

Diverging Ideologies of Disability: A Critique of Literature on Inclusive Literacy

Alexandra Lampp Berglund

Georgia College & State University, Milledgeville, GA

ABSTRACT

Although the concept of literacy has continued to evolve through the work of innovative scholars and educators, conventional understandings of literacy still abound within published scholarship. Pushing past these traditional notions of literacy, a small subset of scholars has advocated for a broadened conceptualization of literacy. Labeled inclusive literacy, this relatively new approach to literacy draws from both socially and cultural situated literacy practices (Street, 1984) and multimodal literacy practices (Kress & VanLeeuwen, 2001), as it takes into account diverse symbol systems and acknowledges literacy's part in daily practices. Further, inclusive literacy values all literacy experiences and works to include children with disabilities, a group that is so often overlooked in regard to literacy learning (Flewitt et al., 2009). Grounded in Critical Disability Studies and language ideology theories, this literature review seeks to explore the diverging disability ideologies found in research published on inclusive literacy practices and the ways researchers position students with disabilities. Specifically, this analysis examines the myriad ways scholars take up or fail to acknowledge the term disability as a means to understand the ways that language use is connected to disability ideologies (Irvine & Gal, 2000).

KEYWORDS

inclusive literacy;
disability; Critical
Disability Studies;
language
ideology

Leu et al. (2013) wrote that literacy “becomes new every day of our lives” (p. 1150). However, despite literacy’s continual evolution, understandings of literacy defined by only written and print text persist (Lawson et al., 2012). Taking note of literacy’s transformation and children’s literacy engagement in different social contexts, New Literacy Studies (NLS) theorists have advocated for a broadened conceptualization of literacy (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Street, 1984). Particularly, NLS research has recognized the existence of multiple literacies and views literacy as the “socially recognized ways in which people generate, communicate, and negotiate meanings” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, p. 33). A small subset of scholars has worked to expand the socially situated and multifaceted understanding of literacy first promoted by NLS. This expansion considers diverse symbol systems and the multiple modes involved in meaning making (Lawson et al., 2012). Labeling this approach *inclusive literacy*, these same scholars’ visions go further than those associated with NLS, as they have advocated for pushing against traditional notions of literacy and sought to include children with disabilities by valuing all literacy experiences (Flewitt et al., 2009). In this way, inclusive literacy promotes inclusivity in both the literacy practices and learners it supports.

Promoting inclusivity, much of the published scholarship on inclusive literacy has presented diverging ideological constructions of disability. The ideologies infused within this research align with different models of disability and derive from varying theoretical positions.

These ideological differences have the potential to impact practicing educators' understandings of inclusivity that ground these inclusive literacy practices. To uncover the array of ideologies of disability woven into research conducted on inclusive literacy, a critique of the literature is warranted. Specifically, a critical exploration that considers how scholars employ the term *disability* is needed to understand ideologies of disability.

This pairing of inclusive literacy and disability promotes the collective goals of the field of Critical Disability Studies (CDS). CDS lies in ideological opposition to the “entrenched pseudo-scientific foundations of special education” that dominate much of the available research on students with disabilities (Connor et al., 2014, p. 6). Highlighting research on inclusive literacy in the field of language and literacy education “provid[es] evidence” of CDS “at work,” and “in action” (Connor et al., 2014, p. 6). Additionally, analyzing the use of the term disability within the literature allows us to understand the ways that language use is inherently and deeply connected to ideologies of disability. This critique also draws on the scholarship of Irvine and Gal (2000), Cavanaugh (2020), and Hasselbacher (2018) situated within the field of language ideology, to continually enforce the important connections between literacy, language use, and ideology.

Using a theoretical framework of CDS and language and ideology, the following research question guides this critique: In what ways do authors of scholarship on inclusive literacy employ the term *disability*? However, before examining the extant published research, the theoretical, historical, and cultural conditions that have sparked the creation of the concept of inclusive literacy must be explored. The following sections serve to situate the literature firmly within these contexts. First, the prominent influences that have shaped and informed inclusive literacy are reviewed. Additionally, this initial exploration of inclusive literacy is key in understanding inclusive literacy as a separate concept and how it differs from the influential tenets of NLS. Further, this explanation will help illuminate the ways that NLS does not serve as a grounding theory for this critique. Rather, NLS serves as a reference and starting point for introducing the history of inclusive literacy. Next, the theories that frame the review are discussed, as each section is guided by this theoretical alignment. Within the Theoretical Framework section, an intertwined view of CDS and language ideology is presented. Before presenting the findings of this review, the specific methods used to carefully craft this review are included. Finally, the findings reveal the multiple ways that disability both is and is not featured in the literature. Further, the findings highlight how this language use is inherently tied to ideologies of disability. Understanding these connections can have significant impacts on educators, and these implications are explored in the concluding section.

What is Inclusive Literacy?

The concept of inclusive literacy initially arose from educators' quest to provide a quality education to students with disabilities, as “inclusive *policies* only find meaning in inclusive *practices*” (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009, p. 192). Instead of excluding students from literacy activities that can position literacy solely “as a curricular goal” and “the development of skills-based reading and writing competences” (Flewitt et al., 2009, p. 212), educators have continually expanded the notion of literacy often promoted in their classrooms. Aligning with this expansion, inclusive literacy does not view literacy simply as a “set of technical skills concerned with reading and writing” but as “embedded in social practice” (Flewitt et al., 2009, p. 213). Drawing from Street's (1984) socially and culturally situated literacy practices and Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2001) concept of multimodal literacy, inclusive literacy offers a way to consider meaning making that moves beyond talk and written text to include “multiple ‘modes’ of communication, such as

gesture, gaze, movement, body positioning, words, vocalizations, and alternative and augmentative communications systems, including sign, symbol, and formal programs” (Flewitt et al., 2009, p. 214). Through this broadened understanding of literacy, students can be provided with differentiated and *inclusive* instruction that meets the needs of all students, including those with disabilities (Milton, 2017b).

