



From the Editor

Journal:	Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education
Article Title:	The Challenge of Addressing Disability Within Social Work Education: Reconciling Theory and Practice
Author(s):	Marilyn Dupré, Brian Carty
Volume and Issue Number:	<i>Vol.19 No.2</i>
Manuscript ID:	192016
Page Number:	16
Year:	2016

Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is a refereed journal concerned with publishing scholarly and relevant articles on continuing education, professional development, and training in the field of social welfare. The aims of the journal are to advance the science of professional development and continuing social work education, to foster understanding among educators, practitioners, and researchers, and to promote discussion that represents a broad spectrum of interests in the field. The opinions expressed in this journal are solely those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the policy positions of The University of Texas at Austin's School of Social Work.

Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is published two times a year (Spring and Winter) by the school of Social Work at 1925 San Jacinto, D3500 Austin, TX 78712. Our website at www.profdevjournal.org contains additional information regarding submission of publications and subscriptions.

Copyright © by The University of Texas at Austin's School of Social Work. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

ISSN: 1097-4911

URL: www.profdevjournal.org

Email: www.profdevjournal.org/contact

The Challenge of Addressing Disability Within Social Work Education: Reconciling Theory and Practice

Marilyn Dupré & Brian Carty

Abstract

Social work education programs addressing disability have not kept up to current theoretical developments within the disability studies literature. While some social work educators support a combined social work and disability studies program, this paper argues that there is a more fundamental issue to be reconciled; the relationship between disability theory and social work practice. The challenge for social work is to embrace critical disability studies by developing practice approaches that are supportive and enabling when working with disabled people. Anti-oppressive social work theory and practice, specifically structural social work, appears to hold potential for meeting this challenge.

Introduction

Carter, Leslie & Angell, (2012) suggest that social work should strengthen its longstanding interdisciplinary approach by embracing critical disability studies to support the inclusion of those with disabilities into the larger culture. The authors propose a combined social work and disability studies degree, or a certificate in disability studies. However, social work education, and social work as a profession, continues to waiver in its understanding of the ideas informing social work practice with disabled people. Although disability theory and enabling practice have been aired in the wider social work literature, social work education and training has not moved fully in line with those changing ideas (Roulstone, 2012).

The changing approaches to disability found within the *Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE-ACFTS) Standards for Accreditation* (2014) demonstrate the inconsistency evident within contemporary social work approaches addressing disability. Members of the Person with Disabilities Caucus within the CASWE-ACFTS have observed that recent versions of the *Standards for Accreditation* have

greatly diminished the gains related to disability content in curricula that had been achieved in 2008, when there were clear educational objectives in relation to disability and social work education (Carter, Hanes, & MacDonald, 2012). The current *CASWE- ACFTS Standards for Accreditation* (2014) encourages and supports diversity and social justice in all aspects/domains of social work programs, with diversity defined as:

...a range of characteristics including, but not limited to: age, colour, culture, disability/non-disability status, ethnic or linguistic origin, gender, health status, heritage, immigration status, geographic origin, race, religious and spiritual beliefs, political orientation, gender and sexual identities, and socioeconomic status (CASWE-ACFTS, 2014, p. 3).

The concept of diversity is widely used in academic discourse even though the meaning is seldom clear (Mullaly, 2010). Australian social work educator, Bob Pease, argues that diversity has become the new “buzz word” within the classroom and workplace (Pease, 2010, p. 111). He believes that core learning objectives for social work education that focus on supporting, recognizing and enhancing diversity are ironic because they carry the unstated assumption that all social workers are white, male, heterosexual and so on. Diversity approaches tend to fit within liberal ideological frameworks that fail to acknowledge the structural inequality that many disabled people face (Roulstone, 2012).

British social work educators and disability activists, Michael Oliver and Bob Sapey (2006) believe that one of the major problems of conceptualizing social work practice with disabled people is that there are few theoretical frameworks adequate for this purpose. They argue that most attempts to develop a professional basis for social work practice with disabled

Marilyn Dupré, PhD, MSW, is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at St. Thomas University.

Brian Carty, MSW, is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at St. Thomas University.

people have never come to grips with the perennial problem of the relationship between theory and practice. Therefore, the important question that remains to be explored is whether or not current theoretical frameworks used to educate social work students about social work practice addressing disability are congruent with the theoretical developments taking place within contemporary disability studies?

