discrimination, in becoming 'a hardworking, uncomplaining minority deserving to serve as a model for other minorities (ibid. 96). Asian-American students are defined as hardworking 'whiz kids', excelling in math and science high achievers overall in terms of academic performance, and unlike other students of color, not educationally disadvantaged.

(Asher, 2001; p.77)

In many contexts within U.S. education, Asian-Americans are believed to be a model of the acceptable learner, as close to the ideal client as is possible. These beliefs have largely been shown to be little more than stereotypes, reflecting nothing of the diversity of the Asian-American population (Asher, 2001; Gillborn, 2008; Lee, 1996).

The point of this is that the perception of the acceptable learner is entirely a creation of the school, the pedagogue, and society. There is nothing about the ‘acceptable learner’ that is internal to the individual or universally recognized, it is categorization born within the beliefs understandings and discourses of those holding positions of power within the school. Think back to the quote offered by Jason, the 11th Grade student above: ‘In class you are who they [the teachers] think you are.’ One teacher at Red Rock noted this:

The perfect student here is probably a lot different than it would be in a big city school back east. Like I said here you're more focused on good grades and achievement while there, I'm just guessing, there it's more about behaviour and how well behaved you are.

(Mr. Esche, Social Studies Teacher)

It is clear from the quote that it is not the differences within the students, but rather what is valued about them that differs in other contexts.

The main interest in the acceptable learners within this chapter is in what their privileging says about, and the role it plays in, the inequities encountered by the students positioned within the ‘unacceptable’, and ‘impossible’ categories.

Unacceptable Learners

The power to privilege described above is also the power to disadvantage or oppress. Privilege and oppression are components of a larger whole. Though constructed as a binary, this practice actually serves to mask a singular process. Perhaps it's a deficiency of the English language that the two are

broken up into a binary, but in reality it is impossible to acknowledge one without recognising the other (Cixous, 1996). We can only recognize privileging if we recognize that there are others who are not privileged. If the acceptable learners are one-half of the whole, the unacceptable learners make the equation complete.

The notion of the unacceptable learner is far more difficult to map out than the concept of the acceptable learner. Privileging is by its nature exclusive, oppression on the other hand cuts a wide swath. Sociologists have been mapping out the mechanisms of oppression for some time now.

A good deal of sociological work has focused on the role of identity politics/negotiation/construction as one of these mechanisms (Bradley, 1996; Clifford, 2000; Hall, 1996; Murigami, 2009). In education alone sociologists have identified oppressive practices being operationalized around 'class' (Apple, 1999, 2006; Ball, 2003; Brantlinger, 2003), 'race' (Apple, 2001; Gillborn, 1995, 2008), 'gender' (Acker, 1994; Sadker et al, 2009), 'sexuality' (Mac an Ghail, 1994; Rasmussen, 2006) and 'disability' (Allan, 1999a; Priestley, 1999) as well as across a number of these at the same time (Benjamin, 2002; Bhopal & Preston, 2011; Youdell, 2006;).

The unacceptable learners at Red Rock cut across all of these categories. They were the students who didn't match up with the perceived ideal. Teachers at the school could not always clearly articulate what they were looking for in their ideal student, but they were always very certain about which students did *not* meet that ideal.

It's the ones that don't want to be here that get me. They're usually not the really smart kids, and if I'm honest they're mostly kids from poor families and the ones in the gangs. Not all of them but you know a percentage. They just make it really hard for me to get myself in here everyday. And I

know they lower the experience for real students, who want to be here.

(Mr. Martin, Social Studies Teacher)

This is an interesting quote, the teacher started off by identifying the students as, the students ‘that don't want to be here’. Ignoring for the moment why or whether or not the students did not want to be there, this would seem to be a reasonable complaint. The teacher feels the work they're putting in is both unappreciated and wasted. When asked about the next part of the statement, that ‘They’re usually not the really smart kids’, the teacher said that this belief was based on both the students grades and what they had to say in class.

The third section of the quote, that ‘they’re mostly kids from poor families and the ones in the gangs’ does a number of things. Firstly there is an attribution of class. This might not be remarkable if the school actually kept or collected statistics on students’ socio-economic background. This type of assumption about students’ backgrounds was quite common, mostly focusing on presumed working class backgrounds. The use of the word gangs is also important. Within the School, ‘gangs’ was a coded word, which was almost exclusively used to identify Hispanic boys. As one teacher said:

I don't know if they're really part of a gang, but they sure act like it. They're all Mexican which I know is a stereotype. But you know they tend to dress alike. They get into trouble a lot. If they're not in a gang, they're doing a great job pretending.

(Mr. Holmgren, Math teacher)

In reality the school had a few somewhat insular social groupings of Hispanic boys. According to the school's police officer, none of these groups fit the police criteria as a ‘criminal gang’. He said:

...but really it's people stereotyping them because they're Latino boys, and because they've adopted a couple gang associated styles that they've picked up from what they've seen on the latest Snoop Doggy Dogg video, but you can tell they're not real gang members, because they'll mix two styles associated with two different gangs. Biggest thing these kids get up to, and it can be a problem and it is illegal, is tagging [graffiti], but they don't meet our definition of a criminal gang.

(Officer Gray, School's assigned police officer)

So if we look back at the quotation 'they're mostly kids from poor families and the ones in the gangs', it now falls into a broader racist discourse.

The final section of the quote: 'And I know they lower the experience for real students, who want to be here', recognizes the hierarchy that the teacher places the acceptable and unacceptable students in. The teacher clearly holds a higher value for the acceptable learners. It is evidenced in the use of the phrase 'real students' and in the lack of concern expressed for the educational experience of the unacceptable learners. Youdell (2004b; 2006) argues that these hierarchies are constituted repeatedly using a variety of technologies built into classroom practises.

These subjectivating practices can also be seen in the minutiae of teachers' and students' discursive practices in the classroom where discourses of ability and conduct are deployed in assessing and constituting ideal, acceptable and unacceptable learner identities. These constitutions are in turn deployed in practises of classroom triage which act to further constitute students as learners in these terms. That is mundane classroom practises do not simply sort, rather they are moments in the ongoing constitution of these students as learners.

(Youdell, 2004 – personal correspondence)

Many of these practices have been adopted around arguments that they cater to individual 'needs', 'abilities' or 'inabilities'. A key point in Youdell's

argument is that the practices maintain the hierarchical identities and not the other way around. This is important, because it contravenes the traditional argument that particular practices are adopted because of individual deficit.

So where does disability fit into the equation? The vast majority of the students, who fit the profile³ of the unacceptable learner at Red Rock, were identified by the school as being 'learning disabled'. Significantly however, disability was hardly ever cited when teachers explained why students were perceived as being so far from the ideal. While there were many suggestions of deficits in 'intelligence', 'achievement' and 'common sense', almost no one suggested there was any connection with whether or not the students were listed on the school's assisted education rolls. On the rare occasion that this was noted, it was dismissed by citing the school's widely acknowledged inclusivity.

The school was proud of its inclusion program and according to the principal and many of the staff, Red Rock has taken on 'inclusive education' as its 'mission'; and to an extent it does have something of a missionary or community service feel to it. Both staff and students see 'inclusion' as something that the school does well. This includes many of the students that the school identifies as 'learning disabled', who don't recognize themselves as among those being included. To them as well as a majority of the schools' nondisabled students, recognizable disability was seen as physical and sensory impairments, as well as developmentally related impairments. It is not particularly surprising that the majority of learning disabled students did not self identify as disabled, and weren't identified with a disabled identity by nondisabled students. Or even that those students the school had labelled 'developmentally disabled' were only seen as having a disabled

³ This refers to students specifically identified by teachers as being the antithesis of the ideal student as well as students observed to be treated and/or spoken of in ways that echoed this perception.

identity. What was surprising was that for ‘disabled students’ particular identities were not available, or in some cases were not recognised as valid. In the rest of this chapter, I will look at two mechanisms used in Red Rock to accomplish this. One is transposition and the other is the creation of a third category of learner, the ‘impossible learner’. The use of both of these mechanisms in Red Rock are however predicated on the existence of a third; *institutional ableism* (a concept discussed in the previous chapter).

Transposed Deficiencies

Red Rock had made a school wide commitment to its own form of ‘inclusive education’. To the school, inclusive education was a policy focused solely on bringing disabled students into the regular education system. This commitment to its inclusion program was at odds with the reality that many of the school’s disabled students were viewed by teachers as what I have defined (after Youdell and others) as unacceptable learners. The upshot of this conflict was that disability was not recognised as a tolerable reason for identifying a student as an unacceptable learner.

What inclusion has meant at Red Rock is that everyone in the school has had to rethink what is and isn’t acceptable treatment of people with disabilities, not only here but in the community. It’s had a major impact on people’s behaviour, mostly I think because the school as a whole took a stand in saying this is what’s right.

(Mr. Lurie, Vice-Principal)

This does not mean that disabled students were no longer treated as unacceptable learners, but simply that disability was no longer cited as why they were unacceptable. The school’s inclusion policy basically outlawed more overt discrimination but allowed subtler more covert forms to take their place. Linda Ware (2003) describes this phenomenon:

General education teachers who boldly refused special education students admittance to their classrooms were no longer able to justify their entitlement to teach ‘some’ but not ‘all’ students. That is not to say that covert ablist beliefs have been extinguished. Similar to racism ablist normativity operates just beneath the radar where overt exclusionary assumptions are renounced while simultaneously cultivating more covert mechanisms to outlaw difference.
(Ware, 2003; p149-50)

The outlawing of difference that Ware refers to is, I would argue, the delineation between the acceptable and the unacceptable learner. The covert mechanism used at Red Rock to apply this unacceptable learner status to disabled students was what I call the transposition of deficiencies. Deficiency models of disability have long been used to explain and justify the inequitable treatment disabled students encounter (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011; Oliver, 2000). Red Rock’s inclusion policy made this tradition untenable.

...you have to help them [the LD students] overcome their problems with learning. I teach them strategies and skills so that they get the message ‘if they put in the work, they can do it!’ And the ones who put in the effort do see results.
(Mr. Fuller, History teacher)

The reason the average grade students receive in our class is a B rather than a C is because we bring everyone along, and we’ve shown it can be done with everyone, not just the good students. In fact I don’t know that we would be nearly as successful, with just the best students.
(Mr. Pierpont, Math Teacher)

Bonilla-Silva (2010), Gillborn (1997; 2008) and Wright, et. al (2000) have all argued that ‘deracialized’ or ‘colour-blind’ policy discourses have served to reinforce rather than undermine racialized inequalities, while at the same time they are used to shield institutions from charges of racism. Red Rock’s ‘inclusion’ program with its focus solely on doing away with disability

based exclusion, has had similar consequences. Teachers continued to identify students as deficient, they merely transposed the perceived deficiency into another deficiency model.

As was discussed in the last chapter the word transpose means ‘to write or perform (a musical composition) in a different key’ (Merriam-Websters, 2005 p. 761) other than the one in which it was originally written or in which it is usually performed.’ At Red Rock disability as deficiency was the original key and it was replaced by any of a number of deficit identities depending on which was the least assailable within the context of a given student. The deficiency changes but the inequality remains the same.

Transposition: Race as deficiency

Issues of race were completely ignored by the school’s inclusion policy, and in fact were conspicuously absent from consideration in most of the school’s policies, the lone exception being the English as a second language (ESL) policy:

Eventually we’ll have to start looking at how we approach our growing ethnic diversity in the school. We look at it in our ESL program, as far as it relates to our students with deficiencies in English. We don’t treat our ‘Native American’ students as being academically the same as our Hispanic Students they have different problems. (...) Basically we’ve tried to focus on one thing at a time, for the past few years it’s been inclusion.
(Mr. Snider, Principal)

Being absent from the school’s policy discourse meant that race was very much available to teachers as a deficiency model.

The largest ethnic minority group in the school were the Hispanic students (the school's classification). They comprised 4.3% of the school population, and 13.3% of the students the school identified as learning disabled. In all 20% of the Hispanic students in the school were labelled learning disabled by the school. Now, of course, disproportionate identification of minority students as disabled is nothing new (Artiles, 2003; Connor and Boskin, 2001; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Losen & Orfield, 2002), what was unexpected, however was that teachers almost never attributed the difficulties the "learning disabled" Hispanic students had in school to constructions of disability, they were almost exclusively attributed to their constructions of race or ethnicity.

The biggest problem those two have other than not having complete fluency, is that they don't apply themselves. They started school in Mexico, where they were used to not having homework, and they could just coast by on what they did in class. And they've had trouble adjusting 'cause things don't work that way here.

(Mr. Barkley, Math teacher)

Javier doesn't like my class. I think it's because his English isn't very good and he has trouble following the class. I feel for him, it's definitely something the school needs to address, because it's not just Javier it's a lot of the Mexican students.

(Ms. Erving, History teacher)

This is the transposition of deficiency models. Students were still identified as unacceptable learners; the reasoning behind this identification has merely shifted. The teachers use a discourse of racial/cultural deficiency instead of an arguably more traditional disability discourse.

In constructing Hispanic students as deficient in terms of race/culture teachers were able to maintain the school's identification as inclusive (to

disabled students). The artificial nature of this transposition and of deficit models in general, could be seen in many of the Hispanic students not identified by the school as disabled. These students tended to more closely approximate the 'acceptable learner' profile. When asked about these students, teachers often focused on the extent to which they were 'Americanised':

I think one of the reasons he [Michael] hasn't had some of the same problems as some of the other Mexican students is because he came over here at such a young age. His parents are Americans [white] who adopted him and brought him back here when he was five. So this [the U.S.] is the only school he's gone to. Being more Americanised he's had an easier time of it.

(Mr. Conrad, English Teacher)

If the process of transposition were not about maintaining student's status as unacceptable learners, and was solely about racism, it would affect Hispanic students more generally instead of just a portion. This is not to say that racism is not a factor, clearly it is, but simply that the maintenance of the inequality is the primary focus. If you look at racism as a means to marginalisation, or the exercise of power, rather than as simple hate, a bigger picture of inequality emerges (Goldberg, 1997).

Transposing raced identities onto students also meant that teachers did not have to take particular students seriously as learners in the same way they would have to if the students had access to a disabled identity. Ethnic minority status was not privileged by the inclusion policy. The transposed identities allowed teachers to construct Hispanic students as either victims or villains; both representations implied deficiency.

Hispanic *girls* were constructed by teachers as heroic well-intentioned victims of their own circumstances, families and financial situations. Fernanda, a senior who the school had identified as having linguistic and cognitive processing delays, was nearly sent to the alternative school the year before for excessive absences. Since that time she had managed to cut back on her absences, and ended up graduating with a borderline B-/C+ average. When the school was deciding not to send Fernanda to the alternative school, one of her teachers wrote in her defence:

While absence has been a major impediment to Fernanda's progress, we need to take into account the extenuating circumstances of her family's situation. Fernanda has expressed a desire to stay at Red Rock and has indicated that she is willing to take steps to reduce her absences, and has taken a new job that she assures me will not require her to work the same difficult hours. Her mother has also indicated that she will make certain that Fernanda takes on fewer responsibilities at home so that she can better focus on school. More would be the pity if we let this hard working, well meaning girl, fall through the cracks.
(Mrs. Vick, Spanish teacher)

The family circumstances alluded to in the letter had to do with the attempted deportation of Fernanda's father. In this case her father's situation as well as her own desire to make things work are coupled to portray Fernanda as the heroic victim, maintaining the belief that any difficulties Fernanda might be having are not anything that the school can address, because they are attached to Fernanda.

Academic accomplishment was irrelevant to this construction, as both success and failure were interpreted as supportive evidence. Yvette, an 11th grade student who the school labelled as having significant linguistic delays in both English and Spanish, suspended her studies in order to get a full time job. A teacher described her situation in the following way:

It's sad when you see something like that, she's a good kid, wasn't the greatest student, but she really tried, heard her brother was arrested for something, I guess she had to help the family pay the bills. We told her that if she ever wanted to come back and finish or if she wanted to make arrangements to attend the alternative school we'd be glad to help. She was really appreciative, I think she'll eventually try and finish or at least go for her GED⁴.

(Mr. Franklyn, Yvette's Homeroom teacher)

The teachers see both Fernanda and Yvette as tragic figures either overcoming or coping with situations not of their own making. Strangely there is still a connection here to the disabled identity that teachers refuse to recognise. One of the traditional stereotypes imposed upon disabled people is the role of victim (Biklin and Bogdan, 1977). It has been argued that this stereotype is used to maintain disabled people's marginalised status (Reiser & Mason, 1995).

Teachers did not cast Hispanic *boys* in the role of 'victims', but rather portrayed them as 'villains'. This too harkens back to a traditional disabled stereotype⁵. As was mentioned earlier there was a general perception in the school that equated Hispanic boys with gang membership. These students were seen as instigators who brought on their own problems, drug users, gangbangers, generally difficult students who did not care about school or their studies.

Jorgé, a 10th grader who had moved the U.S. two and a half years prior to this research, was classified by the school as having linguistic delays in both Spanish and English. At the beginning of the year Jorgé's brother Hernando

⁴ Graduate Equivalency Degree

⁵ Biklen & Bogdan (1977) identify ten traditional disabled stereotypes including: disabled person evil or as punishment for parent's evil, disabled person as victim, disabled person as pathetic or as an object of pity, disabled person as a burden, disabled person as incapable of participating in everyday life, disabled as non human (ie. freak or atmosphere), disabled person as "Super Crip", disabled person as object of humour, disabled person as own worst enemy, and disabled person as non sexual. I have discussed these stereotypes in greater detail within the literature review.

was expelled for smoking Marijuana on school grounds. Hernando had admitted to being there, but not to smoking; his parents believed him but the school did not. The teacher who saw the group of students had insisted that Hernando had been smoking. The same teacher also said that she was ‘fairly certain’ that Jorgé had been among the group, but later said she ‘might have been mistaken’ when Mrs Aguilar the ESL teacher said that Jorgé had been in her room getting help with his homework at the time. The teachers who taught Jorgé had fairly similar perceptions of him:

Jorgé Casteneda, now there’s one kid who makes me feel like his only purpose is to waste my time... you know? The first time he makes an effort with his work I’ll probably keel over.