To expand on the foundational concepts that frame inclusive literacy and how inclusive literacy generatively builds upon these influences, Street’s (1984) and Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (2001) groundbreaking research is briefly reviewed. Street (1984) presented an understanding of literacy as “a shorthand for the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” (p. 1). Through this lens, literacy, again, is viewed as multiple practices, rather than a static, singular entity. In Street’s work, literacy encompasses practices that accomplish the same purposes of reading and writing but occur organically, both culturally and socially, as individuals communicate and make meaning in their daily lives. Inclusive literacy draws from this notion that literacy can be varied and is unique, based on context, and that knowledge is co-constructed in social contexts (Milton, 2017b).

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), too, brought forward a broadened conceptualization of literacy with their theory of multimodality and highlight the multiple modes that people can and do use to make meaning. Building on Street’s (1984) influential research that explores the social nature of meaning making, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) explained that the different modes used by individuals to communicate are “forms within the various sign systems that carry the meanings that a social collective recognizes and understands” (Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 11). Further, as Jewitt et al. (2016) shared, multimodality “marks a departure from the traditional opposition of ‘verbal’ and ‘non-verbal’ communication” (p. 3). This view of literacy acknowledges the value that has been previously placed on verbal communication and upends the verbal/nonverbal binary. Inclusive literacy is built on the foundation of this acknowledgement, as it includes multiple modes that move past the singular mode of verbal communication and considers the various means of communication that students with disabilities use, far beyond verbal utterances.

Inclusive literacy differs from Street’s (1984) and Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (2001) theory of multimodality and research in the way that it specifically advocates for individuals with disabilities right to literacy. Further, inclusive literacy is grounded in the understanding that literacy is a human right, particularly for children as they grow, develop, and make meaning of the world around them in different and yet still powerful ways. Proponents of inclusive literacy seek to ensure that all students are granted these rights, specifically through the continual reconsideration of literacy and the quest to understand literacy’s complexities and all that it can entail. The emphasis placed on acceptance creates the unique concept of inclusive literacy.

Educational stakeholders can foster inclusive literacy in a variety of ways. The consideration of multimodal literacy, first introduced by NLS scholars, serves as the first step toward inclusion. However, more than simply considering multimodal literacy is needed, as stressed by Flewitt et al., (2009). Flewitt et al. (2009) highlights that creating an inclusive environment, practicing consistency in activities, holding high expectations of students’ development, and building relationships are all crucial elements in supporting inclusive literacy. While the influences of NLS are notable in inclusive literacy, these additional critical behaviors set inclusive literacy apart from other scholarship within the field.

Theoretical Framework

CDS serves to uniquely frame this review of the literature on inclusive literacy, as CDS offers a view of disability that is tied to societal, historical, and cultural conceptualizations. Language ideology, or beliefs about language, connects language use and social organization (Hasselbacher, 2018; Piller, 2015; Silverstein, 1979). CDS then provides a means to interpret and analyze these social organizations through the lens of varying models of disability. To understand the points of convergence between these two complimentary theories, each is explored, as is its relevancy to inclusive literacy.

Critical Disability Studies (CDS)

Disability studies, more broadly, draws from a range of disciplines, including psychology, education, sociology, and policy and cultural studies, and focuses on the phenomena of disability and ability in relation to political and social categorizations (Goodley, 2014). Within this larger field, CDS is a response to the *critical turn* coupled with disability activism and seeks to include new paradigms to continually reconceptualize the disability experience. These influences can be traced to postconventionalist, poststructural, postcolonial, feminist, queer, and crip theories. Similar to these schools of thought, CDS challenges scholars of disability theory to rethink material constructions of the body within society (Goodley et al., 2019; Shildrick, 2012). In addition to the influence of these prominent theories, one can see how CDS is infused with and informed by critical pedagogy, as the goal of CDS is to promote education as a means to resist preconceived societal norms surrounding disability (Goodley, 2014). The transformative understandings of embodiment within CDS position disability as “part of a multiplicity of possibilities,” rather than a marked difference or deficit (Shildrick, 2012, p. 31).

As CDS is a subfield within disability studies, the models within disability studies that have shaped disability into a complex and everchanging concept are important to consider. These differing models are represented in the literature on inclusive literacy included and serve as the basis for the subsequent analysis and organization of this critique. The medical model of disability, often viewed as the “normative” model of disability, employs medical discourse in which disability is read “solely through biological, genetic, hormonal, neurological, and physiological language” (Goodley, 2014, p. 4). Opposing this model, the social model of disability pushes against the concept of impairment constructed by the medicalization of disability. Further, the social model of disability attempts to break down the social, economic, and cultural barriers that are created to prevent those with perceived impairments from participating in a variety of social activities (Goodley, 2014). Simply put, the concept of a disabling society is problematized, rather than disability itself. Lastly, postconventional models of disability developed from postmodern and poststructural theory (Shildrick, 2012). These models deconstruct the epistemological and discursive forces that shape the lived disability experience.

As these models of disability are reviewed, it is imperative to note that their progression is not meant to be presented in a linear way. Instead, as evidenced in the literature featured in this critique, these models all exist simultaneously and are taken up in a variety of settings. Many scholars, activists, and individuals within the disability community both champion and discourage the use of different models. No one model can serve as “final answers” to questions surrounding disability, because, as Shildrick (2012) asserted, “the work of critique is to keep alive the very process in which questions itself generates new potential” (p. 31). In this way, CDS, including its many varying models, is a means to examine why individual ideologies may be used in a particular context and what factors may have informed and shaped these ideologies.