Background

The field of disability studies spans the boundaries of academia, personal experience, political activism, and public policy (Albrecht, 2002). British disability activist and scholar, Colin Barnes, writes that the terminology “disability studies” first appeared in an academic context in the United Kingdom in 1992, although people had been studying disability-related issues since the 1960s (Barnes, 2007). Barnes explains that the difference between disability studies and previous courses related to disability is that the focus of disability studies is on the re-definition of disability by disabled people. For Barnes disability studies is about the various forces; economic, political and cultural, that support and sustain “disability” as defined by the disabled people’s movement, in order to generate meaningful and practical knowledge with which to eradicate this categorization. According to the seminal writing of British disability activist, Tom Shakespeare (2008), disability studies emerged as a radical challenge to individualist and medicalized thinking.

The International Society for Disability Studies was founded in 1982 as a nonprofit, scholarly organization that promotes the study of disability in social, cultural, and political contexts. Disability studies’ focus is the direct experience of disability and impairment, including the place and meaning of disability in society and the development of alternative political measures needed to realize an inclusive society (Prince, 2004).

Disability Studies recognizes that disability is a key aspect of human experience, and the study of disability studies has important implications for society as a whole, including both disabled and nondisabled people. Through research, artistic production, teaching and activism, the

Society for Disability Studies seeks to augment understanding of disability in all cultures and historical periods, to promote greater awareness of the experiences of disabled people, and to advocate for social change (Society for Disability Studies, 2012).

Historically, the fundamental theoretical paradigm of this field has been the social model of disability, reflecting both the politicization of disability by disabled people and strong sociological roots in the academic field. What is called the “social model” in the United Kingdom and the “minority model” in the United States has been the guiding framework for disability theorists since the 1970s, with the view that disability is a form of oppression requiring a political and rights-based response rather than a medical or social care response (Williams, 2001).

Disability studies is viewed as both interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, engaging with various disciplinary perspectives as a critique of specific approaches to disability, as a project to evolve an interdisciplinary frame to be incorporated into multiple disciplines, and as a new sphere of scholarly work similar to women’s studies, queer studies, and black studies (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). However, while some disability theorists view these developments as a part of a growing maturity and awareness, others view such plurality as a risk to the social and political aims of disability studies. Barnes (2012) cautions that a shift away from the social model’s materialist analysis of the structural forces of ableism will have serious implications for disabled people in relation to creating a more fair and inclusive global society. Barnes asserts that even in Nordic states, universal welfare and educational policies continue to rely on medical and psychological labels. More recently the focus of disability studies has turned to addressing the core assumptions of ableist thinking as “structures of categorical exclusion” (Roulstone, Thomas & Watson, 2012). The state of disablement, like racism, is so ingrained in western societies that ableism, as a site of social theorization, represents the “last frontier on enquiry still preoccupied with the arcane distinction between ‘impairment’ and ‘disability’ in the government of disability” (Campbell, 2008, p. 152).

Critical disability studies (CDS) represents a move away from those who have co-opted disability studies for normalizing ends (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Thomas (2012) observes that the language of empowerment, inclusion, and disability rights has been appropriated by politicians and state officials to serve a neoliberal agenda to free up market mechanisms and curtail state welfare provision. Many Western governments have adopted a sociopolitical understanding of disability and have enshrined disability rights in law. However, a review of complaints to the Canadian Human Rights Commission in 2011 found that the number of complaints alleging discrimination on the grounds of disability was 28%, or 404 out of 1,424 complaints received that year (Canadian Human Rights Commission Annual Report, 2011). These results, although improved from previous years, appears to signify that legislation is not a sufficient mechanism for changing people's attitudes about disability.