(Ms. Juneau, History teacher)

Jorgé? Well you can tell he doesn’t want to be here. He’d rather be off listening to rap or hanging with his friends somewhere. He never puts any effort into his work... he could probably do it, instead he just hands in this chicken scratch that I can’t make any sense of. And then there are the times when I’m pretty sure he gets Mrs. Aguilar to do his work for him. Like I had them write that poem last week, they only had to do five or six lines. Not a taxing assignment, and he turn’s in this poem that was just too good to be his own work⁶.

(Mrs. Reeves, English teacher)

Jorgé had written the poem by himself although Mrs. Aguilar had helped him to translate it from the Spanish he wrote it in and read, and advised him on drafts. He’d spent three days working on it, which would seem to contradict the belief (held by more than just the two teachers quoted here) that Jorgé never put any effort into his work. Mrs. Aguilar, the ESL teacher, had heard these characterizations of Jorgé and number of other of her male

⁶

This episode is explored in greater detail in chapter six.

Hispanic students and had difficulty reconciling them with her own experience of the same students:

They work so hard. Trying to do what's asked of them by us. I can see why they find it so frustrating that so little of their hard work is recognised. A lot of them put in three times the effort that the other students do just to handle the language.
(Mrs Aguilar, ESL teacher)

In relation to Jorgé she argued:

Jorgé works so hard, his parents came here so he and his brother could go to school here, and with his brother suspended he feels even more pressure to do well. For that woman to not accept that as his work and tell him that she thinks he cheated. You've seen! He comes in here every afternoon to do his homework... how many of the other students do that? Most of them leave as soon as the buzzer goes.
(Mrs. Aguilar, ESL teacher)

Mrs Aguilar was one of the few teachers who did not see the Hispanic students ethnicity as a deficiency. She attributed her different perception of the students in part to her own background as an immigrant, and in part to her understanding of what pedagogy should be.

Some teachers here are used to teaching a certain type of student and they feel that is the way that everyone should learn. But people don't learn just one way do they? And you have to teach to all the students' styles.
(Mrs. Aguilar, ESL teacher)

Mrs Aguilar's perspective offers an alternative to the 'transposed deficiency' viewpoint offered by other teachers in the school. It serves as what Carol Thomas (1999) would call a 'counter-narrative'; a small space for resisting the transposition of deficiencies:

Perhaps the key point is that without the counter-narratives of others who challenge social 'norms' we as isolated individuals, are trapped within the story-lines of the prevailing narratives. If we do re-write our own identities then we strengthen the counter narrative, and the dominant and oppressive social narratives begin to crumble...
(Thomas, 1999; p.55)

In many ways, the sort of deflection represented by transposition is nothing new. In 1981 Martin Barker described what he termed the new racism; a phenomenon in which traditional biologicistic forms of racism shifted to less politically vulnerable and more culturally defined forms. What is new is that while the shift that Barker described was limited to a discourse of race, the 'transposition of deficiencies' spans the much broader discourse of inequalities. Class and gender are as factors in transposition as well, and for the school's purpose were just as easily used to support deficiency models as race.

Transposition: class as deficiency

Class identities were also transposed onto the school's 'learning disabled' students, but these identities only came to the foreground in relation to white students. As one teacher's comment shows:

She worked really hard, but, you know the deck was stacked against her Her dad lost his job ages ago and hasn't found a new one. Mom works about sixty hours a week as a cleaner, neither one reads very well, You'd probably call them white trash if they weren't such sweet people.
(Mr. Croce, science teacher)

Other teachers offered similar perspectives:

I sort of think they [assisted education students] don't all belong there [assited education]. A lot of them simply come from poor families. They weren't read to as kids and their

parents don't have the time or in some cases the ability to help them with their schoolwork. Most of them were playing catch up before they started school.

(Mrs. Weekes, Math teacher)

The teachers' implication is that class background has left many students with a serious internal deficit that is at the heart of the heart of the students' academic and/or social marginalisation. There is an increasingly well-documented tendency to portray working class Americans as deficient, through the use of terms such as 'white trash', 'hillbilly', and 'redneck' (Hartigan, 2003; 2005; Wray, 2006).

During my time at Red Rock all of these names were used to describe white working class students either in earnest or for serio-comic effect. According to John Hartigan (2003):

These labels are each applied to whites with tenuous economic and social circumstances, teetering on the edge of society and hardly privileged or powerful in any conventional sense. (...) these racial epithets are a means to objectify specific forms of cultural content or at least distinct social positions (regional and class identity in particular) that are located disruptively within the homogenizing discourses and practices of whiteness. The stratification of power and privilege within whiteness hinges upon rural versus urban identity, and the relative degrees of education versus "backwardness"; These labels all work to animate these key contours of difference within. (...) What counts as white in many social situations depends on class identity, and terms of racial belonging are importantly inflected by the markings of class.

(Hartigan, 2003; p. 96)

Hartigan's argument is that the construction of working class whites as deficient is the mechanism by which both class and racial privileging is maintained.

These instances of name-calling evidence the forms of decorum or etiquette that whiteness depends upon for its hegemonic position and which is consistently threatened by the words, actions, bodies and lifestyles of various strata of whites who reveal the tenuous and artificial nature of these social conventions by their inability to conform to the decorums of whiteness.
(Hartigan, 2003; p.96)

At Red Rock this took the form of particular White students' inability to approximate the perception of the 'acceptable learner'. These constructions of 'white trash' also echo disability's past with their connections to past disability labels such as 'inbred', 'backwards', and 'feebleminded' (Selden, 1999; Wray, 2006)

The imposition of disparaged, clearly deficient, working class identities was particularly prevalent in relation to White male students. Teachers often described these students as lazy, unmotivated, and for a number of them drug use was assumed in the absence of evidence. The disabled status of White students identified by the school as learning disabled was acknowledged but rarely was it given credence, more often, as was the case with Jimmy, it was seen as something the student used as an excuse.

Jimmy was a 10th Grader who the school had classified as communication disordered with an attention deficit. A teacher described him to me as 'the laziest student you will ever meet'. Another said:

I know he's one of the special ed. students, but Jimmy just wants you to do the work for him, he's basically lazy. If he ever stopped talking about [Professional] wrestling with Chuck and paid attention in class he might know what was going on.
(Mrs. Hitchcock, Biology teacher)

Jimmy's disengagement with his classes was real. By his own account, he would often 'lose track of what Mrs Hitchcock is talking about.' Jimmy's teachers bore a great deal of responsibility for this. Like Mrs. Hitchcock many of the teachers noted that Jimmy did not pay attention in class, many of them however also said that Jimmy took up too much of their time and asked too many questions when they were trying to teach the whole class:

Occasionally I've managed to get him to focus on the lesson, but he wants all my attention or nothing, he'll ask five thousand questions, and I'll take so long explaining to him that I won't have time to complete the lesson. The rest of the class suffers that way. So I usually tell him that I'll explain it if he comes to see me after class, but he never does.
(Mrs. Hitchcock, Biology teacher)

This was a common reaction to Jimmy's attempts to keep up with the class. By the end of the first term, Jimmy asked fewer and fewer questions and expressed more and more frustration.

I can't understand it if they don't explain it to me, you know? But then they get mad if I ask too many questions. Being special ed. means I'm supposed to get help and stuff. I can't win, so why try.
(Jimmy, 10th Grader)

Jimmy highlights one of the consequences of not recognising his disabled identity: in resisting Jimmy's attempts to access a disabled identity, teachers ignored the things that led him to seek out that identity. What Jimmy recognised and the teachers failed to acknowledge is that he engaged in their lessons by asking questions. He saw his disabled status within the school as something that made it valid for him to ask questions. Disregarding or invalidating that identity, teachers further marginalized Jimmy.

In some ways, the two preceding sub-headings are misleading. They imply that transposing one deficiency model for another is a matter of replacing one singular identity with another. Identity is clearly nowhere near as simplistic a concept. In all of these constructions of students, race, class, gender and even disability were factors. Transposition took different forms for Hispanic girls than it did for Hispanic boys, while constructions of Whiteness traversed class and racial boundaries. Transposition did not mean that race, class, gender or disability disappeared; it meant that one construction was brought to the foreground at the same time that another (in this case disability) was pushed to the background. It is now important to look at why an inclusion policy focused on disabled students has led to the use of such a covert means of maintaining inequalities.

Institutional Ableism

As was discussed in the previous chapter institutional ableism is the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their disability. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour that amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and ableist stereotyping which disadvantage disabled people. Whereas the last chapter examined the ways in which institutional ableism is embedded within policy, it is by no means limited to the policy realm. I would now like to look at how institutional ableism operates at the micro-political level. Doing so will shed light on why the marginalized status of Red Rock's disabled students was maintained despite a genuine desire for a more inclusive school.

Institutional ableism points to the fact that there are discriminatory structures, practices and uninterrogated beliefs embedded within education

systems that subvert even the most well intentioned policies by maintaining the substantive oppression of existing hierarchies. This means that even in a school such as Red Rock, which has made a strong school wide commitment to ‘inclusive education’ for disabled Students, there are patterned and recurring beliefs rooted in both school practices and the unquestioned understandings about disabled people within the schools ‘inclusive’ policies, that serve to maintain existing exclusionary⁷ outcomes.

It is I believe for this reason that, according to one of the school’s Vice Principals, roughly 80% of the Red Rock students that are referred to the local ‘alternative’ school, are students listed on the assisted education rolls. The percentage estimated among students on long-term suspension while not quite as dramatic was similarly high. The total number of these students was actually quite low, but it is the disproportionate nature of these two forms of exclusion that are symptomatic of institutional ableism. The most common reasons for both the referrals and the suspensions, were truancy, drug use and violent behaviour. Truancy was the most frequently occurring of these issues, but it did not always result in suspension or in the student being sent to the alternative school.

We try not to do that [suspension] too often. It only tends to be necessary in the more extreme cases and when they don’t make an effort to change the pattern. In Mike’s case he’s only been here, ... lets see... nine, no ten days, over the last six weeks. If a student is only missing a class here or there, they’re gonna get a detention.

(Vice Principal, disciplinary matters)

Why did 80% of the cases identified as ‘extreme’ involve disabled students?
Why did disabled students miss more classes and stay away longer? Ricardo

7

This can be social, academic, or physical exclusion.

a student the school identified as ‘learning disabled’, and who eventually dropped out to work rather than go to the alternative school explained it:

I hate school, like that place [Red Rock] isn't as bad as it was last year [the middle school] but they still make me feel like a tonto, a stupid. Like, I knew most of the answers on that test but didn't get to finish [ran out of time]. So Mr. Croce says I need to work harder. I knew it! ... So why should I go back.

(Ricardo, 10th Grader)

What this quote highlights is that there are structures (in this instance timed exams) within the school that serve to discriminate and marginalise disabled students. Institutional Ableism has led the school to adopt the covert mechanism of transposition. Transposition provides a resolution to the threat the school's inclusion policy represents to the maintenance and legitimation of existing inequalities.

There was a segment of the school's student population for whom existing inequalities were not threatened. Students the school identified as ‘developmentally disabled’ were only allowed access to an identity defined by a belief in disability as internal deficiency. These students were seen as ‘impossible learners’, a categorization which meant teachers were satisfied if only the spirit of the school's inclusion policy was met.

Impossible Learners

For the students the school identified as developmentally disabled, teachers showed no sign of utilising transposition. A traditional medicalised understanding of disability was left untouched. For many teachers the belief that these students disabilities were related to immutable internal deficit,

meant that that the school's inclusion policy could be satisfied by their (the students) mere presence in the classroom.

If other students in the school were sorted into the acceptable/unacceptable learner categories, the 'developmentally disabled' students were relocated outside that dichotomy into a category Youdell (2006) has termed 'impossible learners'. 'Impossible learners' are students of whom little is expected other than presence and (minimal) participation. Benjamin (2002; 2003) identified a similar phenomenon; she described this as a discourse of the 'really disabled':

A distinct discourse of success operates in relation to these students. This discourse apparently floats free of curricular progress. It is a discourse that simultaneously *allows* students to be different by valuing non-academic (or non-credentialised) success, and *reinscribes* them as different by exempting them from requirements relating to curricular performance.
(Benjamin, 2003; p.113)

I prefer to use impossible learner because this is a discourse that is constructed within a given context; it is not necessarily limited to disabled students. Youdell (2004) finds it in a British context in particular constructions of black boys. At Red Rock I encountered one case in which a similar discourse was applied to a nondisabled student. Sarah, a white nondisabled student described by many teachers as, coming 'from a very poor family', as well as in terms of her perceived 'promiscuity'. Towards the end of 10th grade just after her sixteenth birthday she became pregnant. Early into her 11th grade year, her already irregular attendance became even more sporadic. When asked about this, teachers didn't appear as concerned as they did in relation to other students attendance difficulties. There

seemed to be the perception that the consequences were no longer as dire if Sarah did not graduate:

...she probably won't graduate. A lot of the girls who get pregnant don't, but whenever she comes in that has to be a good thing. It's better than her staying at home doing nothing. She's going to have enough time at home when the baby comes.

(Mr. Snider, Principal)

Sarah's identity was wholly defined for teachers by the limitations that they assumed her impending motherhood would impose on her. Where before her pregnancy Sarah would have likely been constructed within the acceptable/unacceptable learner dichotomy, her pregnancy meant that a status as a 'real student' was no longer available. She was more than welcome to be there, and there was a belief that she would benefit from her attendance but she was placed outside of the performance-related expectations imposed on other students:

I told her that whatever she can do is okay. It's tough enough being sixteen, I can't think what it must be like to be sixteen and pregnant. It's really a wonder that she still comes in.

(Mrs. McNabb, Sociology teacher)

While I would argue that the impossible learner identity is available to a wide range of students in a given context, at Red Rock it was predominately imposed upon students the school identified as 'developmentally disabled'. Teachers viewed the 'developmentally disabled' student identities as being quite fixed and unchangeable. It was an odd mixture of "Super Crip"⁸ – amazing just because they were there, and "Mascot"⁹ - likeable simply

⁸ The 'Super Crip' is one of Biklin and Bogdan's (1977) stereotypes, elaborated by Reiser and Mason (1995) it describes the phenomenon of everyday acts accomplished by disabled people being treated as extraordinary feats.

⁹ Mascotting is described in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as "a sort of kindly condescension" (p. 27)

because they're disabled, with nowhere near the status or standing of the other students in the class.

It's great having him in the class. Yes he's limited in what he can do, but you know whatever contribution he makes is just wonderful. And my kids just love having him as part of the class. Whenever Steve, his peer assistant, is out they all want to be the one to fill in for him and work with Jeff.
(Mrs. Adams, English Teacher)

This statement was true, all of the students in Mrs. Adams class (and in fact the students in all of Jeff's classes) were very fond of Jeff. He was however positioned in the class less as one of their peers or even as another student but more as a favourite pet. It can be seen in Mrs. Adams' expectations for Jeff in the class as well as her understanding of him:

I don't set much work for Jeff, figure he can't handle too much, I'm happy when he's not too disruptive; he'll listen to the book I read to the class, and maybe answer a question or two about it. ...It was so cute the last book we read was Beowulf, and we asked him a few basic questions, 'who was the hero?', 'Where did it take place?' and when we got to 'Who was the monster?', he immediately shouts out 'Grendel' in a voice that was trying to sound ferocious.
(Mrs. Adams, English Teacher)

For Jeff and the other 'developmentally disabled' students at Red Rock, their status as 'impossible learners' meant that unlike students whom the school identified as 'learning disabled', disability was still permitted to mark them as different and thus apart. At the school's graduation ceremony, the only students to receive a standing ovation were Jeff and Jane who

happened to be the only ‘developmentally disabled’ students graduating that year.

When students that the school labelled developmentally disabled attempted to negotiate alternate identities, their actions were reinterpreted until they fit within the pre-existing fixed identities people expected of them. For example Jane, a 15 year old student with Down’s Syndrome asked to join the cheerleading squad, when I asked why she wanted to be a cheerleader she cited the status of the squad, they were ‘cool’ and she ‘wanted to be their friend’. She was instead made an ‘honorary’ member. She only cheered with the squad at home games. She had pom poms but didn’t have a uniform, and she wasn’t listed as a member of the team in the yearbook, or appear in the team photo. Instead she was given the school spirit award. The teacher in charge of the cheerleading squad explained the level of Jane’s participation this way:

I felt that she couldn’t handle all of the intensive training and travel, or the time commitment. Some of the away matches we go to are 150 miles away in [another town] and the girls have to stay over in a motel. Instead we worked it out so the girls have sat down and taught her all of the routines, and she comes to all of the home games. It works out really well, Jane enjoys it, and the girls all love her. And it was partly that I didn't want the liability of care.
(Mrs McNabb, Cheerleading Coach)

Jane did enjoy cheering at the home games, but there was no real evidence that she would not have enjoyed the away matches as well, or that they would have been any more difficult for her. The real issue here however, is that while Jane wanted to be one of the cheerleaders, her actual role, positioning and participation was determined by the understandings and expectations that a teacher had *constructed* around her impairments rather

than the reality of those impairments. In reality, Jane went on far longer trips with her family in the summer.

In prescribing a disabled identity for developmentally disabled students, teachers limited and actively obstructed the students' attempts to shape their own identities. In Jane's case, she wanted to be viewed as a cheerleader. The school pushed her into the position of "A Downs girl who cheers *with* the cheerleading squad" (emphasis added), a description that was offered to me on my first day in the school.