Language Ideologies

Language ideology is commonly defined as a set of language beliefs and is infused with numerous connotations. As Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) shared, the use of the term *ideology* acknowledges the cultural, historical, and social influences exerted upon language and the inherent power of these forces. Moreover, following poststructural lines of inquiry, the term also reminds scholars that these same cultural, historical, and social forces are “partial, contestable and contested, and interest-laden” (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994, p. 58). Interested specifically in language, Silverstein (1979) promoted that language ideologies are “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (p. 193). Language ideologies help speakers understand the relationships between language and their use (Cavanaugh, 2020).

While language is the predominant focus of much of the field of language ideology, a small, yet emergent, community of scholars call for an examination of the ways that literacy, in addition to language use, shapes ideologies (Bhattacharya & Sterponi, 2020; Hasselbacher, 2018; Ochs et al., 2005; Phuong, 2017; Volk & Angelova, 2007). These researchers have employed a critical approach that borrows features from discourse analysis to feature an understanding of literacy and language use that “is not limited to talk and text” (Phuong, p. 51) and “refers to any number of semiotic systems . . . rather than an individual’s ability to use one in particular” (Hasselbacher, 2018, p. 72). This expansion doesn’t attempt to conflate literacy with language. Instead, these scholars hoped to emphasize the connection between language and literacy and the ways they generatively build upon and inform one another. Further, the consideration of literacy within language ideologies presents an exciting opportunity to weave together CDS and language ideology, because, as Phuong (2017) shared, CDS and language ideology “are rarely discussed in tandem,” despite disability and language ideology being similarly laden with cultural and social influences and struggles of power (p. 51). Further, so many within the disability community communicate in ways that stretch far beyond talk and text. In this critique, I align with this group of language ideology scholars that have promoted this inclusivity.

Understanding various ideologies surrounding disability informs how disability is framed in multiple educational settings, including but not limited to literacy education and the research published within these fields. Throughout this critique of the literature on inclusive literacy practice, language ideologies ground the analysis of research on inclusive literacy, while CDS serves as a more specific way to examine why individual ideologies may be used in a particular context and how these ideologies are made evident through literacy engagement and language use.

Conceptualizing the Complex

Inclusion, literacy, and disability each do not have one commonly accepted definition. Instead, they are entities whose meanings change based on their context. To form my own understandings of these terms while critiquing the literature available, I use CDS and language ideologies as frameworks to define these complex terms. I begin with the term literacy to ground my work in the larger field of language and literacy education and then move on to the concept of inclusion to similarly situate my work among previous notable scholarship in CDS. Lastly, the continually evolving concept of disability is unpacked to introduce the ways that the term can and is employed across the literature published on inclusive literacy.

Literacy. Leu et al. (2013) proclaimed that literacy “defines both who we are and who we shall become” (p. 115). Society collectively informs the ways that literacy is conceptualized, as

needs for producing and consuming texts change and evolve. Literacy, in turn, also shapes who we are, as it defines the ways that we can and will communicate with others. Literacy has continually been linked with societal needs (Monaghan & Hartman, 2000), and, with each piece cited in this critique, a different view of society and, thus, a different ideology of literacy is presented. Each author and researcher whose work is featured understood and placed various degrees of importance on gender, race, class, and, obviously, ability, as literacy has long “been influenced by these shifting currents” (Monaghan & Hartman, 2000, p. 111). Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) echoed how ideologies of literacy have long relied on social institutions and that “the definition of what is and what is not literacy is always a profoundly political matter” (p. 66).

Scholars have made evident that no one understanding of literacy can be separated from the forces that have informed it. In this sense, my own definition of literacy is colored by the myriad forces that have shaped and formed it and is still continually evolving. Most noticeably, CDS and inclusive literacy have shaped the ways I view literacy. Within this work and in my own life, I define literacy not just as written text or spoken language. Literacy can encompass bodily movements and gestures, pictures drawn by hand or using computer software, and so much more. In this way, I view literacy as making meaning across multiple mediums, mirroring the underlying tenets of inclusive literacy.

Inclusion. As the concept of inclusive literacy is explored, a focus on the term *inclusion* as it relates to educational and, more specifically, classroom practices, is crucial. Much of the research featured in this analysis of the literature focuses on the practical implications of inclusive literacy, so this consideration is key when unpacking the ideologies of scholars who support inclusive literacy. More specifically, inclusive education serves as a driving force of inclusive literacy. However, in different contexts, inclusion can be defined quite differently. Within the United States, the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975 sought to guarantee that eligible students with disabilities are provided a “free and appropriate public school education in the least restrictive environment,” commonly abbreviated as FAPE and LRE (U. S. Department of Education, n.d.). IDEA, then, seeks to control how state and public agencies provide particular educational services to the disability community, including early intervention and special education programs. or equitable access and inclusion for all children within digital spaces.

However, despite this widespread government support, local schools grapple with the interpretation and implementation of this legislation and the *appropriateness* of the services offered vary widely (Colker, 2013; Sack, 2000). With this ambiguity, teachers and administrators alike are left wondering how to best educate their students with disabilities and, ultimately the meaning of inclusion. This uncertainty is prevalent throughout published research on inclusive literacy. Researchers vary in their interpretations, and much of the research has viewed inclusion, particularly in regard to literacy, as a right (Barratt-Pugh et al., 2017; Flewitt et al., 2009; Kliever et al., 2006; Lawson et al., 2012; Milton, 2017b), a way to reconceptualize literacy (Lacey et al., 2007; Lawson et al., 2012, Milton, 2017a; Milton, 2017b; Oakley, 2017; Price-Dennis et al., 2015), and the outcome of desegregating classrooms (Barratt-Pugh et al., 2017; Milton, 2017b; Price-Dennis et al, 2015).

Disability. As with inclusion, much legislation has sought to define disability. For instance, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a prominent piece of legislation in the United States,

legally defines *disability* as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity” (ADA National Network, n.d., para. 2). Further, this definition includes disability can be either “recorded” or “regarded” (ADA National Network, n.d., para. 2). The ADA’s notion of “regarded as having a disability” aligns with the commonly accepted understanding of disability as a social phenomenon, and impairment serves as the central tenet of this definition. Contrastingly, having a “record of” a disability entails “that the person has a history of or has been misclassified as having a mental or physical impairment... even though the person does not currently have a disability” (ADA National Network, n.d., para. 1). Within my work, I use the ADA’s concept of a “regarded” disability. With this definition, I consider individuals own personal interpretation of their disability.

In addition to honoring the voices of the disability community in my definition of disability, I do the same with the discursive representation of disability. While many scholars often use the term *dis/ability* or *(dis)ability* to represent the postmodern or poststructural theories that informs their work, both scholars (Linton, 2017; Overboe, 1999; Shildrick, 2012; Titchkosky, 2006) and activists (Ableism Is Trash, 2022; Autistic Truth, 2022; Disability Reframed, 2021; Talk Disability, 2021; NeuroDifferent, 2022) within the disability community simply use *disability*. This decision aligns with one of the integral components of the disability rights movement: Nothing About Us Without Us (Charlton, 1998). With this alignment, I acknowledge and listen to the disability community on disability issues (Disability Reframed, 2021; Talk Disability, 2021).

Research Methods

To begin the process of gathering research on inclusive literacy, I sought to deeply understand the concepts that would serve as my primary search terms: *inclusion*, *literacy*, and *disability*. These keywords are relevant and were chosen with intent. Maxwell (2006) defined keywords as terms “that have important implications for the design, conduct, or interpretation of the study, not simply those that deal with the topic, or in the defined field or substantive area, of the research” (p. 28). Following Maxwell’s guidance, each of these keywords informed and subsequently guided the review of the literature.

After determining the keywords, *literac** AND *includ**, I began my search of six electronic databases, including Academic Search Complete, EBSCOHost, Education Research Complete, ERIC, PsychINFO, and SOCINDEX with Full Text. I conducted this search in three different phases to discover how the term *disability* has been used within published research on inclusive literacy. Each phase was documented extensively by recording the results of each individual search and listing commonalities found among the pieces featured and noting studies of interest. The numerical results from this initial phase of the search presented 17,788 peer-reviewed journal articles. To narrow the search significantly and to bound the search within the field of education, the keyword *educat** was added and produced significantly less results: 8,505 published pieces. During the third and final phase, the key word *disabilit** was added to align the search with the research question posed. This search highlighted 1,121 peer-reviewed academic journal articles, with only 171 being research reports.

Sharing the results from these three searches provides a wider scope to this critique by highlighting the vast amount of research that has been conducted that focuses on inclusive literacy. Additionally, this presentation of data displays the significantly smaller amount of research that examines inclusive literacy that explicitly involve and include students with disabilities. The final search, with only 171 publications, provided a basis for the next step in the process of reviewing the available literature. I determined whether each article did, in fact, describe inclusive literacy

and students with disabilities by completing a “quality screening” that helped me to “narrow the search by identifying the best available studies” for this particular review (Fink, 2014, p. 49). I then transferred the identifying information of each “quality” piece to a literature management system. This screening allowed me to narrow by focus by reviewing 10 studies in total.

The goal in crafting an organizational scheme was to determine the types of research featured and to assist in the process of close reading. This system included the following: article citation, purpose, theoretical framework, methodology, definition of inclusion, definition of (dis)ability, findings and key arguments, and a “so what” category. The “so what” category allowed me to explicate what stood out in each piece and primary takeaways (Bhattacharya, n.d.). Additionally, by analyzing the research in this way invited me to “note differences in how a variable is measured across studies” (Galvin & Galvin, 2017, p. 73). In this critique, the variable measured across studies is the myriad ways that disability is employed in research published on inclusive literacy.

Findings

Employing the term *disability* is no simple task, as explored extensively in the sections above. Multifaceted and complex, disability, as a concept, actively resists the use of one specific label or definition that can be used in all contexts (Shildrick, 2012). Within the context of the literature reviewed, two common themes are found in the ways that researchers attempt to employ the term disability: *omission of the term disability when identifying students and promoting the participation of students with disabilities*. These themes speak to the institutional discourses found within the scholarship and the ways these discourses reflect larger societal beliefs or ideologies (Cavanaugh, 2020).

Avoidance of the Term Disability

First and foremost, no published pieces explicitly defined disability, but these same publications defined literacy, inclusion, and inclusive literacy. The scholars’ attention to clearly defining literacy, inclusion, and inclusive literacy may be attributed to their selected publication outlets and foci. Additionally, authors may have made assumptions of a shared understanding of what is meant by the term disability within a particular discipline. Many of the cited pieces were featured in journals originating in the fields of special education and inclusive education, and these disciplines often focus on issues surrounding disability but not literacy engagement. For instance, within the *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, Lacey et al. (2007) acknowledged that, for students with disabilities, “conventional literacy could be seen as irrelevant” (p. 149). With this acknowledgement, Lacey et al. (2007) needed to define conventional literacy and how it differs from inclusive literacy. However, defining disability didn’t work toward achieving the goal of Lacey et al.’s (2007) research which was to seek out and share examples of teaching and learning practices that include students with disabilities. While these reasons for omission may align with disciplinary norms or authors’ intentions, the scholars’ exclusion of an explicit definition of disability is striking, as disability is inherently bound within definitions of inclusion and inclusive literacy.