The positioning of students like Jane as 'impossible learners' serves to highlight the institutional ableism at work within the school. It is manifest in the understandings of what disability means. It is in the teachers perceptions of the students whom they allow access to a disabled identity that we can see that teachers interpret disability as equivalent to individual deficiency.

with kids like Jeff and Corey it's a bit more difficult there is less that they can do. With the LD kids like Samantha and Mark they can fit into the class far easier. I'd love to know what's going on in Jeff's head, does anyone really know what autism is like?

(Mrs. Carlisle, Assisted Ed. Teacher)

In this quotation one of the assisted education teachers (whose job is predicated on the recognition of disability) highlights two things. She makes explicit the belief in disability as deficiency: 'there is less that they can do'. She also recognises the hierarchical nature of the positioning of students identified as 'learning disabled' and 'developmentally disabled'; the difference between the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable learners'.

This data points to the fact that as long as disability is understood within the parameters of a deficiency model the value of Inclusive education programs

will be limited as disabled students will continue experiencing oppression (Corker, 1999; Oliver 2000).

Conclusion

In focusing solely on the inequities faced by disabled students, Red Rock's inclusion policy limited its own effectiveness. If, as has been demonstrated the constructions of inequality are multi-faceted then formally addressing only one aspect of these constructions leaves an opening for technologies such as the 'transposition of deficiencies', to be used to bypass the targeted aspect and maintain the inequality.

Exclusion at Red Rock took many forms and involved a complex array of discriminatory pressures. While disability was at the centre of the school's Inclusion Policy, it had not examined either its own understandings of disability nor the many other forms of discrimination that students encountered. Consequently the hierarchical positioning of students was allowed to continue without disruption. It is in this positioning that students level of inclusion/exclusion is justified; positioning students in relation to a perceived ideal, and arguing that this hierarchy is tied to naturally occurring internal competencies or deficits teachers:

...uphold the fiction that anyone can be 'successful' while also legitimating the reality that, in a competitive system, 'success' cannot be available to all.
(Benjamin, 2002; p.106)

The school's inclusion policy did present a threat to these hierarchies as they pertained to some of the disabled students within the school, but again the inequality was maintained by transposing race, class and gender models of deficiency in place of the threatened model of disability as deficiency. The small group of students allowed access to a disabled identity were the

students labelled as ‘developmentally disabled’, for whom the inclusion policy did not disrupt the view of disability as internal deficiency.

It is necessary to say that these hierarchies are context specific in their content. In another setting it is easy to imagine wholly different constructions of acceptable, unacceptable and impossible learners. Likewise the ways in which technologies such as ‘transposition’ are deployed, differ within a given context. While the descriptions within this chapter, of how both were utilised at Red Rock are specific to Red Rock, the concepts themselves offer a wider look at the construction and maintenance of inequalities in education. In the next chapter I explore the role nondisabled students played in shaping disabled student’s experiences at Red Rock.

5

'We're not friends': Nondisabled peers and the governance of friendship

Introduction

Much of the argument for inclusive education has been centered around the importance of socialization and the interaction of disabled and nondisabled students (Davis & Watson, 2001; Pavri & Luftig, 2001;). Even in times before the education system was ready to contemplate the academic value of inclusive education, the argument was made for its social value (Guralnick, 1976; Madden & Slavin, 1983). Julie Allan (1999a) has pointed to nondisabled students as 'inclusion gatekeepers'. She argues that their role while:

...broadly supportive of inclusion, was highly regulating and normalizing, and their perseverance, criticism, resentment and indignation acted as self regulatory mechanisms, policing their own conduct and that of others. Like any governmental regime it constructed the subjects it governed (...) and its functionalist orientation to creating useful individuals (...) imposed limits on pupils with special needs, by contributing to the construction of their disabled identities and constraining them to act in particular ways. (p.44)

While Allan is writing about a school in Scotland she could just as easily have been referring to Red Rock. In this chapter, I explore the role nondisabled students play in both the success and the failure of inclusive education at Red Rock; to examine their role as gatekeepers and look at

some of the mechanisms they employ in their ‘governance’, particularly governance through the control of ‘friendship’.

In the previous chapters we have explored the roles institutional ableism and transposition play in subverting and undermining inclusive intent at a policy level and in the classroom, in this chapter we will see the repercussions of both, echoing throughout the relationship between disabled and nondisabled students. It will become clear that the hierarchy between disabled and nondisabled students is a positioning that nondisabled students work actively to protect.

The chapter will begin with an exploration of nondisabled students’ understandings of and stake in Red Rock’s identity as having an inclusive culture. Looking at how this identity shields these students from examinations of their own privileged positions within the school while at the same time allowing them the opportunity to actively protect their hierarchical positioning. It will then move to the nature of these hierarchies and the ways in which students are identified as acceptable and unacceptable peers within them. The final section of the chapter will then focus on nondisabled students’ primary means of sustaining their hierarchical positioning – the governance of friendship – and the very active and deliberate way in which they utilize this mechanism.

Nondisabled Students and Inclusive/Service School Culture

There is a growing body of work in disability studies focused on the role of nondisabled people in the othering of disabled people. While still at an early stage in its development, this literature is something akin to the literature that has emerged from critical race theory and critical pedagogy around whiteness (e.g. Doane, 2003; Gillborn, 2005; Leonardo, 2009; Preston,

2007). Much of it is based in the notion that to gain a full understanding of the process of othering it is necessary to not only understand the experience of those people being constructed as different but also to examine the role, motivations and actions of those who are doing the constructing. However, with the social model of disability dominating the landscape of disability studies in the social sciences, research into the nondisabled has taken a somewhat different trajectory than whiteness studies.

Much of this research has focused on troubling constructions of ‘normalcy’ (Davis, 1995, 2002). Rosemary Garland-Thomson (1997) and Simi Linton (1998) show how discursive constructions of ‘normality’ locate the groups and individuals within those constructions in culturally and societally powerful positions while at the same time marginalizing those groups and individuals that do not match these constructions. Garland-Thomson coined the term ‘normate’ to articulate this concept in a way that the uninterrogated term ‘normal’ is incapable of:

The term *normate* usefully designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings. Normate, then, is the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them.
(Garland-Thomson, 1997; p.8)

The importance of this concept lies in its recognition that constructions of normality are neither as innocuous nor as naturally occurring as they would seem; and in its understanding of ‘normal’ or ‘norms’ as staking out powerful hegemonic positions. It is this understanding that has led Simi Linton (1998) to adopt the same practice that I have used within this thesis of resituating the actors as disabled or nondisabled, which as she argues designates:

...membership within or outside the community. Disabled is centered, and nondisabled is placed on the peripheral position in order to look at the world from the inside out, to expose the perspective and expertise that is silenced. Occasionally, people with disabilities is used as a variant of disabled people. The use of nondisabled is strategic: to center disability.
(Linton, 1998; p.13)

Linton argues that just as research into whiteness has brought that veiled and hegemonic position under scrutiny, an examination of 'the nondisabled stance' (p.14) can bring its obscured and protected status into question as well:

'The nondisabled stance' like the white stance, is veiled
'White cannot be said quite out loud, or it loses its crucial position as a precondition of vision and becomes the object of scrutiny'(...) Therefore centering the disabled position and labelling its opposite nondisabled focuses attention on both the structure of knowledge and the structure of society.
(Linton, 1998; p.14)

Removing this shroud from around the nondisabled position has enabled a greater understanding of nondisabled people's part in shaping discrimination, oppression and resistance in disabled people's lives.

Nowhere has this been explored in greater depth than in relation to the role nondisabled people play in the success, failure or shape of inclusive education. Anastasia Vlachou's (1997) study shows how the views and attitudes of nondisabled teachers and students work in subtle and not so subtle ways to shape and limit disabled students' participation in education. Vlachou refers to what she calls 'expressions of segregationist mentalities', this is used to describe the manifestation of the uninterrogated beliefs and attitudes of nondisabled students (Vlachou also applies this to teachers) that shape and limit the role, positioning and access of disabled students in the

regular education system. Vlachou found that the underlying understandings and perceptions that nondisabled students held about disabled students did more to shape individual relationships between disabled and nondisabled students than anything that could be attributed to impairment.

Reading Vlachou's research with an understanding of institutional ableism enables a recognition that institutional ableism operates not only at the level of policy and practice, but also at an interpersonal level. By this I mean that it takes an unseen shaping role in the ways in which disabled and nondisabled students interact with one another. This highlights yet another level at which disabled students' involvement and opportunities in education are impeded and limited by factors external to the disabled students themselves. Perhaps more importantly it illustrates the need to examine the micropolitics of the relationships between disabled and non disabled students.

Some of this micro political research has already begun. As was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter Julie Allan's (1999a) work has highlighted the role nondisabled students play in regulating the involvement and standing of disabled students in the regular education classroom. She describes this as a governmental regime that was:

largely positive and supportive, helping pupils with special needs to succeed. It was also, at times, highly punitive and legitimized the exclusion of individuals from social interaction.

(Allan, 1999a; p.39)

Nondisabled students at Red Rock took on a very similar role. They were overwhelmingly positive and supportive of Red Rock's commitment to inclusive education seeing it as demonstrating an egalitarian ethos.

This school is really good for them [disabled students] most places make them have different classrooms and stuff but here they are in the same class as us [nondisabled students] and they can learn from us. Otherwise they would only be with other kids with problems like them and they wouldn't learn.

(Connor, 18; 12th Grade)

This broad support for inclusive education could be heard from almost all of the nondisabled students at Red Rock and was offered in many ways as the defining narrative of the school's identity. This narrative may have appealed to nondisabled students more as a part of a school culture of (community) service than as part of an inclusive culture. In fact many of the things that the school offered as evidence of its inclusivity (such as nondisabled students taking on a role as peer assistants/tutors or letting disabled students cheer with the cheerleaders), were seen by nondisabled students more as *service* either to the school, the community or the disabled person or in some cases to the aspirations of the nondisabled students themselves, than as anything to do with *equity*.

I like working with Jeff. I'm really lucky, I'm healthy, I can do stuff, I have a great family and friends and its nice to be able to give something back and help someone who is not so lucky. Helping people is something that is important in my church we all try and do something.

(Steve, 18; 12th Grade)

Being Mike's helper has been fun. He's a good kid. I enjoy it. I probably get as much out of it as he does. Like just spending time with someone who has it so hard, that's what I wrote about in my college app. essay. I think it's what got me into State [University]. When I went for my interview it was the only part of my application they really asked me about.

(Noah, 18; 12th Grade)

Now this may seem nitpicky, many people would see the result as being the same regardless of the motivation; a disabled student still gets help, or to participate. However in this case intent is not irrelevant as the nondisabled students' understandings of their actions have a significant impact on the outcomes. The perception of the disabled student as an act of service not only maintains but also builds upon the existing hierarchy that gives nondisabled students a greater status within the school culture. In many ways it is a variation of a traditional charity model of disability which numerous authors (eg. Oliver, 1990; Reiser & Mason, 1995; Thomas, 2007) have pointed out actively constructs disabled people as less than and less worthy than nondisabled people, as objects of pity. When this is looked at side by side with Red Rock's view of itself as an inclusive school a different picture emerges. If disabled students are seen as service then including them is viewed as an extension of that service, an act of kindness rather than an attempt to address inequity. The importance of this distinction is that it makes the position of disabled students even more tenuous. Their level of involvement becomes a gift or an act of benevolence, an extended privilege rather than a right. This means that it can be withdrawn or limits can be placed on the charity.

This is not a new phenomenon. Harlan Lane (1993) describes how the hearing community uses understandings of the benevolence of the work they do running charities for the deaf 'to lock out deaf people themselves, to silence their narrative and prevent their collaboration' (Lane, 1993; p.186). For an example of this process at Red Rock I would go back to the case (discussed in the previous chapter) of Jane, the student with Down Syndrome who wanted to be a cheerleader. If you recall she was allowed to cheer with the squad only at home games and was not given a uniform or included in the squad photo in the yearbook. Jane wanted to be a

cheerleader because as she said they were ‘cool’. Being cool and being a part of that group was part of the narrative that Jane wanted for herself. It is significant that the cheerleaders teaching Jane the routines was seen by many at the school, including by many of the cheerleaders, as an act of service to the school and to Jane, and was not shied away from but offered as an example of how good these students were.

Those girls are so good. Do you know they take their own time, outside of all of their practices, and their homework, and their own social lives to teach Jane all of the routines. And on top of that they all pitched in to buy Jane’s Varsity jacket. Those are kids that have their heads on straight.
(Mrs. McNabb, Cheerleading Coach)

The cheerleading coach was far from alone in seeing the work that went into Jane’s participation as service. The sentiment is echoed by one of the squad’s co-captains:

We all love teaching Jane how to do the routines. It’s not really difficult and it’s important to all of the squad to give back to the school a little.(...) And she’s [Jane] so much fun that we get more out of it than she does. I even wrote about it on one of my college applications
(Karyn, 18; 12th grade).

Not only do these quotations highlight the positioning of disabled students as acts of service, but in outlining the narrative of this situation as a benevolent act for Jane’s benefit it becomes clear that this narrative is a major reason that no one questioned the limitations placed on her participation. The rationale being: ‘you can’t criticize them for doing a good thing’. Tom Shakespeare (2006) has commented on the implications and effects of this:

The association of disabled people a charity suggests that disabled people have no option but to rely on handouts. It suggests that non-disabled people are beneficent and that

disabled people are needy. It leaves disabled people feeling dependent and incapable. This discourse structures the way that non disabled people relate to disabled people, and the way that many disabled people feel about themselves.
(Shakespeare, 2006; p.155)

The 'service' narrative derives much of its power from its reliance on the often unquestioned assumptions that disabled students are less worthy of and less likely to benefit from opportunities. This was something echoed at many levels in the school. From the PTA:

The parents are all really proud of the school's commitment to handicapped students. It [inclusion] is something they do really well here. The only issue any of us have and its not really an issue as much as something we just want to keep people thinking about is that its done in a way that doesn't cheat the regular students. [...] You know you don't want them [nondisabled students] to get less time with the teacher That's why its so good that they have the special ed teachers in there doing so much team teaching.
(Mrs. Cardeno, PTA representative)

To the teachers:

I think we're all working to make the inclusion program a success, but at the end of the day its still my job to make sure the regular kids are ready for their college boards and are in a position to succeed
(Mrs. Harbaugh, English teacher)

And the students:

It makes my mom furious, and she's right you know. It's not like Mikey or Toby are going to college so why should Mrs. D spend most of the class helping them. I need the grades to get into University next year.
(Wes, 17; 11th Grade)

Reading these quotations it becomes clear that underneath the inclusive education narrative that the school projects on the surface, there is a belief

permeating the school that disabled students are inferior and therefore less deserving of learning than their nondisabled peers. Their participation in the school is a great thing – ‘parents are all really proud’ – as long as it does not interfere with nondisabled students’ entitlements or threaten their position in the hierarchy. It is this understanding that makes the service narrative (which guides school practice far more than the inclusive narrative) so useful to maintaining inequity. Nondisabled members of the school and community can feel good about what is being done for disabled students while leaving the substantive positioning of disabled students unchanged (and conversely leaving the dominant positioning of nondisabled students similarly unchanged). Jenny Corbett (1999) warned this type of school culture could never be truly inclusive:

If the cultural environment of a school is to be inclusive, this involves recognizing and respecting cultural groups ... as valid alternatives, and not just marginalized substrata.
(Corbett, 1999; p.54)

Nowhere in Red Rock was the view of disabled students as a ‘marginalized substrata’ more apparent than in the interactions and relationships between disabled and nondisabled students. While it will be evident that student identities had a far greater plasticity in these relationships than was seen in the previous chapter with the teachers, in situations where a disabled identity was either attributed to, or taken up by, a student, that student was viewed by other students as marginal, isolated or a threat and was treated in a manner that represented this view. The next section will explore these interactions with an eye towards contextualizing the existing hierarchy between disabled and nondisabled students and identifying some of the mechanisms nondisabled students use to actively maintain this hierarchy.

Acceptable, unacceptable and impossible peers

As with the teachers at Red Rock, students viewed their peers in relation to a perceived ideal, marking fellow students in much the same way as the teachers, as acceptable, unacceptable or impossible peers. This is not a particularly new phenomenon and has been encountered by a number of researchers (e.g. Benjamin, 2002; Youdell, 2003, 2006). Drawing on her research from both the United Kingdom and Australia Deborah Youdell (2006) develops concepts introduced by Judith Butler, to highlight a number of ways these discursive constructions are used to marginalize and exclude.

...when we name, or interpolate, another we in fact do not describe that person but, rather, contribute to the making of them in the terms of the name we have used. And in so far as to name is to make, it is also an action, a doing, that is, speech and action come together in discursive practice.
(Youdell, 2006, p.79)

The argument Youdell is making is a very simple yet often overlooked point that discourse plays a powerful and significant role in actively shaping people's lived experiences. This can be seen in the previous chapter. Teachers' discursive constructions of student identity were used to shape the way students were perceived and in doing so shaped the levels to which they were included and excluded from school life and notions of success.

This is not to imply that disabled students play no role in this positioning, they can and often do contribute to and shape discourse like anyone else (Davis & Watson, 2002), but an understanding of the differential and often hierarchical power relations in schools means that it is necessary to recognize that some contributions to discourse are more privileged than others (Rasmussen, 2006; Youdell, 2006). At Red Rock while it became clear early on that the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students was relatively fixed and that teachers discursive constructions

carried significantly more power¹, relationships between disabled and nondisabled students were more fluid, affected almost as much by context and location as by forms of impairment. As we can hear in this story from two students that the school identified as learning disabled:

Keri: What gets me is that they're like different cause of where you are.

Ruth: Yeah Jen [another student and Ruth's neighbour] is like that when we are here she barely says hi. And when we are home it's like she thinks I'm her best friend.