Despite the absence of an explicit definition of disability, researchers’ language use signals their ideological positioning in regard to disability. While four scholars did employ the term *disability* (Barratt-Pugh, 2017; Flewitt et al., 2009; Kliewer et al., 2006; Milton, 2017a), five authors chose not to use the term disability in their work and instead used terms that still signal disability in various ways, either employing an asset-based or deficit lens (Lacey et al., 2017;

Lawson et al, 2012; Oakley, 2017; Price-Dennis et al., 2015; Valtierra & Siegel, 2019). This avoidance is notable and aligns with the “underlying attitudes, values, and subconscious prejudices and fears that ground a persistent, albeit often unspoken intolerance” of people with disabilities that permeates society and, more specifically educational spaces (Shildrick, 2012, p. 35). The terms that were used to signal disability deficiently include the following: *students with severe learning difficulties* (SLD; Lacey et al., 2007; Lawson et al., 2012); *learners with diverse needs* (Oakley, 2017); and *special education students* (Price-Dennis et al., 2015). The term associated with an asset-based stance is *academically diverse learners* (Valtierra & Siegel, 2019).

Used most frequently in the literature, the term *students with SLD* derived from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) that divides literacy into five levels, ranging from the first level that includes “people with very poor skills” to levels four and five that seek to categorize “people who demonstrate command of higher-order information processing skills” (Lacey et al., 2007, p. 149). The OECD is an international organization that works alongside governments, policy makers, and citizens to establish “evidence-based international standards and find solutions to a range of social, economic, and environmental challenges” (OECD, n.d.). The data produced from literacy research conducted by the OECD has implications in 38 countries around the world, but not without criticism. Specifically, within the United States, the data is used to determine the need for additional educational opportunities and targeted instruction for students across grade levels. With its varying levels, the OECD’s literacy scale has created an international standard for literacy skills and employs a deficit-based lens that focuses on what students cannot do in regard to conventional literacy practices, rather than focusing on multimodal literacy engagement. This rating system excludes and sets students apart from their peers, and the specific words used to describe the literacy levels are connotative of the damaging discourses and normative views associated with the medical model of disability that sees disability as deficient (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). In the medical model, “it is the medical diagnosis (and not the individualized needs of the child) that determines the available placement for the child” (Haegele & Hodge, p. 196). Similar discourses circulate around high-stakes literacy assessments that inform literacy levels such as these that seek to uphold “normative” standards (Erevelles, 2012). Within the featured scholarship, students with SLD were understood simply as one level of a larger literacy scale, not as individual, capable learners who can and do enjoy engaging in literacy. By not acknowledging disability, the term *students with severe learning difficulties* (SLD) focuses on difficulties rather than the possibilities and potentiality that is bound within disability (Goodley et al., 2019).

Attempting to acknowledge the multidimensional nature of disability, *diversity* is often used as a placeholder for disability, as seen through the use of the terms, *learners with diverse needs* (Oakley, 2017) and *academically diverse learners* (Valtierra & Siegel, 2019). Oakley (2017) did not define what was meant by the term *learners with diverse needs* and instead cited that the focus of the piece was the benefits of using technology with students with disabilities. Oakley (2017) further shared, “A major use of technology has been drills and games for struggling children to ‘remedy’ their learning difficulties or close the gap in the basics of phonological awareness and letter sound correspondences” (p. 162). With this goal clearly presented, one can infer that Oakley equated learners with diverse needs with students with disabilities. Exploring the implications of the use of the term *learners with diverse needs* presents the opportunity to unpack the complicated history of the term *special needs*, as the two terms are similar in many ways. Special needs, once the preferred term by many within the disability community and beyond, has fallen from favor (Shildrick, 2012). Explaining this shift in discourse, Linton (2017) wrote that *special* “can be

understood as a euphemistic formulation, obscuring the reality that neither the children or education are considered desirable and that they are not thought to surpass what is common” (p. 164). *Needs*, as included in the term special needs and learners with diverse needs, is also complex and can work to position individuals as lesser than. Disability Reframed (2021) shared, “The needs of disabled people are not special. They are not extra, nor are they exceptional. They are human.” However, by employing the term learners with diverse needs, Oakley (2017) positioned particular students’ needs as exceptional, rather than focusing on required accommodations that must be provided to ensure disabled students’ full participation in literacy learning.

Valtierra and Siegel (2019) briefly explained their reasoning for using the term *academically diverse learners*. They used the term to encompass the variety of students featured in their study, one of which was a student with a diagnosed disability. Specifically, the students selected for the study were “one typically developing reader, one struggling reader receiving special education services, and one non-heritage English speaker,” and these students were chosen to emphasize the benefits of inclusive literacy for all learners, not just students with disabilities (Valtierra & Siegel, 2019, p. 115). This consideration regarding the language used is valuable, as is Valtierra and Siegel’s (2019) aim to “shift narrow, ability-oriented dispositions toward literacy to more expansive and inclusive conceptualizations” (p. 119). In this context, inclusivity values all learners, and inclusive literacy seeks to ensure an equitable and empowering education for all.