Keri: Yeah and do you remember then she wouldn't help us with that problem in Mrs. Weekes' class.

Ruth: Oh yeah she was like [imitates Jen] 'its easy, just do the work.' If it was easy I wouldn't have asked her. And the next day she was over my house cause she was bored.

(Keri & Ruth, 17; 11th Grade)

As was the case in the conversation above context/location played a major role in shaping relationships between students with the dividing lines being drawn between in class, out of class and at home. Pahl (2000) notes that location and availability play major roles shaping the styles and forms that friendships take. Many of the students at Red Rock were very much aware of limitations that locational boundaries placed on their relationships.

We're friends in class. We sit together because neither one of us really know what she's [the teacher] talking about most of the time. Its nice to know you aren't the only one. But we don't really hang out much outside of class. He's got his own friends I'm sure and I've got mine. It's not like we avoid each other, we just don't really like, meet.
(Quentin, 16; 9th grade)

¹ This is the focus of much of the previous chapter.

Now it is important to recognise that although location shapes these relationships it does not *determine* them. By this I mean that location plays a role in what many of these relationships look like but they are not the key factor that determines whether a relationship exists. For that it is necessary to look back to the concepts of acceptable, unacceptable and impossible introduced in the previous chapter. Youdell (2006) argues that students make the same sort of judgments about peers' relation to an unstated ideal that teachers do. While at Red Rock these judgements appear to be less fixed in peer relationships than they were with the teachers, there is evidence that students also classed each other in three broad categories of acceptable, unacceptable and impossible peers.

GB: How did you become friends with Kassie and Ellen?
You don't have any classes with them?

Marta: Ellen and I used to have English together but this year I took the AP class² and I know Kassie from church and cause she lives just down the street from me.

GB: Why do you think that you became friends with them as opposed to other students here?

Marta: I don't know, maybe 'cause we have [sic] so much alike. We're all smart, we get good grades and we like the same things, like music and movies. Kassie and I think we're more like sisters than I am with my own sister, who is a bit wierd.

GB: Is that what makes it work? That you like the same things?

Marta: Yeah but its more than that. I know they have the same values as me. They don't smoke or drink or have

²

Advanced Placement class high school students can take to get early university credits.

sex, so I know I'll always be comfortable around them.

GB: Are you friends with anyone who you don't feel that about?

Marta: No... I can't feel safe around people who don't share my values.

This was fairly common. For the majority of students who were White, middle class and nondisabled, the acceptable students were for the most part students that they saw as being like them. On occasion acceptability was constituted explicitly around race, class, or notions of intelligence, but more often it was around this usually undefined and amorphous concept of values. What became clear in talking to students was that the understandings being used to determine whose values made them acceptable and unacceptable were based more on racist, ableist, sexist and class based stereotypes than on real knowledge about the individuals being evaluated. Over and over again the values students ascribed to others as the reason they were not friends did not match the professed values of those they were projecting onto. For example Mary Ellen (a self identified White middle class Christian) told me that she wasn't friendly with Carina and Monica (two Latina girls she shared almost all of her classes with) because:

They're really sexually promiscuous, most of the Mexican kids are. I was raised to believe that that's a sin. I'll pray for them but I don't want to be their friend. I just wouldn't feel comfortable.

(Mary Ellen, 16; 11th Grade)

That the two girls she was referring to, described themselves as 'strict Catholics' who told me that they didn't believe in sex before marriage, apparently played no part in Mary Ellen's hyper-sexualized racially stereotyped discursive construct of them. This is not a new phenomenon, a

number of authors (Hey, 1997; Rasmussen, 2006; Youdell, 2003, 2006) have described the ways in which attributed sexual identities and subjectivities have been used to create and deny access to spaces, relationships and opportunities. In this case the identity that Mary Ellen attributed to Claudia and Monica not only justified her not being friends with two girls she spent most of the day with but also made not being friends with them the only appropriate or even moral recourse available to her.

It would be easy to walk away from what I have described so far with the idea that the student hierarchies were straight up and down with White middle class nondisabled students at the top and an arrangement of other groups of students lined up beneath them. This would be a gross oversimplification of inter-student relations at Red Rock. There were multiple hierarchies at Red Rock with each operationalizing its own understandings of who should be classified acceptable, unacceptable and impossible. With almost all of these groups the students seen as unacceptable were the students the school had identified as learning disabled. I can offer no certain insights into why this was, however one notable exception to this, may offer some clues as to some of the processes involved.

Whyatt: An exception that protects the rule

Disabled students at Red Rock were a fairly marginalized group. Their friendships tended to either be with other marginalized students or were marked by significantly hierarchical relationships. There was a notable exception to this however, a group of seven or eight mostly twelfth grade boys who were all on the wrestling and football teams together. The undisputed leader of the group was Whyatt, the school's star athlete who

had his choice of several college athletic scholarships in any of the three sports he played. Whyatt was identified by the school³ as having multiple learning disabilities related to reading, writing and mathematics. Within this group however Whyatt was nevertheless seen not only as an acceptable peer but arguably as the *most* acceptable peer. There was an ongoing argument between two of the boys in the group about which of them Whyatt was closer to. Whyatt did not hide the difficulties he had with school from his friends. All of them seemed very much aware that he worked with the assisted education teacher; many of them regularly assisted him with assignments; and none of them regarded any of it as a particularly important factor in their relationship with him. The unique thing about the situation was that unlike most of the students that the school identified as disabled Whyatt wasn't seen through a lens of deficiency, he was almost universally described as gifted or incredibly talented by both his friends and others within the school. His athletic abilities were appreciated to such an extent that they could not be coalesced with a view of Whyatt as deficient.

Yeah I know he struggles in school, but that's more cause he's not interested, not cause he's stupid. He's not stupid, I see every week on the football field just how smart he is. This kid is better than any high school athlete I've ever coached, and I've been coaching a long time.
(Mr. Vermeil, Football coach & English Teacher)

Or as one of his closest friends from the football team put it:

I help him out with work and he helps me with the playbook. That's what friends do. I'm better at some things, he's better at others, so we help each other.
(Jared, 18; 12th grade)

³

According to the school's head of assisted education.

For the majority of students the school identified as learning disabled, their difficulties with school regardless of what they might be attributed to were viewed as evidence of individual deficiency and marked these students as unacceptable peers and learners. In Wyatt's case, his athletic abilities were so considerable that rather than unacceptable, he was seen as something of an ideal peer by many students within the school and the difficulties were either dismissed or accepted as is evidenced in the two quotes above from his coach and team mate. Furthermore unlike many other students the school identified as disabled, Wyatt was allowed the mobility to move between groups at the school. The girl he was dating (Josie) described herself and most of her friends as 'Preps'⁴, her GPA⁵ was close to the top of the class and she was involved in numerous extracurricular activities, ranging from the drama club to student government. Wyatt also spent a lot of time with his brother (Brayden) and his friends - who spent most of their time in the autoshop. Josie was aware of how exceptional Wyatt's acceptability was.

He's pretty unique, I don't know anyone at the school who is friends with as many different groups as he is. That's one of the things I love about him, he gets along with everybody.
(Josie, 18; 12th grade)

This mobility was evidence of Wyatt's acceptability as a peer. As will be evident later in this chapter this is not a privilege enjoyed by everyone at the school. Wyatt's openness and willingness to utilize this mobility (which would be risky for other students) is the type of action that in other contexts

⁴ Short for 'Preppie', used by many students derisively to describe middle class students who dressed a bit more conservatively were pro-school and got good grades. When asked to define 'Prep' one student told me 'A prep is someone who is a bit more stuffy, who dresses a bit uptight and has nothing going on in their life but school'. Josie's view of prep was more positive she saw her friends and herself as people who took their work and themselves 'seriously'.

⁵ Grade Point Average – The cumulative average of all of a student's grades.

(Reynold, 2006) has been pointed to as a sign of just how secure a person is in their position at the top of the hierarchy.

Whyatt's acceptability as a peer highlights the artificial nature of these determinations. Just about every other student that the school classified as having similar disabilities, were viewed as far less desirable peers and certainly were not positioned at or near the top of any hierarchical school groupings. Whyatt had no special social skills that were noticeably absent in these other students, his standing within the school was largely a product of his success in the athletic program. His teachers and peers interpreted this as a marker of his acceptability ignoring all the other markers that would usually have identified him as an unacceptable peer. As one of his teachers told me:

I wish all the LD kids were like him. You can see by the way he plays football that he won't allow a little thing like a learning disability keep him from succeeding. He's a great kid, most of these others they want to use what they can't do as an excuse for not doing anything.

(Mr. Mohrinwig, History teacher and assistant football coach)

We can see in Mr Mohrinwig's statement that he has constructed an understanding of Whyatt's football skills and success that allows him to be the exception, the proof that disabled kids can be successful and acceptable while at the same time reaffirming the unacceptability of other similar students. When asked why this different attitude didn't translate into better grades for Whyatt he said:

Well I'm not sure he doesn't do better than most LD kids, but you've also got to realize that there is a bit of bias by some of the teachers here against student athletes, you know they've got this old dumb jock stereotype that they won't let

go of. (interrupted) where were we... yeah but in my experience he's not a stupid kid. You don't run an offense and lead your peers on the field with the success he's had if your brain don't work."

(Mr. Mohrinwig, History teacher and assistant football coach)

In this instance Mr. Mohrinwig again uses Whyatt's leadership role and his athletic success as a means of dismissing something (low grades) that he would otherwise⁶ have attributed in other students as signs of deficit. This same selective focus could also be found in Whyatt's close friends. Jared, who Whyatt said was his best friend other than his brother, had an ongoing conflict with another student Derrick (a white middle class student who the school identified as learning disabled). Jared was very much the aggressor in the conflict, whenever the two met in the hallway or in the classroom Jared would call Derrick a 'Retard' (the most common choice), a 'Woman', or a 'Dork' and would usually follow that with a string of jokes about how stupid Derrick was. Jared appeared to take Derrick as a personal affront.

GB: What's going on between you and Derrick?

Jared: What do you mean?

GB: You seemed to be going at it this morning in the hallway.

Jared: Oh he's just a dork. He bugs me is all. I like to let him know how stupid he is sometimes. You know you're so stupid you think a quarterback is a refund or you're so stupid you tried to put m&m's in alphabetical order. It's just a laugh.

GB: What about him bugs you?

⁶ In a separate interview Mr. Mohrinwig was quoted as saying: "I don't know with some of these kids, its really not cause, they work hard, these are good kids, they just can't... some of them just can't do it."

Jared: He's a dork. I don't know he just gets on my nerves.

GB: Why do you say he's stupid?

Jared: Cause he is. It's not like he's a friend. I don't have to like him.

There are a number of points to highlight here. Jared uses the same identifiers to mark Derrick as unacceptable that he is willing to dismiss in Whyatt. In the last sentence 'It's not like he's a friend I don't have to like him.' Jared comes close to acknowledging the selective focus he applies in attaching these markers to Derrick. The unstated implication being that if Derrick were a friend he would not treat or see him in the same way. This also brings up the central role peer friendships play in controlling access and inclusivity. In the final section of this chapter I would like to focus on these processes and help develop an understanding of the governmental role of friendship.

As was mentioned at the top of this section Whyatt's life and friendships at the school represent an exception from the rule of marginalised disabled students. It may in fact be an exception that helped protect the rule. Recognition of Whyatt's successes and popularity serves insulation from criticism; 'He can do it why can't everyone'. It is not a new phenomenon many writers researching Race have pointed out the way exceptional minority success stories have long been used to insulate organisations and individuals from critique of racist practices and outcomes (Bell, 1992; Gillborn, 2008). If anything Whyatt's acceptability highlights the artificial and unnecessary nature of the marginalisation of disabled students.

The Governance of Friendship and disabled students

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, Julie Allan, in her (1999a) book *Actively seeking inclusion* examined the governmental or gatekeeping role played by nondisabled students in shaping the educational experiences of disabled students in the general education system. According to Allan:

The mainstream pupils appeared to operate within a framework of governmentality (...), functioning as a set of unwritten rules of conduct for themselves and others and sanctioning or prohibiting particular actions. Foucault's use of the term governmentality combines the power to direct conduct with a particular mentality or presumption that '*everything* can, should, must be managed, administered by authority' (...). Foucault argues that it is a particularly insidious kind of government since 'it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely' (...) Bhabha (1994) describes the governmentality practised by colonizers as an avowed ambition to civilize and modernize. Among mainstream pupils it could reflect a desire to normalize pupils with special needs or eradicate some of their differences.
(Allen, 1999a; p.31)

Allan is pointing out is the central role that nondisabled students play in determining when and where and to what extent disabled students are included in general education experiences. It is a powerful position, which further contributes and cements nondisabled students' place at the top in their hierarchical relationship with disabled students.

At Red Rock this position of governance, took many forms. It is important here, however to remember that for Foucault governmentality was largely an instrument used in the deployment of power. Applying this understanding of governmentality to Red Rock a picture of nondisabled students function within the governance of disabled students begins to emerge. At Red Rock nondisabled students utilized a number of

mechanisms in fulfilling their governmental roles. I would like to focus on one particular mechanism that took many forms in the school and played a significant role in limiting inclusivity; the governance of friendship.

As was discussed above, the nondisabled students (like their teachers) classed their fellow students according to three broad classifications of acceptable, unacceptable, and impossible peers. The main difference of course being that the student classifications were less static and more contextual. There are probably a number of reasons for this, but none stood out more than the governance of friendship.

Tom Shakespeare (2006) has noted:

But whereas sex is not always a priority, for almost all human beings the need for intimacy, companionship, and acceptance remains central from birth to death. People can survive, even flourish, without sex, but the majority would be desolate without friendship.
(Shakespeare, 2006; p.169)

There is a long and detailed literature exploring the centrality of friendship in student's lives (Davies, 1984; Griffiths 1995; Hey, 1997; Pahl, 2000). For many of Red Rock's students the value placed on friendship was second only to the value placed on close familial relationships. As one student wrote in her friend's yearbook: 'you are my friend, and that has been everything to me.' (Field notes).

This high value placed on friendship had many roots. Friendships were often seen by students as vital sections of their support network. Filling a void that parental and familial relationships could not.

I can talk to them [Friends Keith & David] about things that my parents just don't get, you know, there are things I just

don't have to explain to them, they get it... and they don't give me a hard time if I don't take their advice.
(Owen, 18; 12th Grade)

In addition to support friendships were seen by many students as controlling what aspects of the school experience students had access to. As one student noted, while describing table groupings in the cafeteria:

Rick: You can't really sit there, unless you're part of the group or are friends with someone who is. I mean, you can sit there, but it won't go well.

GB: What kind of things will happen?

Rick: If they respect you... they might give you a dirty look, they might ignore you, or maybe say 'Hi', but if they don't [respect you] it won't be so nice. They'll make sure you move.

GB: How?

Rick: Depends on who it is. Some will just say 'Leave!' Some will try and bust on you... umh sometimes, you might get threatened but that doesn't happen too often.

There are several things to note here. The mention of respect would seem to indicate again the importance that students place on where someone falls on the acceptable to unacceptable peer scale; where someone is located by their fellow students on that scale appears to play a significant part in shaping not only their experience in the school, but also what, where and who they have access to within it. From Rick's account, highly acceptable peers (a student's friends) would be accorded full access, other acceptable peers would be tolerated and unacceptable peers, driven off.

The exclusionary nature of friendships and the role this plays in governing student experiences is not new. Valerie Hey's (1997) study of girls'

friendships looked in detail at their strategic use of exclusions in affecting and shaping group positioning.

Their own friendship culture provided meanings about the right way to be through positioning the ideal friend as white, non-boffin, and not 'slaggy'. Their investment in that was at the expense of other girls' social and discursive exclusions. (Hey, 1997; p.84)

At Red Rock this regime of friendship as governance took a number of forms. The most common being friendship as a license to police behavior and the offering, withholding and withdrawing of friendship as a means of controlling positioning, status, and access within the school, as well as within student hierarchies. Disabled students who were seen as unacceptable peers were often subjected to one or all of these mechanisms. While there were numerous instances of this, one example stands out.

Kara and Michelle were lab partners in a 10th grade biology class. The school identified Kara as having a reading disability. According to one teacher, it was dyslexia, but according stated that she was just 'a very slow reader'. Michelle was an honors student and teacher had paired the two of them 'hoping that Michelle might help Kara keep up. At first in class the two appeared to get along very well, laughing, meeting up outside of class to work on a joint assignment, saying hi when they passed in the hallway, they sat next to each other even when there was not any lab work. My own impression was that they seemed to be becoming friends. After roughly a month and a half, Michelle began acting increasingly hostile to Kara in class. The first time this hostility became noticeable was when Michelle somewhat stridently in the middle of class, told Kara to stop talking to her while she was trying to take notes. Asked about the incident afterwards, Michelle said:

Wasn't that annoying! I'm trying to take notes in class and all she wants to do is talk to me. That's why she does bad on the tests. She spends the whole time talking, you think if she paid attention she'd do better. And Mrs. G. asked me to help her in that class, but she is not really helping herself is she?

(Michelle, 15; 10th Grade)

Michelle viewed her actions as being as much for Kara's benefit as her own. She saw policing Kara's behavior as falling within the parameters of her teacher-assigned role with Kara.

Well no. Mrs. G. asked me to help her cause she's not a great student. Even when she's annoying me like today. I explained that she needed to take the notes. It makes no difference to me, it's for her good.

(Michelle, 15; 10th Grade)

Interestingly enough, when asked about the same incident, Kara said she had only asked Michelle what the teacher had said because she had not heard her clearly.

After about a week of growing hostility from Michelle directed at Kara the teacher felt the need to assign them new lab partners. When asked why the switch had been made Michelle said:

Michelle: We just couldn't get along, she kept thinking we were like friends and stuff.

GB: What did she do that bothered you?

Michelle: She just acted as if we were close, coming up to me with my friends as if we hung out together.

GB: Was that a problem?

Michelle: Yeah, it was. Dara and Amy were looking at me like 'who is this freak?'... and I only met her this year in Bio. I've been best friends with them my

whole life. We went to kindergarten together, we go to the same church. They know everything about me she doesn't.

GB: So is that why you seemed so mad at her in class?

Michelle: That and because she's a pest. Every five seconds asking me something unimportant. Finally I got sick of telling her to shut up and asked Mrs G. if I could work with someone else.

For Michelle, Kara was an acceptable peer as long as it was within the unstated limits of the classroom. In Michelle's view Kara breached these limits by trying to join Michelle and her friends; this reconstituted Kara as an unacceptable peer. Michelle's hostility was a gatekeeping action, making it clear that any level of friendship was withdrawn and highlighting and advertising Kara's unacceptable status to the rest of the class. A message that seemed well received as evidenced by the comment made to Michelle by Kara's new lab partner on the day the change was made: 'Thanks a lot. now *I'm* stuck with her'. This governance over the access to and limits of friendship serves to actively maintain the hierarchy between disabled and nondisabled students.

The withdrawal of friendship, or more often than not the statement of non friendship, was often used to demarcate hierarchical boundaries. Being the person doing the rejecting discursively positions that person at the top of the hierarchy. The power of discursive constructions to stake exclusionary positions has been well documented within the growing body of research around the performative nature of subjectivities (Rasmussen, 2006; Reynold; 2006; Youdell, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2010). While this strategy was used by both girls and boys at Red Rock, the way in which it was deployed was highly gendered. Girls seemed to use the technique more dramatically

and for public embarrassment. They were louder and usually followed the statement by looking around for the support or sympathy of whoever else was there. This was the case between Marina, a nondisabled white middle class student in the 12th grade and Stacey, also a White middle class 12th grader that the school identified as having dyslexia. The previous year Marina had taken notes for Stacey in their history class. By all accounts [including both students] it had been an unproblematic relationship that had ended with the school year. One day while I was talking to some other students in the cafeteria, Marina (seated at the next table) screamed at Stacey:

Marina: WE'RE NOT FRIENDS! Why are you always hovering around me? I know your dyslexic so let me spell it out... GO AWAY!

Stacey: You don't have to be such a spazz about it. I just asked if I could sit there.

Marina: Well you can't, goodbye!

After the thirty second exchange, Marina looked around to the others at the table appearing to make sure she had their support. This pointed to the interaction being intended as much for the rest of the lunch room as it was for Stacey. The reaction of the male student I had been speaking to, who without seeming to approve or disapprove said: 'Well I guess she was put in her place', seemed to indicate that it had reached its audience. In discussing the incident with Marina afterward it became clear that for her the audience was very consciously utilised to marginalise Stacey.

GB: What happened at lunch?

Marina: What do you mean?

GB: Between you and Stacey?

Marina: I've been having a pest problem... We had some classes together last year. I helped her take notes in history, and now she keeps trying to act like we're friends. So I had to make it clear to her and everyone that we're not.

GB: Her and everyone?

Marina: The rest of the school.

GB: Why the rest of the school?

Marina: Because people like her don't get it unless they've been embarrassed. I wanted to make sure she got the message. She definitely doesn't think we're friends now.

This type of public denial of friendship was a commonly used act of governance. When I refer to it as an act of governance I mean that it was deployed in a way that not only marked the subject as unacceptable, but it also signalled their unacceptability to the others in the school.

As was mentioned earlier, boys also used denial of friendship to govern but the public aspect was far less common. Boys would more often act privately, by questioning their subject's sexuality or their (presumed) heterosexual masculinity. This was the case with Drew and Eli. Drew and Eli were two White middle class students. Both were in eleventh grade Drew was seventeen and Eli was sixteen. Drew was nondisabled and the school identified Eli as having multiple learning disabilities⁷. The two of them have a common friend Micah. The incident between them came out in a conversation that Drew and I were having about his friendship with Micah.

⁷ According to his IEP he 'has demonstrable Dyscalculia – His processing freezes up during anything more than simple math tasks' and 'shows signs that he has difficulty integrating complex and progressive auditory commands'

GB: Are you also friends with Eli?

Drew: Nah he's more Micah's friend than mine. He kind of reminds me of that little yappy dog in the looney tunes, the one that's always trying to hang out with big dog telling him how great he is. That's him and Micah. Actually I had to tell him to 'step off' last week.

GB: What happenend?

Drew: Micah was out sick, I guess he [Eli] was bored and thought he'd hang out with me. I didn't want to hang with him so I had to tell him to get off my wood.

GB: Huh?

Drew: You know, I told him to get off my dick, I said I'm not Micah and it's not my job to entertain him.

GB: How did he react?

Drew: He turned and walked away, what else was he going to do?

There are a number of things to point out in Drew's story. Just as with Marina and Stacey, Drew is making a statement of non-friendship. There was no audience for this interaction. Yet its governing affect seemed as strong albeit more subtle. All that Eli would say about the incident was that Drew was 'an asshole' and that he'd been 'a jerk last Friday', however he no longer spent time with Micah when he was with Drew and spent much of his time outside of class on his own. While there are many possible interpretations of what went on, what stands out is the thinly veiled threat contained in Drew's 'Get off my wood' directive. The subtext of this seems to be 'Don't make me question your heterosexuality'. Drew's statement 'He turned and walked away, what else was he going to do?' indicates that Drew

understands the power that this threat carries without the need for an audience.

In this instance Drew's use of private threat serves to isolate Eli as effectively as the public attack utilized by Marina. What makes both Drew and Marina's actions so similar is their implicit understanding of the tactical role friendship plays in positioning themselves and others. In these cases both actions are being successfully deployed to assert dominant standing within a hierarchy. It is this power and flexibility that makes the governance of friendship such a potent and attractive mechanism for gatekeeping.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the very active role nondisabled students play in shaping disabled students experience of inclusive education. It is a gate keeping role but more than that it is role in which nondisabled students actively work to police positioning and access within the micro-politics of the school. Within this process it is clear that friendship is used by nondisabled students as a tool to regulate and control disabled students behaviour and standing within the established hierarchy. It was offered withheld and withdrawn strategically in ways designed to maintain this hierarchical relationship.

Peer relations have always been central to arguments in favour of inclusive education. Many of these arguments have simply assumed that just putting disabled and nondisabled students together would gradually lead to the improved positioning of disabled people in our society. Unfortunately the dominant voice in questioning this has come from special educationists pointing to the lack of social inclusivity in schools in an attempt undermine the inclusive education movement. In this chapter we've seen, not that

Inclusive education can't improve social inclusivity, but that there are aspects of power and vested interests in hierarchical positioning that need to be better understood and accounted for if inclusive education is going to work better.

It has been over ten years since Julie Allen pointed out the gatekeeping role that nondisabled students play in shaping the educational experience of disabled students. The dearth of research to extend Allan's insights, is a serious omission. What we have seen in this chapter is just how sophisticated and effective these gatekeeping mechanisms are when it comes to protecting the privileged positioning of nondisabled students. That this is still the case in a setting such as Red Rock (where those same students project a value and a pride in an inclusive identity) only highlights how sophisticated and effective.

So far this thesis has focused on the technologies and mechanisms being deployed by policymakers, teachers and peers against disabled students. In the next section I would like to focus on Red Rock's disabled students themselves, looking at their experiences and the means some of them have found to resist, survive, and sometimes thrive.

6

Making Space: Disabled Students' Resistance

Introduction

In the three chapters preceding this, the focus has been on some of the forces acting upon disabled students in the education system. The first showed how institutional ableism is built into the fabric of the individuals with disabilities education improvement act (2004) and how through the use of transposition this enables and furthers other types of discrimination. In the second we saw how ableism shaped Red Rock's teachers discursive constructions of their students and how transposition once again provided other outlets when disability was seen as an inaccessible means of discrimination. Finally the previous chapter offered a glimpse at the role that nondisabled peers play, through the governance of friendship, in determining, shaping and controlling the levels of inclusivity at Red Rock. In this chapter I would like to turn the focus back onto the disabled students themselves and their experience of these forces. Using three case studies I would like to take a closer look at how three disabled students have experienced the effects of policy, pedagogy, and peers.

The first case we will look at will focus on Daniel, a student for whom the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process played a major role in shaping both his educational experience and its outcomes. Utilizing extensive observations and interviews with Daniel and the other members of his IEP team, the analysis will centre not on what was done to Daniel, but

on how what was done affected him and shaped his actions, experience and opportunities.

The second case will focus on Jorge a student that the school identified as having 'linguistic delays' in both Spanish (his first language) and English (his second language). The case will center on his very different experiences with two teachers. The third and final case study will look at Kelly, a student who very suddenly acquired a disability during the school year. I will focus on her experience of the shift from being seen as an acceptable peer to being seen as an impossible peer.

***'Shouldn't what I want be the most important?'* Disabled Students and Policy**

The *Individualized Education Program (IEP)* is a statutory requirement that has been one of the central mechanisms of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) since its first inception in 1975. Responsibility for creating and overseeing the implementation of the IEP falls to the IEP team. IDEA mandates the IEP team's composition as follows:

(B) Individualized education program team.—The term 'individualized education program team' or 'IEP Team' means a group of individuals composed of-- (i) the parents of a child with a disability; (ii) not less than 1 regular education teacher of such child (if the child is, or may be, participating in the regular education environment); (iii) not less than 1 special education teacher, or where appropriate, not less than 1 special education provider of such child; (iv) a representative of the local educational agency who-- (I) is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities; (II) is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum; and (III) is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the local educational agency; (v) an individual who can interpret the

instructional implications of evaluation results, who may be a member of the team described in clauses (ii) through (vi); (vi) at the discretion of the parent or the agency, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related services personnel as appropriate; and (vii) whenever appropriate, the child with a disability.
(P.L. 108-446)

It is worth noting that the only member of the team whose membership is qualified with the phrase ‘whenever appropriate’ is ‘the child with a disability’, the subject of the team’s meeting. I raise this point because while the student involved in the case I am about to focus on was included in the IEP team¹, the value and status given to his knowledge, preferences and opinions seemed to highlight his lesser standing within the team. It is this as much as anything that shaped his educational experience that year.

Daniel

I was introduced to Daniel by Mrs. Dawkins, one of the assisted education program² teachers. Daniel was a 17 year old eleventh grader and according to Mrs. Dawkins, had been diagnosed with ‘ADHD’ and ‘a reading disability’. She told me that Daniel’s IEP was coming up and that she thought he and his parents probably wouldn’t mind if I sat in. After speaking to Daniel and calling his parents she told me that they were happy for me to be there. She also told me that I was welcome to attend the team’s pre-IEP meeting. I asked what this was:

We like to meet as a team... you know the school side of things. So we can all get on the same page. We’ve just found that it’s better to approach the

¹ As was every other student in all of the IEPs I attended at Red Rock.

² ‘Assisted Education’ was term used by the school in place of Special Education. All of the teachers in the program however had standard special education teaching qualifications.

parents with a unified front.
(Mrs. Dawkins, Assisted Education Teacher)

I asked if this was a standard practice or if it was unique to Red Rock. She told me that as far as she knew it was fairly common and that it had been done at all of the schools she had taught at.

In the pre-IEP meeting much of the discussion focused on how much time Daniel would spend in Mrs. Dawkins' resource room, getting extra assistance with his assignments. When it was agreed that they would recommend that he continue coming one period every day, Mrs. Dawkins noted:

He's not going to like that. He's always looking for ways of getting out of coming to my room. When I reminded him that we're all meeting today, the only thing he wanted to know was if he could spend less time in my room.

To which the only regular education teacher who attended the meeting said:

He spends less time in your room and I'll never see another piece of homework from him. And if he does do it without your help, I don't know if it will be worth the wasted paper. I can tell instantly when he's done it in your room and when he's scribbled down something at the last minute on the bus to school.
(Mr. Hough, History teacher)

The consensus in the room was that Daniel merely wanted the extra free period to 'hang out with his friends' and that this would not be good for him academically. My overall impression of the meeting was of a group of teachers paternalistically protecting a student from himself. As we were walking out of the pre-meeting, one of the teachers said to me:

With some of these kids the biggest thing they need is help getting out of their own way. This one definitely falls into that category.
(Mr. Lurie, Vice Principal)

The teachers may or may not have been right about Daniel's motives; however, the reason he gave them in the IEP meeting for not wanting to be in Mrs. Dawkins's room was that it was a waste of time:

It's a waste of time, I don't get anything done there anyway, mostly I just do my homework on my own anyways, and I don't need to be there to do that. That's why they call it homework, you do it at home.
(Daniel, 17, 11th Grade)

When told that being in Mrs. Dawkins' class would allow him to get help with his work, Daniel responded by saying: 'I don't need it'. Rather than engaging with his statement the teacher leading the IEP turned and asked Daniel's parents: 'How do you feel about this?' Daniel's father responded for both his parents saying:

We trust you. If you say this will help him do better, then that's what we'll do. Dan'll do what he has to do. We just want to make sure he does okay and graduates.
(Daniel's father)

This ended any real discussion about how much time Daniel would spend in Mrs. Dawkins' class. After Daniel's father spoke, the person leading the meeting turned back to Daniel and said:

Since your parents agree, I think the way we should proceed is for you to continue with your current schedule and if you still feel it's not a help, then we can reassess it later in the year. Okay?

It was more of a statement than a question and the resignation in Daniel's 'okay' indicated that he understood the discussion was over.

Self Determination

'Self determination' was a concept familiar to many of the teachers at Red Rock³. It generally has referred to creating situations and environments in

³ Several teachers used the term in discussing their approach to inclusive education and IEPs and three teachers indicated to me that they and some of their former colleagues had used Martin, J. E.,

which students can take an active role in their IEP meetings (Agran & Hughes, 2008). Much of the research around self determination has found that both IEP meeting and the program developed by it are more successful when students take a significant role in leading the IEP (Agran & Hughes, 2008; Arndt et al., 2006; Stang et al., 2009); yet the only person who mentioned the concept after the meeting was Daniel who by the following day was furious:

The meeting was about me! Don't you think they should have listened to what I wanted? They ignored everything I said and everything that happened is what they wanted. All this stuff about me being a part of it and having a say and they didn't care what I wanted. Shouldn't what I want be the most important? It's my education isn't it?

Daniel's understanding of what the IEP was supposed to be echoed the philosophy many of the teachers at the school, including some of the teachers in his IEP meeting, told me they used to approach IEPs.

We try and incorporate a lot of the principles of self determination in the IEP process. We find that when the kids have... a sense of ownership in the plan that the team comes up with, they do more to make it work.

(Mrs. Dawkins, Assisted Education Teacher)

Much of the research into self determination would seem to agree with Mrs. Dawkins' assessment and in fact would go a bit further. Martin, et al.(2003) found a correlation between giving students a level of self determination and enhanced academic outcomes. Wehmeyer & Palmer (2003) found that students given opportunities for self determination had higher employment rates, better access to health and other benefits, greater financial independence and were also more likely to access independent living opportunities.

When asked why the IEP team chose to disregard Daniel's stated preference, Mrs. Dawkins suggested that it was a situation in which professional expertise outweighed a desire for Daniel to be in control of the process.

That was a shame, but he really needs the help or he won't graduate. I've seen it a hundred times, the kids always think they can handle it on their own and then they either come in asking for help when it's too late, or they don't and we end up having to call a meeting because they're failing out.

(Mrs. Dawkins, Assisted Education Teacher)

Daniel's take on it was somewhat different: 'They'll listen to what you want as long as it's the same as they want to give you, Otherwise too bad for you.'

Mrs. Dawkins' citation of professional expertise as justification for ignoring or disregarding the opinions or desires of disabled people is far from new. A number of disability studies theorists and researchers have offered extensive critiques of this phenomenon in a number of fields including special education (Biklen, 1992; Finkelstein, 1980; Linton, 1998; Oliver, 1990).

Mrs. Dawkins' citation of her own expertise as an explanation for discounting Daniel's preferences meshes with Doug Biklen's (1992) description of Special Educators:

Special educators usually describe their work as clinical they treat individuals. If their work is with groups they nevertheless usually attempt to individualize their 'interventions'. They are presumed to possess current expert knowledge and they are expected to exercise professional judgment in each case they handle. They recommend and sometimes have the power to require a particular treatment.

(Biklen, 1992; p.83)

In this case Mrs. Dawkins (and the other members of the IEP) chose to value that professional judgment over any equity oriented considerations

such as self determination. The point in examining Daniel's IEP is not to question the correctness of Mrs. Dawkins' (or anyone else's) professional judgment or intentions. What makes the events of this IEP so important is the way it helped shape the rest of Daniel's year and possibly his academic career.

'Cutting'

Not long after the IEP meeting⁴ Daniel began 'cutting'⁵ Mrs. Dawkins' class. At first he was only missing one class a week. As he told me, 'When I have that last period, I'd rather go home'.⁶ By the end of January (two months after the IEP) he was skipping Mrs. Dawkins' class two or three times a week. The causes of absenteeism⁷ are a highly disputed area of research (Reid, 2005). Some of the research has focused on individually located causes while others have concentrated on contextual and social causes (Gabb, 1995; Reid, 2005). Focusing on a British context, Kinder et al.(1996) identified and ranked seven causes that absentees commonly identified as the cause of their absenteeism:

1. The influence of friends and peers
2. Relationships with teachers
3. The content and delivery of curriculum
4. Family factors
5. Bullying
6. The classroom context

⁴ Confirmed by both Daniel and Mrs. Dawkins' attendance records.

⁵ 'Cutting' was the term the students used for skipping either a class or an entire day of school.