Promoting the Participation of Students with Disabilities

As evidenced in the previously cited studies, a noticeable group of scholars did not employ the term disability in their work. The scholars who did use the term disability did not define disability, despite the complexity disability presents as a concept. However, two of these same scholars did situate their work within CDS, particularly the social model of disability (Flewitt et al., 2009; Kliewer et al., 2006). This theoretical alignment signals the critical nature of their research, a stark contrast to the scholarship cited above. This criticality serves as the foundation of CDS and represents “a sense of self-appraisal” that seeks to reflect and assess where we, as a society, have come from, where we are at, and where we might we going (Goodley, 2013, p. 632). In particular, CDS “rethink[s] the conventions, assumptions, and aspirations of research, theory, and activism” regarding disability (Goodley, 2013, p. 632). The progression and evolution of the models of disability within CDS serves as an example of this reflection and reassessment. Transformative views of disability have continually given ways to new models of disability. For instance, the medical model is often positioned in contrast to the social model, while the social model has served as the foundation for postconventional models of disability (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). The literature on students with disabilities in the field of language and literacy education reflects these changes, as a growing body of research is grounded within the social model of disability (Flewitt et al., 2009; Kliewer et al., 2006). According to Goodley (2014) and Haegele and Hodge (2016), the social model of disability is the most prevalent model of disability and frequently employed by scholars across disciplines.

The popularity of the social model of disability can be seen in research published on inclusive literacy, as the social model of disability is only the theoretical model of disability evident in the scholarship (Flewitt et al., 2009; Kliewer et al., 2006). The use of the social model, in these contexts, is significant. In addition to being a well-known model of disability within CDS and disability activism, the social model of disability, as its name indicates, is primarily concerned within societal understandings of disability and brings issues of disability into conversations concerning social constructions, practices, and institutions (Kliewer et al., 2006). The social model

of disability focuses on how society continually imposes the concept of disability on individuals with impairments (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). Specifically, when using this model, authors address the ways that disability has been set up “as a political category” and “the social, economic, and cultural barriers that prevent people with impairments from living a life like their non-impaired brothers and sisters” (Goodley, 2014, p. 7). Within this body of research, these social, political, economic, and cultural barriers include access to education, literacy, and communication opportunities (Flewitt et al., 2009).

Flewitt et al. (2009) framed their work within the social model of disability to align with the stance of NLS that situates literacy as a sociocultural practice. In this way, both disability and literacy are concepts that are formed by social and cultural perceptions. Focusing on early literacy experiences, this group of researchers sought to explore different understandings of literacy and how associated literacy practices could expand “young children’s participation in different social and communicative opportunities” found in the home and at school (Flewitt et al., 2009, p. 215). Kliewer et al. (2006), more broadly, addressed the larger social institutions for which reconceptualizing literacy can prove to be more difficult. Suggesting one way to combat oppressive social barriers, Kliewer et al. (2006) proposed that “presuming competence and rightful citizenship in areas such as literacy development and facilitated communication may promote understanding” (p. 170) among individuals both with and without disabilities. *Presuming competence* and *literate citizenship* both work in opposition to the social impositions that act as barriers for children with disabilities to fully participate in literacy practices. Presuming competence challenges educators to expand their understandings of competence and find multiple and new ways for students to demonstrate competence and engaging and connecting with others (Kliewer et al., 2006). Inherently connected to presuming competence, presuming literate citizenship ensures the literate visibility of individuals with disabilities so that they may fully participate in literacy-based activities that ultimately facilitate full participation in society, more broadly (Kliewer et al., 2006). As Kliewer et al. (2006) explained, literacy is a “critical tool of community participation” (p. 177). In order for individuals to make vital connections with others in their communities, they must be able to express themselves. Literacy facilitates this communication across multiple modes.

Conclusion

Although all the research included in this critique has the common goal of fostering inclusive literacy, diverging uses of the term *disability* and, thus, ideologies of disability exist in the scholarship. These differences are not surprising, as they are indicative of the contrasting conceptions of disability that exist within the field of language and literacy education and, largely, society. Understanding the complexities surrounding discourses of disability has widespread implications for educators, particularly those who are in the field and can readily apply the principles of inclusive literacy in their own unique contexts. The knowledge gained through this critical exploration of research on inclusive can inform language use and then, in turn, shape ideologies of disability.

Most noticeably, understanding ideologies of disability, including our own and others’, can create educational spaces that are more inclusive and accessible sites where students with disabilities can participate more fully. Gardland-Thomson (2017) presented the concept of *academic activism* within the field of CDS. Academic activism is “the activism of integrating education” and creating inclusive learning environments for students with disabilities (p. 377). This concept is supported by the belief that “scholars and teachers shape the communal knowledge

and the archive that is disseminated from kindergarten to the university,” and educational stakeholders serve as the grassroots movement working toward equitable education for students within the disability community (Garland-Thomson, 2017, p. 377). Through academic activism, educators can help to break down the cultural, social, economic, and historical barriers that students face when attempting to participate more fully in their classrooms and society, as highlighted by the concept of inclusive literacy.

The presence of CDS, and, more specifically, the social model of disability, and the active acknowledgement of the complexity and diversity of the disability experience within the research, though, serves as a hopeful reminder that there are educators and scholars who think critically and carefully about their language use and the ways that language and power are intimately related (Cavanagh, 2020). As Sandoval Gomez and McKee (2020) shared, CDS can help educators “understand the ‘why’ of inclusive education and equality” and help them determine how to move forward and take action (p. 2). The actions that teachers can take vary based on a number of contextual factors, including grade level, administrative support, and the resources available. However, practical applications of incorporating CDS into one’s pedagogical practices and teaching philosophy include, first, reflecting on our own language use. This critique asks us to pause and ask the follow questions: *Do I avoid using the term disability? How does my language use promote the participation of students with disabilities in my educational spaces?* The answers to these introspections can, then, guide future language use.