⁶ He also said that on days when he had Mrs. Dawkins' class last, if he left early he could usually get a ride with a friend.

⁷ Reid (2005) has noted that the term 'absenteeism' is in and of itself problematic due to the diverse range of definitions which have been applied to it. For the purposes of this paper it will refer to being absent without consent.

7. Problems arising from their own personality or learning abilities

I highlight the Kinder et al. causes (as opposed to some of the others that have been put forward) because Daniel attributed his own absenteeism (to varying degrees) to at least four⁸ of the causes on Kinder's list and Daniel's teachers suggested a further two⁹. The only cause on the list that no one suggested was bullying.

One of the primary reasons Daniel offered for his cutting class, was a personal distrust of Mrs. Dawkins connected to the IEP meeting in which Daniel felt that more than any other teacher she had let him down by not listening to what he wanted. Even six months later in May he would point to the IEP meeting as a reason for not attending the class.

Why would I go to her? Why would I trust her? She showed whose side she was on at that meeting. Let them kick me out. (Daniel)

The other reason Daniel most frequently cited for not attending Mrs. Dawkins' class was related to the content and delivery of the curriculum (or in Daniel's opinion, the lack there of). As Daniel put it:

You can't even call it a class. It's babysitting! I'm too old for a babysitter. I don't need it. Like if she taught anything new I might be able to understand it, but we just do homework and watch Charlie drool. (Daniel)

At least part of Daniel's assessment was accurate. The primary activity in the class was the completion of homework assignments. However, it should also be noted that Mrs. Dawkins was a very active teacher who often used those homework assignments to review and reinforce the concepts that the

⁸ 1. The influence of friends and peers, 2. Relationships with teachers, 3. The content and delivery of curriculum, 4. The classroom context.

⁹ 1. Family factors 2. Problems arising from their own personality or learning abilities

students were getting in their other classes. Daniel's oft stated belief that he did not 'need a review' may explain his discounting of this teaching as 'babysitting'. Daniel's comment about watching one of the students drool may also have been significant. For Daniel the presence of two of the more visibly impaired students who the school identified as 'developmentally disabled', Charlie and Jeff, was seen as further proof that he did not belong in the class.

It's a good place for them [Jeff and Charlie]. They need the help and someone to work with them and stuff, but I'm not like that, I can do it on my own
(Daniel)

The interesting thing about this is that Daniel sees the class as useful to Jeff and Charlie because of the disabled identity he ascribes to them, and in doing so his own lack of access to or rejection of a disabled self identity becomes clear. While it is not clear whether accessing a disabled identity would have changed Daniel's feelings towards Mrs. Dawkins' class, if his own words are to be believed, it might have.

GB: Which class is the most difficult?

Daniel: Definitely English.

GB: Why is it the toughest?

Daniel: Cause I hate reading.

GB: Is this something you could get help with in Mrs. Dawkins' class?

Daniel: I guess if I needed help, it would be, but really the problem is just that I don't like doing it.

That Daniel felt he didn't need help was clear. However, his grades during this time may have indicated otherwise. In English and History his grades fell from a C+/B- average to a D+/C- as his cutting expanded beyond just

Mrs. Dawkins' class. Even in math (Daniel's favorite class) his grade dropped from a B- to a C+. Daniel attributed the change in his grades more toward a growing feeling of apathy toward school that he was feeling than to his missing so many classes. On more than one occasion he told me 'I just don't care about school anymore'. Whether Daniel's grades fell because of his cutting or his apathy or some other reason is unclear, but it does seem clear that all of them can be traced to the IEP meeting. On this both Daniel and Mrs. Dawkins would agree.

Yeah, after that [the IEP meeting] none of it mattered. They don't care what I want! Why care what they want?
(Daniel)

We probably could have, I mean I know we could have handled that one better. After that IEP we lost him [Daniel]. I don't know what way would have been better but I can't think of a way it could have turned out worse for him. A lot of us have tried to draw him back in, but he doesn't want any of it.
(Mrs. Dawkins, Assisted Education Teacher)

Both saw the IEP meeting as the key (albeit negative) moment in Daniel's school year. Both recognized this meeting as where Daniel's absenteeism and dropping grades originated.

Daniel's cutting eventually caught the attention of the school administration. The first four times he was called into the office Daniel received detentions. The fifth came in May after Daniel had ended about a month of good attendance with a string of cut classes. Daniel was suspended for three days. Although he said that his parents were furious with him, Daniel seemed unfazed by the suspension and even found it somewhat humorous.

They want to punish me for missing classes by telling me I can't go to classes. That's some group of

geniuses running this place. If I was anorexic, would they send me to bed without my dinner.

When the suspension was over, Daniel had to come in with his parents to talk the situation over with the vice principal. According to Daniel, it was at this meeting that the school first broached¹⁰ the idea of Daniel registering for the next year at the local alternative high school. He said that his parents were resistant to the idea, thinking that it would either reduce his chances of getting a diploma, or that it would be a less valuable diploma. Daniel, on the other hand, seemed to like the idea, as a means of escape from Red Rock:

I can't wait to get out of this place... Anywhere else will be better.
(Daniel)

Whether or not the alternative school was going to be better is unclear. What is clear is that in most instances Red Rock did not see the alternative school as a better option, but rather as an option of last resort. As the Vice Principal explained:

We try and avoid Ravine¹¹ [the alternative school] unless we think the student will only benefit with a change of scenery. It's not an option we suggest unless everything else hasn't worked. It's supposed to be for at risk students, but we graduate at least as high a percentage of our at risk students, so why make a kid change schools if he doesn't have to.
(Mr. Lurie, Vice Principal)

A number of the teachers also indicated that they felt that going to the alternative school wasn't the best thing for most students. Citing both the lower perceived status of the alternative school, as well as an increased

¹⁰ By all accounts it was suggested as a possible solution, but was not something that the school pushed particularly hard for.

¹¹ Pseudonym.

likelihood of the student opting for a GED¹² a number of the teachers indicated that they felt that sending a student to the alternative school served to limit the students future options:

Some of them may end up in community college but for most of them that's [the alternative school] the end of the line. And then it's off to work.

(Mrs. Demps, Math teacher)

In relation to Daniel, only three of his teachers felt that the alternative school might be the right place for him. The others either weren't sure what was best for him, or believed he should continue at Red Rock. In the end it was Daniel who pushed for the change in school. There was a second meeting with his parents and according to both Daniel and Mrs. Dawkins, Daniel convinced both his parents and the school to make the change. Mrs. Dawkins said:

I'm not in love with it, but we've seen how things work when we don't consider what he wants, so let's try this and see if he can't turn things around.

(Mrs. Dawkins)

Daniel's attendance did improve for his last month at Red Rock. It is not clear if that was tied to finally being listened to or his parents anger at his suspension.

There is nothing within the IEP process as it is defined by IDEA that mandates how student voices are to be valued. The fact that it is not required for students to be a part of the team, combined with the extremely high value education has traditionally placed on professional expertise would seem to point to the ableism built into the law. It can be seen in the unquestioned assumptions about who will know best and who should be

¹² A graduate equivalency degree (GED). While it is intended as the equivalent of a high school diploma, it was seen by the teachers as having a lesser value.

listened to. Daniel's cutting served as a form of resistance, a protest against the low value his knowledge, voice and expertise were afforded in the IEP process. While this protest did not get Daniel his original desire (to go to Red Rock without having to attend classes in the resource room), it did force the school to listen to him when he revised his preferred placement (the alternative school).

***'They believe in me. (...) she don't matter.'* Disabled students and Teachers**

Chapter three of this thesis explored the role that teachers play in limiting disabled students' experience of Red Rock. In this case study I would like to focus on one student's experience of two different teachers. One who viewed him as unacceptable and deficient, and another who saw him as acceptable and highly capable. We will see how at times these competing visions served as something of a tug of war on his view of himself as a student.

Jorgé

I met Jorgé in my second week at Red Rock, when I asked him if I could interview him about an incident for which his brother (Hernando) had been expelled from the school. I had already known his name from the list the school had given me of all of the students being served by the assisted education department. He was in tenth grade and so it was his first year at Red Rock after having spent one year at the middle school where he had first been identified as needing special education. Jorgé, his brother, sister and mother had immigrated from southern Mexico two and a half years earlier to join his father who was working in the United States. In our initial interview Jorgé was emphatic in stressing that their emigration had been

legal and that his family had ‘used a lawyer and got green cards¹³’. It was never clear to me if this stress was out of pride or because he was unsure of what my intentions or agenda were.

The previous year one of Jorge’s middle school teachers had referred him to the school district for testing. The educational psychologist’s assessment said that:

Jorgé has considerable delays in his linguistic development in both English and Spanish. He performs slightly better with spoken language than written, but tests below average on both.
(Educational psychologists report from Jorge’s IEP)

Because of this assessment, Jorge was automatically assigned an assisted education supervisor¹⁴ when he arrived at Red Rock. While the school had assigned Mr. Forrest as Jorge’s supervisor, Jorge in interviews was unaware of Mr. Forrest being anything more than one of his math teachers and a ‘nice teacher’.

Sanctuary: Mrs Aguilar

The teacher Jorge viewed as an advisor and the only teacher he seemed to trust was Mrs. Aguilar, his English as a second language (ESL) teacher. As he put it: ‘She the only one who like us(...) the Mexican kids.’. Jorge was in Mrs. Aguilar’s ESL class. He also saw her many days after school for extra help with his work and could often be found in her classroom during lunch and other free time. Many of the students that the school identified as ‘Hispanic’ recognized Mrs. Aguilar as the lone ‘Latina’ teacher at the school and viewed her room as something of a sanctuary in an otherwise hostile environment.

¹³ The ID card the U.S. uses as documentation of officially approved immigration status. An immigrant cannot work legally without one. It should be noted that Jorge’s emphasis may also have been a reading of the political climate in the region which was and is rather hostile to undocumented immigrants.

¹⁴ The school’s equivalent of an academic advisor.

It's safe. People leave you alone when you are there.
 Even teachers are nicer when you're in there. They
 know we are her students and she'll stand up for us.
 (Sonia, 18; 12th grade)

Jorgé saw Mrs. Aguilar as his lifeline in the school. He valued her for both her teaching and for the fact that she treated him as someone who was capable of learning.

She teach me so much. When other teachers act like I stupid, she explains. She the only one who know I can do it. If I don't understand in English she tell me in Spanish. She the best teacher I ever have. (Jorgé)

He went to her whenever he had questions about homework, his other lessons, and even filling out school forms. This was by no means unusual and was similar to the relationship many of Mrs. Aguilar's ESL students had with her.

It was clear that Mrs. Aguilar viewed Jorgé in a way that no other teacher in the school seemed to. Mrs. Aguilar recognized how hard he worked, how much he wanted to learn, and was the only teacher who took the time to let him know that he was capable; in effect, she viewed him as a highly acceptable learner:

She [Mrs. Aguilar] believe in us the other teachers they just see Mexicans (Jorge)

It was this, as much as anything, that kept Jorgé in the school and working hard after his brother was kicked out. Hernando was expelled for smoking marijuana on the school grounds. The teacher who accused him said that she was 'fairly certain' that Jorgé had been with the group of boys who were smoking, but later said she 'might have been mistaken' when Mrs. Aguilar the ESL teacher said that Jorgé had been in her room getting help with his homework at the time. As Jorgé put it:

When they kick out Hernando and tried kick out me too. I think okay I go, but she tell me to stay for me. She the only reason I still here.

(Jorgé)

Jorgé saw Mrs. Aguilar as the only one in the school who actually believed in him and the only teacher who deserved his trust.

She do what she says she gonna do. She don't lie to you or nothing.

(Jorgé)

While Mrs. Aguilar's room represented a safe haven for Jorgé, other teacher's rooms represented hostile territory.

Hostile Territory: Mrs. Reeves

If there was a teacher whom Jorgé viewed as the polar opposite of Mrs. Aguilar, it was Mrs. Reeves. Mrs. Reeves was Jorgé's English teacher. As Jorgé described their relationship:

She hate me, I hate her! Nada mas!¹⁵

(Jorgé)

Mrs. Reeves, without going to the extreme of the word 'hate', expressed similar sentiments:

I've been at this school for four years and I've never encountered a student who gets so far under my skin. I can handle the ones who are hostile and even the ones that just struggle. Jorgé just doesn't care. He doesn't. Puts no effort into anything. Ask his other teachers, they'll tell you how lazy he is. Well, everyone except for Patricia [Mrs. Aguilar], but well she's got her favorites. (...) I know he's got language problems, that he wasn't well educated coming over here from Mexico but you'd like to see him try.

(Mrs. Reeves)

¹⁵

'Nothing more'!

There are a few things that need to be pulled out of this quotation. Mrs. Reeves' statement that Jorgé 'gets so far under my skin' appeared to be true. In observing many of her classes, Mrs. Reeves' reaction to Jorgé was noticeable; she seemed less patient in dealing with him, more suspicious of the things he said and less flexible with him than with most of her other students. Behaviors that she either ignored or did not see from other students elicited detentions for Jorgé.

The second thing is the assertion that Jorgé was one of Mrs. Aguilar's favorites and that this made her (Mrs Aguilar) somewhat biased towards him, unlike the other teachers at the school. I later asked Mrs. Reeves about this:

We all have favorites, but I think Patricia sees herself as sort of the ... uh... protector of the Hispanic kids. It's almost like those are the only kids that exist for her here. I know she has other students but I don't know if she always remembers.
(Mrs. Reeves)

Mrs. Reeves dismisses Mrs. Aguilar's advocacy as a bias based on her perceptions of Mrs Aguilar's identity as 'Hispanic'. Derrick Bell (1992) has referred to this as the 'First Rule of racial standing', which states:

No matter their experience or expertise, blacks' statements involving race are deemed 'special pleading' and thus not entitled to serious consideration.
(Bell, 1992; p.111)

While Bell is speaking specifically about African Americans, there is no reason to think that in other contexts, other minoritized people would not also be subject to the same rules of racial standing. In this case Mrs. Aguilar's opinion about Jorgé is being portrayed as not carrying weight, because it is more about a shared cultural affiliation than about a fellow professional's beliefs. The reality that Mrs. Aguilar's cultural background

was vastly different from Jorge's (they were born in different countries, had different mother tongues, came from different socio-economic backgrounds) was lost under the shared 'Hispanic' identity ascribed to them by Mrs. Reeves. This is nothing new; a number of researchers have noted the artificial origins and racist nature of the term 'Hispanic'. 'Hispanic' has emerged primarily as a category employed for government demographic use and has little to do with people's own identifications (e.g. Gimenez, 1997; Marrow, 2003).

Going back to Mrs. Reeves' statement about Jorge, her comments that he 'puts no effort into anything' and that 'you'd like to see him try' were incongruous with my observations. Jorge worked harder and put more of an effort into doing his work for Mrs. Reeves' English class than he did for any other class he took. He explained it as a very conscious decision:

...she hate me! so I have to work harder so she don't
do anything to me
(Jorge)

Jorge spent four days a week after school, a minimum of an hour each day, in Mrs. Aguilar's class getting help with his assignments. By Mrs. Aguilar's estimate, 90% of that help was for Mrs. Reeves class.

The situation in which Jorge sought help from one teacher for another teachers class was not particularly unusual for the students that Red Rock identified as disabled. Many of the school's disabled students had time built in to their schedules to work with their assisted education supervisor as a means of helping them keep up with their classes. In this case, however, it positioned Jorge as something of a disputed territory between the two teachers.

No man's land: Jorge

The dispute was not over who Jorge worked with or what he needed to learn or do. What was disputed was who Jorge was. Was he as Mrs. Reeves asserted 'very lazy' and 'not the smartest kid in the class', or was he the 'the very hard working' and 'extremely capable' student that Mrs. Aguilar believed he was. Jorge was very much aware of the pull both these visions had on him:

She [Mrs. Reeves] want me to feel stupid. I hate that so I go to Señora Aguilar. She knows I can do stuff, she explain things to me so I understand.
(Jorge)

It was his understanding of this situation that made Jorge work so hard with Mrs. Aguilar to do the work for Mrs. Reeves' class. He wanted to prove one teacher right and the other wrong.

Mi madre¹⁶ y Señora [Mrs. Aguilar] they know I'm smart. I don't want them to be wrong so I work hard... The other one [Mrs. Reeves] I don't want happy so I work hard also.
(Jorge)

If Mrs. Aguilar was right, Jorge got to be the intelligent and hard working student she saw, as opposed to the lazy and stupid student that Mrs. Reeves made him feel like.

As the year progressed this tug of war over who Jorge was, reached a head when Mrs. Reeves gave Jorge's class an assignment to write a poem that expressed an emotion. Mrs. Reeves gave the assignment on a Monday to be turned in on the Thursday of the same week. When she told the class about the assignment, she appeared to look at Jorge when she said:

¹⁶ 'My mother'

I will not accept any late papers and if you write it by hand, it must be legible. If I can't read it, you will get an F. No exceptions.

(Mrs. Reeves)

Writing was something Jorgé said was very difficult for him. He said that he had trouble 'saying what I want to say', as well as with spelling. For these reasons he began working on his poem the same day the assignment was given. He went to Mrs. Aguilar for advice on how to write the poem. He said that he understood from Mrs. Reeves that a poem did not have to rhyme, but that he was not sure how to go about writing one. Mrs. Aguilar asked him if he knew what he wanted the poem to be about. Jorgé asked her if he could write about his grandfather's death. She suggested that it might be easier if he started writing in Spanish and then translated it to English. She helped him find a few examples of poems on the internet both in Spanish and in English and explained some basic poetic conventions that he had heard from Mrs. Reeves including metre, allegory and metaphor. He then wrote (in Spanish) three of the four verses he would eventually turn in to Mrs. Reeves checking with Mrs. Aguilar as he wrote for reassurance. This reassurance was what Jorgé valued most:

I didn't know if I was doing it right but she tell me that it's good. That helps me a lot. She help with the English too, but that was easy, just looking up words.

(Jorgé)

The next day Jorgé finished the poem and with Mrs. Aguilar's supervision (the word she said that she preferred to assistance) he began to translate it. The following day he finished the translation with Mrs. Aguilar asking him questions about particular word choices to see if the poem conveyed the meanings he intended. Mrs. Aguilar then suggested to Jorgé that knowing Mrs. Reeves dislike of his handwriting maybe he should type it up on the computer so that Mrs. Reeves would have nothing to criticize. Jorgé agreed

and though he was fairly slow on the keyboard, managed to finish it before he went home. He submitted it to Mrs. Reeves the next day and was very proud of the work he had done.

It was hard, but I did it good. I think I get a good grade.

(Jorgé)

I asked Jorgé about the assignment five days after he submitted it. I had been talking with one of the vice-principals earlier that day when Mrs. Reeves came in to ask him for some advice on what to do about a student she suspected of cheating. She said that she had no evidence but that the work was just too good to be the student's. The vice-principal said that if there was no evidence of cheating, the only thing that she might be able to do is ask him enough questions about the work so that it might become clear whether or not it was the student's work or someone else's. The following day after her class she did just that. The conversation went as follows:

Mrs. Reeves: Jorge, can I speak to you?

Jorgé: Yes.

Mrs. Reeves: Can I ask you a few things about your poetry assignment?

Jorgé: Mhm. [nods head yes]

Mrs. Reeves: Is this your poem?

Jorgé: Yes.

Mrs. Reeves: Did you write it yourself?

Jorgé: Yes!

Mrs. Reeves: Can you tell me what it's about?

Jorgé: It's about when my grandfather die and how it make me feel.

Mrs. Reeves: How it *made* you feel. And what does the poem say you felt?

Jorgé: Sad and alone. I miss him... I wrote this poem.

Mrs. Reeves: Did anyone help you write it?

Jorgé: Señora Aguilar read it and help me with some words.

Mrs. Reeves: That's all she did?

Jorgé: Yes. I wrote it!

Mrs. Reeves: Thank you. That will be all.

The exchange is offered for two reasons, firstly, because it was a significant event in their relationship, and secondly, because it demonstrated not only Jorgé's awareness of what Mrs. Reeves was thinking (that the poem was too good for him to have written that he must have cheated), but also his willingness to resist her view of him. When I spoke to Jorgé about the meeting afterwards he said as much:

She think I'm stupid. If she think I cheat, it must be good.
(Jorgé)

He further demonstrated this when he got the assignment back and asked Mrs. Reeves why he only got a 'B' for it. Mrs. Reeves told him that a 'B' was a good grade and that while the poem 'was a huge improvement on his usual work', it didn't warrant an 'A'. Jorgé accepted this but told me afterwards that he knew she would have given anyone else an 'A'. Whether or not this is true is unimportant. What is significant here is that it shows Jorgé not only rejecting Mrs. Reeves view of him as an unacceptable learner, but also shows him taking ownership of Mrs. Aguilar's view of him as an acceptable learner. This did nothing to shift Mrs. Reeves view of him

but it did have an effect in his other classes all but one of which saw his grades rise from the previous term.

In chapter three we saw the ways in which teachers' narratives and understandings of students can serve to limit and constrain students' opportunities and successes. There is nothing in Jorgé's story that would contradict this. What does become clear from this case is a student's ability to leverage one teacher's counter-narrative as a means of resisting another teacher's positioning of them (the student) as unacceptable. In this case Jorgé was able to hold on to Mrs. Aguilar's belief in him as an acceptable learner and use it to both resist and reject Mrs. Reeves' view of him as an unacceptable learner.

For Jorgé, Mrs. Aguilar's (and his mother's) vision of him as someone who could learn and have success in school was a debt to be repaid as well as a foundation to build on.

I work for them, they believe in me. Mrs. Reeve she don't matter. (Jorgé)

It was this foundation which allowed Jorgé to defend himself when Mrs. Reeves was eager to believe he had cheated. When Mrs. Reeves relayed the details of her conversation with Jorgé to the vice principal, he told her to accept the work as Jorgé's. He said that Jorgé clearly knows the content of the work and unless Mrs. Reeves wanted to get involved in 'a mess of accusing a fellow teacher of helping a student cheat', she should let it go and give Jorgé the good grade his work deserved.

While chapter four highlights the limited space that teachers' perceptions of students allows those students in shaping their own identity, Jorgé's story

would indicate that students are able to find this space in the disparity between the competing visions of who they are. In this case Jorge was able to craft a view of himself as an acceptable learner largely because one teacher saw him that way. This is not to imply that Jorge had no input into this identity, or that student identities are solely shaped for them. Jorge did the work, he chose to believe in Mrs. Aguilar's view of him. That students are active participants in crafting the discourses that shape their identities however, does not negate the fact that the power relationships between students and teachers are heavily slanted toward the teachers.

***'As if I'm a different person who they don't know'* Disabled students and nondisabled peers**

Chapter five focused on the ways in which friendship was a terrain governed by nondisabled students in ways that regulated disabled students' experiences of schooling. This section will focus on one student's experience of going from being seen as an ideal or acceptable peer to being seen almost overnight as an impossible peer. What is interesting is not that this shift took place or how quickly it occurred, but the way in which the student resisted it, and the way she positioned and privileged her own competing discourse in reaction to this shift. While Jorge's case study in the previous section showed the way students utilize, engage and disregard teachers' discourses about them, the following case study shows how disabled students actively engage in crafting and positioning their own discourses.

Kelly: from acceptable to impossible

In early February several students were in an accident as they left the school, when the car they were crammed into hit another car. Most of the

students suffered only minor injuries; however one of them, Kelly, a tenth grader who was 15, damaged two spinal vertebrae and needed to be airlifted to a hospital. Three months after the accident Kelly would return to the school for two weeks, before eventually deciding to switch to homeschooling.

The day after the accident Mr. Lurie (the Vice Principal) came in to all of the 10th grade classes to tell the students what had happened, to let them know that Kelly was being operated on that day and to tell them that there were counselors available for anyone who wanted to talk.

In the class in which I heard the announcement one of the students asked Mr. Lurie if Kelly would be all right. He said that ‘provided the operation goes well she should be alright, but there is a likelihood that she may be paralyzed.’ At this point there was an uncomfortable groan from the class. Tina the girl sitting closest to me said to Maria the person sitting in front of her:

Tina: She was such a nice person.

Maria: I know can you imagine being paralyzed?

Tina: Ugh! [Shaking as if to get something off her back] I don’t even want to think about it!

There are two things particularly worth noting from this exchange. Tina’s use of the past tense ‘was’, implies either that Kelly no longer was nice or more likely that Kelly’s life was now over. Other conversations around the school at the time seem to imply that the accident (at least for Kelly) was on a scale similar to or, for some, worse than death.

It makes you think about stuff, you know, like she had her whole life in front of her and now she’s gonna be in a wheelchair. When I got home yesterday I just hugged my whole family and told them I was

glad that they were alive and alright, even my brother. (Cindy, 16, 11th grade)

I can't imagine anything more horrible! I think I'd rather die. (Sean, 17, 12th Grade)

The words that best sum up Kelly's peers' attitude at the time of the accident would be 'pity' and 'profound discomfort'. Returning to the earlier conversation between Tina and Maria, it is easy to see this discomfort embodied in Tina's guttural 'Ugh', as well as her attempt to physically shake the very thought out of her mind as if it were something slimy crawling up her back. This discomfort was something that Kelly herself felt acutely when she came back to school in the spring.

Yeah, they were just like really uncomfortable. I would come out of class and see a friend and they would like go into a panic looking for the closest stairs.
(Kelly)

While, as further reading in this section will indicate, Kelly's friends viewed the change in their relationship with Kelly as something solely emanating from her alone, her observation makes it clear that her friends actively constructed her exclusion, not only avoiding her but seeking out a path that was inaccessible to her as a means of escaping their discomfort.

To Kelly this discomfort was far more pronounced in her relations with her friends than with either people she hadn't known before the accident, or people she had known only in passing. It was something that eventually led her to withdraw both from her friends and the school.

Yeah. People who I didn't really know at all, they come talk to me a lot more than my friends, my friends they see me, they turn the other way trying not to make eye contact. They act like they haven't seen me. And if they do they always have something they

need to do or somewhere they need to be.
(Kelly)

Kelly's reading of her friends' attitudes towards her was accurate, although most of them perceived this change as something emanating from Kelly herself.

I can't imagine what it's like to be like that [disabled], she's so brave. I really miss her, we used to have so much fun just hanging out and stuff, but you can understand why she doesn't want to come back. When you can't do anything and used to do so much.
(Dina, 16 10th Grade)

In Dina's statement it is clear that she viewed Kelly's withdrawal from school as being tied to the many things she believed Kelly could no longer do. She says that she misses 'hanging out' with Kelly, yet according to Kelly, the only time Dina or any of her other friends came to see her was when they all came as a group.

No one has ever been over here to see me by themselves, the only time they came was when the [Basketball] team came over all together. They gave me a card and then left after like ten minutes. They said they didn't want to tire me out, but I wasn't tired. It was like they were afraid if they stayed they might catch it or something.
(Kelly)

Kelly's friends saw her status as disabled as something that couldn't help but make their friendship with her (as it had been) impossible. Dina is a case in point while certainly there was an aspect of her friendship with Kelly that was tied to being on the junior varsity basketball team together; the two had been friends long before that during the three years they attended Red Rock middle school. By the accounts of both girls their friendship had been far more about 'hanging out' and 'laughing' than it had been about basketball.

Going back to Dina's statement it is clear that she views the friendship as something that due to Kelly being disabled is no longer accessible to her. While this bore no relationship to Kelly's reality (she was certainly able to hang out and be someone's friend), to Dina's understanding Kelly's disability made the friendship impossible.

To many of her friends Kelly's new positioning as an impossible peer was unquestionably due to the contrast between her formerly perceived identity as an athlete and her recently acquired status as a disabled person. Students at the school often identified each other by either who they spent time with or how they spent that time. Under this system Kelly had been seen as a 'Jock' or 'athlete' and her friends fit that description as well. Kelly's disabled status troubled this positioning, particularly in the minds of her friends. Almost all of them spoke of the situation with discomfort lingering on this shift.

I can't think how difficult it's been for her...did you know her before the accident? ...She was such a good athlete! That's all we did, played basketball and other stuff. Now she can't really do anything. I really miss her.

(Claudia, 16; 10th Grade)

Mostly we played sports and hung out. It's kind of hard to do that now.

(Sherry, 16; 10th Grade)

She just can't do stuff yet, you know. She came back to school and it was too much and now she's back home. I'm sure once she gets used to it and gets her strength back, she'll be back.

(Amber, 15; 10th Grade)

Many of Kelly's friends tied the fact that they no longer saw her to the accident and their belief that she could no longer participate in athletic

activities as well as to her choice to switch to home schooling after returning to Red Rock for two weeks. These attributions, as well as Kelly's new status as an impossible peer are clear in Claudia, Sherry and Amber's statements. The statements by the girls that 'Now she can't really do anything', 'it's kind of hard to do that now.', and 'She just can't do stuff', besides being inaccurate (many wheelchair users play numerous sports including basketball, and hanging out is certainly not a problem) show how the girls discursively construct Kelly as impossible. In forming these discourses Claudia, Sherry and Amber create a reality in which their diminished friendship with Kelly has nothing to do with the discomfort they felt with her newly acquired impairments, but was rather evidence of the limitations the impairments placed on Kelly. While it is clear that Kelly's friends withdrew from her out of discomfort, what is more interesting and complex is Kelly's decision to withdraw from them as well as from the school.

Withdrawal as defiance

Three months after the accident Kelly returned to the school for a two week period. I managed to observe one of the classes she was in during that time. The teachers were very willing to both accommodate her access needs and help her catch up on the work she had missed. Kelly seemed focused on her studies. After two weeks her parents called the school to say they had decided to home school Kelly for the remainder of the year. The school didn't ask many questions about the decision and most of the faculty assumed that it must be tied to Kelly's physical limitations.

Kelly's choice to switch to homeschooling was also taken by her friends as further evidence of her impossible status. As can be seen in Amber's statement above, it is Kelly's adjustment and lack of strength that get

credited with the decision to home school. By both Kelly and her parent's accounts, however, this decision was made solely in response to the avoidance behavior of Kelly's friends.

I figured if they don't want to see me, that's fine I'll stay away. I've learned who really matters in my life and who I matter to.

(Kelly)

Her friends were just making life miserable for her and we thought this might offer her some space to figure out how to deal with them.

(Doris, Kelly's mother)

For Kelly the decision to stay away from her friends and the school was a pro-active means of defending herself, and was not tied to her physical impairment but was rather a response to her friends' mistreatment.

I just decided that I didn't want to be around that. I deserve to be around people who care about me, who respect me. Who like me for me not what I can do with them.

(Kelly)

Kelly didn't see withdrawing from school as admitting defeat to disability. She saw it as an act of defiance to her former friends; a refusal to be mistreated.

Why should I put up with people treating me like that? I don't deserve it and I won't accept it. I have to use a wheelchair now, it's not like it's something contagious or anything.

(Kelly)

Kelly's reaction to her friends in many ways came from her own reading of the shift in her friend's perceptions of her from an acceptable peer to an impossible peer. It was a shift she had clearly rejected as artificial and erroneous.

They just weren't very receptive, and they didn't really...the people who I knew they were uncomfortable and stuff, so I said fine, I'll just school at home. I used to go a lot and I used to really enjoy school because everyone would be really fun, and you know I had lots of friends actually. And then after the accident, people trickled away, and they just ...It was like they wanted something out of the friendship and they feel they won't get it right now because I can't. It was like fun to go with me to the mall or something before, but now I'm in a wheelchair and people think it's not going to be as fun and stuff, because I can still pretty much do most of the same things (...) and people, I don't really know how to explain it, they just really don't get it.

(Kelly)

Kelly was not in denial about being disabled, nor was she rejecting a disabled identity she simply refused to be identified solely by disability. As she put it:

This is part of who I am now, and that's okay, I've learned a lot about myself since the accident but it doesn't define me. It's part of who I am, not who I am.

(Kelly)

It was this notion of being defined by and rejected for the disability that Kelly bristled at. She felt that the way her ascribed identity was being shifted was artificial and in no way connected to the reality of who she was.

Resistance unrecognized

Prior to the accident Kelly had been seen as the very definition of the acceptable peer and student; she was a good student with good grades, lots of friends and someone who participated in many activities at the school. The shift to being seen as an impossible peer was something rather jarring for her.

It was a shock, you know, these are people I was close to, people I confided in, people I trusted... And now it's like they're afraid of me or something. As if I'm a different person who they don't know.

(Kelly)

Having been seen as so acceptable before the accident made Kelly acutely aware of this shift in people's perceptions of her as unacceptable and undesirable. It also made her more determined to resist that shift and hold on to her view of herself as acceptable/desirable.

I'm still the same person, I can still go to the mall and have fun and stuff, I still like to talk about all the same things. It makes me mad that they don't see that. That they see this thing [points to the wheel chair] and think I must be different. (...) I just want them to see that I'm still me.

(Kelly)

This resistance took on several forms, not only Kelly's withdrawal from the school but also her unwillingness to engage with anyone ascribing an undesirable or impossible identity to her. While many of her friends perceived this withdrawal as evidence of Kelly's impaired identity, Kelly very much framed it as resistance; an active refusal of her impossible status. This refusal was a conscious decision calculated to maintain Kelly's perception of herself as an acceptable/desirable peer.

I just decided that that's their problem and that if they couldn't see me for who I am, I wasn't going to let them change the way I see myself. They're just not worth it.

(Kelly)

The power of this resistance may have been limited to the people with whom Kelly did engage. There was no evidence that any of her friends from school viewed her withdrawal as anything other than confirmation of her

impossible peer status. The dividends of this resistance may have been found in her post accident relationships. According to Kelly, since the accident she had grown much closer to several of her friends from the church she attended. She felt they were more willing to engage with her as a multi-dimensional person and didn't just see a disability.

They [friends from church] see me and not just the wheelchair. It's one of the reasons I knew I didn't need my friends from school because if they can't deal with who I am, why should I deal with them?
(Kelly)

According to Kelly, these friends were:

...just more willing to see me as I am. You know, they don't treat me as special or someone to pity; they're just my friends, and they like being around me.
(Kelly)

Deborah Youdell (2004, 2006) has described similar refusals of wounded sexuality and gender identities. She argues that while peer discourses have a power that is steeped in historicity and are hegemonically normative, the discourses of resistance also play significant role in reshaping perception.

It at once shows the functioning of chains of enduring discourses and how students tacitly and knowingly refuse the wounded and denigrated identities ascribed to them. These students can be seen to read, remake, and exceed the limits of normative discourse.
(Youdell, 2004; pp.489-90)

While this argument does not mean that Kelly's refusal of an impossible identity will wholly determine how the world sees her, it does recognize that she has a role in shaping that discourse. She is not simply the construction of others but is actively engaged in constructing herself for others. Viewing it this way, Kelly's decision to withdraw from people who are unwilling to

recognize or acknowledge her own discourse of self, can be seen as a strategic act designed to advantage that discourse.

In the case study prior to this one (Jorgé) it became clear that students were able to latch on to particular competing discourses teachers construct around their identities to create spaces in which they could operate as acceptable learners. In Kelly's story we see how students can actively engage these discourses themselves. Kelly was not only able to articulate a discourse to compete with her friends' vision of her as impossible, but to actively work to privilege that discourse in her life. Her withdrawal from her former friends may have been taken as confirmation of her impossibility to many of them, but within Kelly's life it allowed her space to assert a vision of herself as acceptable; a vision of self which her new friends were willing and able to engage with.