In addition to reflecting on and shifting the language and terms we use in regard to our students with disabilities, promoting CDS to colleagues and students through workshops and curriculum is critical. These opportunities can prompt deep, communal, and individual reflections on biases about disability and what larger social, cultural, political, economic, and historical forces have shaped these understandings (Schalk, 2017; Ware & Hatz, 2016). Third, teachers can presume competence in their students and their families. By presuming competence, teachers can push against deficient views of students with disabilities and broaden the scope of how students and their families participate in classroom communities and society more broadly (Kleekamp, 2020; Kliever et al., 2006; Valtierra & Siegel, 2019).

In addition to these applications of CDS, teachers can also listen to and center the voices of the disability community in their classroom materials and beyond through humanizing and accurate portrayals (Wong, 2020). However, as Wong (2020) asserts, “And yet while representation is exciting and important, it is not enough . . . *We all should expect more. We all deserve more*” (p. xxi; emphasis in original). While inclusion in materials is important, inclusion in regard to literacy engagement is paramount. Inclusive literacy, at its core, seeks to challenge social hierarchies that govern the ways that literacy is conceptualized, and the language used when writing about inclusive literacy should, too, seek to push against these long held institutions in regard to disability.

References

- Ableism Is Trash. (2022, January 22). Stop deferring to nondisabled people about disability language [Instagram post]. <https://www.instagram.com/ableismistrash/>
- Albers, P., & Harste, J. C. (2007). The arts, new literacies, and multimodality. *English Education*, 40(1), 6–20.
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) National Network. (n.d.). *What is the definition of disability under the ADA?* <https://adata.org/faq/what-definition-disability-under-ada>

- Autistic Truth. (2022, April 13). The current norm of representing nonspeaking autistics as “nonthinking” must end [Facebook post]. <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=488146536105751&set=a.212599933660414>
- Barratt-Pugh, C., Rohl, M., & Allen, N. (2017). The first time I’ve felt included: Identifying inclusive literacy learning in early childhood through the evaluation of better beginnings. In M. Milton & C. Forlin (Eds.), *Inclusive principles and practices in literacy education* (Vol. 11; pp. 125–142). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-36362017000011009>
- Bhattacharya, K. (n. d.). Literature review: Demystifying the process. *Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya’s Academic Gems*. <https://drkakali.weebly.com/literature-review.html>
- Bhattacharya, U., & Sterponi, L., (2020). The morning assembly: Constructing subjecthood, authority, and knowledge through classroom discourse in an Indian school. In M. J. Burdelski & K. M. Howard (Eds.), *Language socialization in classrooms: Culture, interaction, and language development* (pp. 181–199). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316946237.012>
- Cavanaugh, J. (2020). Language ideology revisited. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2020(263), 51–57. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2020-2082>
- Charlton, J. (1998). *Nothing about us without us: Disability, oppression, and empowerment*. University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520925441>
- Colker, R. (2013). *Disabled education: A critical analysis of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. New York University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814708101.001.0001>
- Connor, D. J., Valle, J. W., & Hale, C. (2014). Forum guest editors’ introduction: Disability studies in education “at work.” *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, 8(3), 5–13. <https://www.rdsjournal.org/index.php/journal/article/view/87>
- Disability Reframed. (2021, August 31). Y’all, it’s time we talked about the term “special needs” [Instagram post]. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CTQsBVXsIOC/>
- Erevelles, N. (2012). “What...[thought] cannot bear to know”: Crippin’ the limits of “thinkability.” *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, 8(3), 35–44. <https://rdsjournal.org/index.php/journal/article/view/90>
- Fink, A. (2014). *Conducting research literature reviews: From internet to paper*. Sage.
- Flewitt, R., Nind, M., & Payler, J. (2009). “If she’s left with books she’ll just eat them”: Considering inclusive multimodal literacy practices. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 9(20), 211–233. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798409105587>
- Galvan, J. L., & Galvan, M. C. (2017). *Writing literature reviews: A guide for students of the social and behavioral sciences*. Taylor & Francis.
- Garland-Thomson, R. (2017). Integrating disability, transforming feminist theory. In L. J. Davis (Ed.), *The disability studies reader* (5th ed.; pp. 360–380). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003001201-22>
- Goodley, D. (2013). Dis/entangling Critical Disability Studies. *Disability and Society*, 28(5), 631–644. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2012.717884>
- Goodley, D. (2014). *Dis/ability studies: Theorising disablism and ableism*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203366974-8>
- Goodley, D., Lawthom, R., Liddiard, K., & Runswick-Cole, K. (2019). Provocations for Critical Disability Studies. *Disability and Society*, 34(6), 972–997. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1566889>

- Haegele, J., & Hodge, S. (2016). Disability discourse: Overview and critiques of the medical and social models. *Question*, 68(2), 193–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2016.1143849>
- Hasselbacher, S. (2018). Introduction: Literacy ideologies. *Language & Communication*, 61, 71–74. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2017.09.002>
- Irvine, J., & Gal, S. (2000). Language ideology and linguistic differentiation. In P. Kroskrity (Ed.), *Language regimes: Ideologies, politics, and identities* (pp. 35–84). School for Advanced Research Press.
- Jewitt, C., Bezemer, J., & O’Halloran, K. (2016). *Introducing multimodality*. Routledge.
- Kleekamp, M. C. (2020). “No! turn the pages!”: Repositioning neuroqueer literacies. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 52(2), 113–135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296x20915531>
- Kliewer, C., Biklen, D., Kasa-Hendrickson, C. (2006). Who may be literate? Disability and resistance to the cultural denial of competence. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(2), 163–192. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312043002163>
- Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes of media of contemporary communication*. Hodder Arnold.
- Lacey, P., Layton, L., Miller, C., Goldbart, J., & Lawson, H. (2007). What is literacy for students with severe learning difficulties? Exploring conventional and inclusive literacy. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 7(3), 140–160. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2007.00092.x>
- Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2011). *The new literacies: Everyday practices and social learning* (3rd ed.). Open University Press.
- Lawson, H., Layton, L., Goldbart, J., Lacey, P., & Miller, C. (2012). Conceptualizations of literacy and literacy practices for children with severe learning difficulties. *Literacy*, 46(2), 101–108. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4369.2011.00603.x>
- Leu, D. J., Kinzer, C. K., Coiro, J., Castek, J., & Henry, L. A. (2013). New literacies: A dual-level theory of the changing nature of literacy, instruction, and assessment. In D. Alvermann, N. Unruh, & R. B. Ruddell (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (8th ed., pp. 1150–1181). International Reading Association. <https://doi.org/10.1598/0710.42>
- Linton, S. (2017). Reassigning meaning. In L. J. Davis (Ed.), *The disability studies reader* (5th ed.) (pp. 161–172). Routledge.
- Maxwell, J. (2006). Literature reviews of, and for, educational research: A commentary on Boote and Beile’s ‘Scholars before researchers.’ *Educational Researcher*, 35(8), 28–31. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x035009028>
- Milton, M. (2017a). Inclusive literacy for students from other language backgrounds. In C. Forlin (Ed.), *International perspective on inclusive education* (Vol. 11; pp. 249–265). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/s1479-363620170000011016>
- Milton, M. (2017b). Literacy and inclusion: Current perspectives. In C. Forlin (Ed.), *International perspectives on inclusive education* (Vol. 11; pp. 3–18). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/s1479-363620170000011001>
- Monaghan, E. J., & Hartman, D. K. (2000). Undertaking historical research in literacy. In M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. III, pp. 109–121). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- NeuroDifferent. (2022, April 12). To anyone who wishes to represent non-speaking people [Twitter post]. https://twitter.com/Neuro_Different/status/1513469117923315715

- Nutbrown, C., & Clough, P. (2009). Citizenship and inclusion in the early years: Understanding and responding to children's perspectives on 'belonging.' *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 17(3), 191–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760903424523>
- Oakley, G. (2017). Engaging students in inclusive literacy learning with technology. In M. Milton & C. Forlin (Eds.), *Inclusive principles and practices in literacy education* (Vol. 11; pp. 159–176). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/s1479-363620170000011011>
- Ochs, E., Solomon, O., & Sterponi, L. (2005). Limitations and transformations of habitus in child-directed communication. *Discourse Studies*, 7(4–5), 547–583. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445605054406>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (OECD). (n.d.). *Who we are*. OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/about/>
- Overboe, J. (1999). "Difference in itself": Validating disabled people's lived experience. *Body and Society*, 5(4), 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034x99005004002>
- Phuong, J. (2017). Disability and language ideologies in education policy. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 32(1), 47–66. <https://repository.upenn.edu/wpel/vol32/iss1/3>
- Piller, I. (2015). Language ideologies. In K. Tracy, C. Ilie, & T. Sandel (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of language and social interaction* (pp. 1–10). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118611463>
- Price-Dennis, D., Holmes, K. A., & Smith, E. (2015). Exploring digital literacy practices in an inclusive classroom. *Reading Teacher*, 69(2), 195–205. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1398>
- Sack, J. L. (2000, December 6). Schools grapple with reality of ambitious law. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2000/12/06/14idea.h20.html>
- Sandoval Gomez, A., & McKee, A. (2020). When special education and disability studies intertwine: addressing educational inequities through processes and programming. *Frontiers in Education*, 5, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.587045>
- Schalk, S. (2017). Critical Disability Studies as methodology. *Lateral*, 6(1), 5–8. <https://csalateral.org/issue/6-1/forum-alt-humanities-critical-disability-studies-methodology-schalk/>
- Shildrick, M. (2012). Critical Disability Studies: Rethinking the conventions for the age of postmodernity. In N. Watson, A. Roulstone, & C. Thomas (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of disability studies* (pp. 30–41). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203144114-9>
- Silverstein, M. (1979). Language structure and linguistic ideology. In P. R. Clyne, W. F. Hanks, & C. L. Hofbauer (Eds.), *The elements: A parasession on linguistic units and levels* (pp. 193–248). Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Talk Disability. (2021, November 6). Listen to disabled people on disability issues [Instagram post]. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CV8IX4TM5Ae/>
- Titchkosky, T. (2006). Policy, disability, reciprocity. In M. A. McColl & L. Jongbloed (Eds.), *Disability and social policy in Canada* (pp. 54–71). Captus Press.
- U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *About IDEA*. IDEA: Individuals with disabilities education act. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>
- Valtierra, K. M., & Siegel, L. N. (2019). Dispositions for inclusive literacy: Fostering an equitable and empowering education for academically diverse learners. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching*, 8(3), 111–121. <https://doi.org/10.5430/jct.v8n3p111>

-
- Volk, D., & Angelova, M. (2007). Language ideologies and the mediation of language choice in peer interactions in a dual-language first grade. *Journal of Language, Identity, & Education*, 6(3), 177–199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348450701454205>
- Ware, L., & Hatz, N. (2016). Teaching stories: Inclusion/exclusion and disability studies. *Bank Street Occasional Paper Series*, 36(11), 26–46. <https://doi.org/10.58295/2375-3668.1161>
- Wong, A. (Ed.). (2020). *Disability visibility: First person stories from the twenty-first century*. Vintage Books.
- Woolard, K., & Schieffelin, B. (1994). Language ideology. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23(1), 55–82. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.23.100194.000415>

Received: January 4, 2023 | Accepted: March 6, 2023 | Published: April 3, 2023