While this is not to minimize the power of the unacceptable and impossible peer discourses (described in chapter five) to marginalize disabled students, it is important to recognize that those classifications do not go unchallenged, that disabled students are actively and strategically working to shape their own positioning. It is also necessary to note that while Kelly's shift from acceptable peer to impossible peer made her situation somewhat unique, her resistance to that impossible construction was not unique, and could be seen in the daily activities of many Red Rock students.

Conclusion

The three cases presented in this chapter allow for a more three dimensional understanding of disabled students experience of inclusive education than is apparent from the previous three chapters. They do nothing to negate the findings of the chapters but rather add depth to them. While those earlier

chapters focused on the forces acting upon disabled students, these case studies allow us to see that disabled students are more than just passive victims of oppression; moreover, it is clear that they actively resist, reshape and reposition themselves as they encounter these forces.

While it was clear in Daniel's story that the policies and structures of the IEP process gave his voice little or no weight, Daniel himself found a way to be heard. It may not have been the most academically productive way, and it may have cost Daniel as much as it helped him, but he found a way to get the school to take his opinions and preferences seriously. In the process he made it clear that he was, more than anyone else in the process, vital to achieving the goals set out in the IEP.

Likewise Jorgé's case shows the way students are able to utilize teachers' competing discourses about them to resist discourses which constitute them as unacceptable. Jorgé was able to use Mrs Aguilar's view of him as an acceptable learner to challenge and resist Mrs. Reeves view of him as unacceptable. Where chapter four showed the limited space teachers at Red Rock allowed students in shaping their own identities, Jorgé's story illustrates that students are not solely passive constructs of teachers' perceptions. They are able to engage, resist and reject teachers' discourses to a certain extent. Understanding this problem does not mean that we don't acknowledge the unequal power relationship between teachers and students, but rather that we recognize disabled students as active rather than passive participants.

Similarly Kelly found the space to resist being deemed an impossible peer by her friends by reclassifying *them* as unacceptable to *her*. While at first glance her withdrawal from school would seem to be purely an a sign of her own exclusion, it is clear that for Kelly this decision was about resisting the

exclusionary forces she was encountering by not accepting her friends' understandings of who she was after her accident. Like Daniel's case, this resistance may not have taken the most conventional form, but it did allow Kelly the space for an identity of her own crafting, with friends who were able to recognize and appreciate that identity.

All three students sought and found space to resist the forces acting upon them, although it does not mean that all disabled students have or can find such space. Indeed, as Daniel's case illustrates, even when the resistance is successful, its consequences are not always uniformly positive.

Nevertheless, the analysis highlights that disabled students can and do resist. This is by no means meant to minimize the exclusionary and ableist forces aligned against them, because as the previous chapters have shown these are both numerous and potent. However, there is value in recognizing the subtle and ingenious ways disabled students have found to resist, not only in the value of the recognition itself, but also in the possibility that in recognizing these acts we can create more opportunities for them.

7

Conclusion

While I was writing this thesis, I have to admit to having been distracted by another academic interest. It began as a somewhat undefined feeling related to some of the horrible experiences (including physical and mental abuse) of disabled people I would read about in the news or on Beth Haller's Media dis&dat blog¹ or hear about on the disability-research listserv². At first I think I was just trying to understand how such terrible things could happen, but as I continued to look, the growing number and frequency of these incidents presented something of bigger picture; a picture of a world in which individuals constructed as disabled were increasingly under attack; attacks which our society tacitly accepts through ableist understandings and policies. Two incidents in particular highlighted this pattern for me and began to help me see how this interest might be connected to what I was seeing as I analyzed the data for this thesis.

The first case took place in 2004 but was not widely known until 2007. The case is often referred to by the name of the six year old girl at the center of it; Ashley X. Doctors had diagnosed Ashley as having 'Static Encephalopathy with marked global developmental deficits' (Gunther & Diekema, 2006; p.1014). Static Encephalopathy is something of a catchall

¹ <http://media-dis-n-dat.blogspot.com> - A website which aggregates news stories related to disability from all over the world.

² <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=disability-research> - An international email listserv dedicated to examining disability related issues.

medical diagnosis that simply means brain damage ‘that does not change over time’ (Miller & Fountain, 2003; p.287) and can refer to any number of medical conditions. Ashley’s doctors did not offer many specifics about her ‘marked global deficits’ except that she could not walk or talk³ or feed herself. As Ashley grew her parents found it increasingly difficult to physically care for her. They approached doctors for a solution to this problem and the solution they were offered was a group of procedures that the doctors lumped together under the term ‘growth attenuation’. The procedures included a high dosage of estrogen to stop her physical growth, the removal of her breast buds to prevent her from developing breasts and the removal of her uterus to avoid menstruation. After Ashley’s parents agreed to growth attenuation, the procedures were approved by a hospital’s institutional ethics committee and carried out.

That Ashley’s parents would consider such drastic measures was not what captured my attention. Care giving can be an exhausting, stressful and ethically challenging task. It is not difficult to see how someone in such a position could perceive making that job easier, as being beneficial to the person being cared for. What was shocking for me was that the proposal had been approved by *two* levels of safeguards. First it was deemed appropriate by the team of doctors who carried out the procedures and then it was approved by the hospital’s institutional ethics committee. The doctors’ published report of the case indicates that the doctors’ perceptions of Ashley’s disability were central to their decision to go ahead with the treatment:

One might argue that being smaller might alter the way others interact with an older disabled person, perhaps tending to treat that person as a child instead

³ None of the information released by either the doctors or Ashley’s parents indicates whether or not any other forms of communication such as ‘facilitated communication’ have ever been attempted.

of an adult. Whereas this might be an important issue for a short-statured adult who is capable of normal adult interactions, it is unlikely that such 'infantilization' harms a person whose mental capacity will always remain that of a young child. In fact, for a person with a developmental age of an infant, smaller stature may actually constitute an advantage because others probably would be more likely to interact in ways that are more appropriate to that person's developmental age.
(Gunther & Diekema, 2006; p.1016)

The perceptions the doctors had of Ashley were of someone who would never be capable of communicating and whose relationships and future interactions would not be harmed by these procedures. Their actions presumed an understanding of Ashley's life experience in addition to assumptions about what she would or would not value in the future. With no one else involved in the process in a position to counter their supposition, the ethics committee accepted the doctor's conjecture and approved the procedures.

The second incident was the murder of a young girl, Danieal Kelly from my hometown of Philadelphia. Danieal was a 14 year old girl with Cerebral Palsy, who resided with her mother but was also under the protective services of the Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS). Danieal was found in her mother's home after she had starved to death. She weighed 42lbs⁴ (less than half of the expected weight for someone her age and height), and was found lying in her own waste with bed sores that were bone deep and infested with maggots. Her death was long, slow and painful. As horrifying as Danieal's death was, I was struck not only by the starvation death of a disabled child, but also by the fact that despite a minimum of nine people being in a position to prevent the tragedy no one did a thing to

⁴ 19 kgs or just over 3 stone

save her. As the Grand Jury charged with investigating Danieal's death noted:

despicable as the parents were, they were not that remarkable: there are people like that in the world. That is why DHS – and the private company hired by DHS, which called itself 'MultiEthnic Behavioral Health' – exist. Yet these agencies, whose sole function is supposed to be protecting children from such parents, passed up almost every opportunity, over a period of years, to save Danieal.
(Grand Jury investigating Danieal Kelly's death, p.2⁵)

The role of both ableism and institutional ablism in Danieal's death is unquestionable. The Grand Jury found that Danieal's mother was both embarrassed and repulsed by the child's disability and began to limit Danieal's intake of nourishment as a means of limiting how often she would have to touch and clean Danieal. The DHS caseworker who ignored five formal complaints of neglect in the case suggested to the Grand Jury:

...that Danieal not only did not need special services because of her disability, but that she was not even entitled to routine medical care or schooling.
(Grand Jury investigating Danieal Kelly's death, p.86)

With both the Asheley X and Danieal Kelly cases in the background, what became clear to me as I analysed the data from Red Rock was the extent to which institutional ablism permeates our society. The cases made it clear to me that the institutional ableism I was seeing within the education system in general and Red Rock in particular was far from atypical. The research in this thesis offers a portrait of institutional ableism at systemic, organizational and micropolitical levels as well as exploring disabled students' experiences of ableism.

In looking at institutional ableism within the scope of this project what stands out more than any other thing is the resilience and persistence of inequality. Patterns of unequal experience and achievement appear to be the constant outcome of a variety of different social processes. Indeed, the different means by which such outcomes are produced seem almost interchangeable. If in a given situation one means is more accessible than another then it will be accessed. This thesis in no way professes to offer the why in all of this. This is a much larger question that scholars from a diverse range of fields have struggled with; however, apart from knowing *why* there is a need to maintain discriminatory outcomes, knowing that this *is* a need is of great significance. What this thesis offers us is an in-depth look at some of the ways this need is being met within the education system. In the section that follows I would like to review these modes of operation.

Institutional Ableism and Disabled Students: Sophisticated Attacks and Resistance

As I have noted earlier in this thesis institutional ableism is the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their disability. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behavior that amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and ableist stereotyping which disadvantage disabled people. Chapter three of this thesis examined the ways in which institutional ableism is embedded within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA). What becomes clear in examining the text, case law and discourse of IDEA is that while the rhetoric surrounding and framing the law is one of civil rights, the reality is that the law itself and the system it establishes are saturated with ableist structures and understandings.

In focusing on the institutional ableism within IDEA one can see that some of the very language pointed to as signifying the law's inclusive intent is the same language that permits its discriminatory outcomes. The least restrictive environment (LRE) clause is perhaps the most potent example of this within IDEA. On face value the view that: 'children with disabilities must be educated in the least restrictive environment with their nondisabled peers' would seem to be a step towards a more inclusive education system. However, the mandate is qualified with the addition of the phrase: 'to the maximum extent appropriate.'

The unstated implication of this modifier is that what is seen as the least restrictive environment is not appropriate to the same level for all children; that for some disabled children a more restrictive environment might be deemed more appropriate. All of this is based on unquestioned assumptions that are embedded within the law's deficit understandings of disability. Besides creating a hierarchy between disabled and nondisabled children the ableism institutionalized within IDEA establishes a societally acceptable and legal way of discriminating against students constructed as problematic. Despite the law's focus on disabled students this discrimination in no way limits itself to disability. It has presented a means of maintaining racist segregation that the courts have otherwise determined to be illegal. This can be seen in the disproportionate representation of minority students within the special education system an issue which IDEA itself has attempted to address in its most recent incarnations. By *transposing* race and disability the system is able to maintain otherwise-illegal *racial* segregation through legal *disability* discrimination.

While IDEA has long been portrayed as civil rights legislation, a careful deconstruction of its structures and discourses reveals that it actually serves to formalize and preserve disabled students marginal status within the

education system. Rather than ending disability discrimination it merely replaced institutionalization with a more discretely covert form of inequity, while at the same time creating a means to minimize the civil rights gains made by African Americans under the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision.

In chapter four I examined institutional ableism within the pedagogical practices of a particular school. Looking at the ways in which teachers limited the space available to students in shaping their own identities within the classroom. The majority of students were perceived by their teachers as falling on either side of a dichotomy between acceptable and unacceptable learners. It became clear at Red Rock, an institution which had made a school-wide push to develop a more inclusive culture, that ableist understandings of disabled students were so deeply engrained in teachers' thinking, and in the very ways in which they understood their students, that even the inaccessibility of discourses of disability-as-deficiency was not enough to prevent the students that the school identified as learning disabled from being marginalized into an 'unacceptable learner' identity.

Just as examining IDEA showed racist ends being maintained by the accessibility of ableism, teacher/student engagement revealed ableism to be just as mercenary in preserving discriminatory outcomes. Again through the use of transposition, discourses constructing students in terms of disability as deficiency were replaced by those constructing them as deficient in terms of race, class, or gender. It also became clear that there was a third category of student, the impossible learner. Neither acceptable nor unacceptable at Red Rock these students were primarily those students the school had identified as developmentally disabled. Teacher's viewed their disabilities as the sole, immutable and defining characteristic of their personhood and as

such felt their marginalization was a natural internal limitation and not something that could truly be affected by the school's inclusive agenda.

Chapter five focused on the gate-keeping role that nondisabled students play in shaping how inclusive disabled students' experiences are. Much like the teachers, students appeared to classify each other as acceptable, unacceptable or impossible peers, further limiting the opportunities that disabled students had to shape their own positions within the school. This is not to say that this positioning was as static with peers as it appeared to be with teachers. It was influenced by factors such as location (e.g. home, the classroom, playing fields), but was determined to a far greater extent by the racist, ableist, classed, sexed and gendered assumptions that students interpreted their world through. That there were one or two exceptions in the way students divided each other only seemed to highlight the artificial nature of the processes.

The picture that emerged was that the gate-keeping role was one that nondisabled students had a deeply vested interest in and one which they actively used to preserve their hierarchical positioning within the school. They did this primarily through the governance of friendship. This was the use of friendship as a means of policing behavior and the offering, withholding and withdrawing of friendship as a way of controlling positioning, status, and access within the school, as well as within student hierarchies. Friendship was a tool which served to restrict and regulate disabled students' access to and involvement in the school.

As the case studies in chapter six show, disabled students' encounters with the institutional ableism operating within policy, pedagogy and their peer relationships were experiences they found frustrating, maddening, saddening and isolating. Despite the constrictions, obstructions and

limitations imposed upon them by the people and structures surrounding them, however, these students usually found a means and space for resistance. This resistance did not always take a form that their parents, teachers, or peers recognized as productive or good, but to the disabled students themselves it was far more satisfying than the roles being imposed upon them. Within the context of the many forces being utilized to impede disabled students' positioning, the resourcefulness these students displayed in resistance is significant. While this resourcefulness is encouraging what stands out from this research is how thoroughly ableism permeates the education system. In this context it becomes clear that the sickening cases of Ashley X and Danieal Kelly described above, are neither isolated nor exceptional, but are rather symptomatic of a deeply ableist society.

I would like to shift focus now to questions that this research has opened up for further study and suggest some future areas for research.

New Questions & Future Research

In highlighting the sophisticated means by which ableist outcomes are maintained, preserved and even furthered within the very policies and by the same people who are attempting to disrupt them, certain questions arise. If ableist and racist ends manage to survive and thrive using intersectional technologies like transposition can discrete fields of study such as Disability Studies or Critical Race Theory, truly understand them without reaching out to one another? Work at disability's intersections with race has been sporadic and limited. It is with this in mind that I believe there is still a great deal of work to be done detailing both the macro and micro-political structures and processes that facilitate the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. The concept of 'transposition', although useful, I believe offers us only a portion of the picture and there is

much more work to be done. We need to look and see if the bounty funding in IDEA has led to greater identification. It is also necessary to examine situations in which disproportionality has been reduced to identify the contextual factors and active strategies that can effect positive change.

More work is needed examining how disability intersects with other axes – a job this thesis has started by looking in particular at intersections of disability with race, but also with gender and class., that is very needed. Intersectional work has produced new and exciting insights (e.g. Bhopal and Preston eds. 2012), but to date it has largely focused on race/gender, race/class and gender/class intersections and has been under-engaged by disability studies. This is not to imply that there has been no intersectional work within disability studies there has been some very good work done (e.g. Ferri & Connor, 2006; McRuer, 2006), but far too little. I believe that the work in this thesis as well as the intersectional work from other fields (e.g. Gillborn, 2010; Leonardo, 2009; Youdell, 2006) shows the power of intersectional research to reveal what remains hidden within work with a more singular focus.

The covert nature of institutional ableism has allowed special educationists to ignore the role that discrimination plays in the success or failure of inclusive education. This thesis only begins to touch upon the multitude of ways in which ableism is embedded within the education system. As with most qualitative studies there was a great deal of data gathered which, while fascinating and important, fell outside of the scope of this project. While I may utilize it in other work it hints at a number of directions for further research. The data gathered in the classroom, in addition to highlighting the discursive constructions of teachers, also highlighted the wide range of pedagogical practices which serve in some cases to create a more inclusive environment and in others a less inclusive one. Also, having read deeply

into IDEA for the deconstruction contained within this thesis, I am aware that there is a great deal more ableism embedded within it that very much needs to be illuminated. Clauses on due process, and the identification of disabled students, as well as more detailed examination of the law's funding mechanisms will all add to our understandings of the ways in which ableism is institutionalized within the education system. I believe it would also be useful to look at other policies such as the ADA⁶ and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act that shape disabled lives, through a lens of institutional ableism.

Reflections

In my introduction to this thesis I stated that this project was very much about self exploration. Looking back over this project now, I realize that it might not be clear to every reader just what an ethnography of an inclusive high school has to do with a project of self exploration. The explanation is multi-layered. Not only did this project clarify my own thinking about disability in general, it reshaped my perception of myself as a disabled person.

As I discussed in the introduction, I have not always been comfortable with an understanding of myself as a disabled person. Much of my own experience in an ableist society led me to a view of myself as a fraud for even considering accessing a disabled identity. Seeing how Red Rock's disabled students had their ability to access a disabled identity either restricted limited or forced, pushed me to examine how my own self perception may have been similarly influenced, and led me to re-evaluate my feelings about a disabled identity.

⁶

The Americans with Disabilities Act

More importantly looking over this thesis as a whole, I can now see and fully appreciate the contributions of my particular subjectivities as a disabled scholar. This is not to imply that others would or could not replicate the things I have identified, but simply that it is my perspective that enabled these patterns and concepts to be recognized and drawn out of this data and organized and presented in this thesis; my sociological imagination that took the analysis in the directions it went in. This realization is important because the insights and perspectives at the heart of the thesis have grown from my own resistance against the structures, attitudes and behaviours that made me feel like a fraud rather than an activist critical scholar with disabilities.

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