CDS moves beyond modernist paradigms of disability, such as the social model, to engage with all of the theoretical resources available, including feminism, postmodernism, queer theory, critical race theory, and phenomenology of the body (Shildrick, 2012). There are several key analytical insights arising from the theoretical frameworks informing critical disability studies. Disability studies is now less centered around a materialist imperative due to theoretical developments from postmodern and post structuralist influences which emphasize the cultural, discursive, and relational undergirding of the disability experience (Goodley, 2012). The body is viewed as neither a biological nor a sociological category, but instead, represents an interface where interesting material and symbolic forces converge; "a surface where multiple codes of sex, class, age, race, and so forth, are

inscribed" (Goodley, 2012, p. 6). CDS shifts attention onto "the abled" in which ableist processes create a corporeal standard which presumes able-bodiedness, inaugurates the norm and affirms an ableist ideal (Goodley, 2012, p. 10)

Theory and Research Related to Social Work Education and Disability

The medical model, which views disability as a functional limitation or individual pathology, remains the dominant view of disability informing social work practice (Hiranandani, 2005). Within many social work practice approaches disabled people are depicted as suffering or grieving the loss of able-bodiedness, which is consistent with a personal tragedy view of disability. The social model explores disability as arising from an ideology of ableism, which is defined as the systematic oppression of a group of disabled people based on a combination of personal prejudices, cultural expressions and values, and social forces that serve to stigmatize and marginalize them (Mullaly, 2010, p. 215). According to Australian social work educators, Helen Meekosha and Leanne Dowse (2007), one of the problems for social work practice addressing disability is that the profession of social work has lacked exposure to new theoretical knowledge emerging from CDS. They believe that social work students need to be exposed to disabled people's own theoretical developments that are based on personal insights and experiences in relation to social work practice.

An American research study (Reid-Cunningham & Fleming, 2009) examined the relationship between theories of disability and themes used in major social work text books on human behavior and the social environment, used for masters level social work education in the

¹ British disability activist and social work educator, Michael Oliver (2010), explains that impairment is not the main cause of the social exclusion of disabled people. The category of "disabled" is constructed in the way that society responds to people with impairments. The term "disabled person/people" is used deliberately in alliance with disability activists who believe that, when disability is defined as a social/political category the term "disabled people" denotes a group bound by a common social and political experience (Linton, 1998).

United States. The study found that very few of the social work text books provided theories of disability that could be used to inform social work practice. Overall attention paid to disabled people in the texts was limited and when disability was included, it was not the immediate focus of discussion. Many texts used a deficits or medical model to present disability content (Reid-Cunningham & Fleming, 2009).

American social work educators and disability theorists, Elizabeth DePoy and Stephen Gilson, argue that rather than social work taking a lead in disability rights, which would be consistent with social work's mission of social justice, social work views disability as a pathological condition that immediately catches the clinical interest of social workers. Social work professionals in the United States are now the largest segment of interventionists in mental health and related systems, and in large part, "the praxis tail wags the theoretical dog" (DePoy & Gilson, 2011, p. 183). The authors point out that social work tends to be rooted in longitudinal and intrapsychic theoretical explanations of human deviance. Longitudinal explanations are those related to developmental, stage, phase and life-course theories (DePoy & Gilson, 2011). The life cycle and life course approaches to disability evaluate individuals according to established expectations, or developmental milestones, and determine the extent to which they fit or don't fit (DePoy & Gilson, 2011). The authors comment that the label of "normal" is often ascribed to the phenomena most frequently occurring at each age.

In 2012, *The International Journal of Social Work Education* published a special issue dedicated to the topic of Disability Studies and Social Work Education. In the editorial section of the journal, the editors, Hannah Morgan of Lancaster University in the U.K., and Alan Roulstone of Northumbria University, U.K., observed that the lack of disability-related books and papers in social work journals suggested that disability was, and continues to be, a neglected area of social work education. Roulstone, describes reading key text books written by social work academics and used in the national curriculum of social work in the United Kingdom. He found that while disability is presented in the

curriculum, it is subsumed within a life course approach or within a diversity perspective.

Preliminary findings from a longitudinal research examining social work students' knowledge of disability issues and attitudes towards working with disabled people indicate that exposure to case studies, service-user led teaching sessions, and dedicated teaching sessions related to disability issues appear to positively influence student interest in working with disabled people (Rees & Raithby, 2012). However, gaps in learning were also identified in relation to the students' lack of confidence in their ability to relate theory to practice. For the researchers, this finding indicated that there is a need to combine a curriculum infusion approach to disability with explicitly focused teaching about disability.

Disability culture is another area of disability studies scholarship that receives little attention within the social work literature. Dupré (2012) argues that an understanding of disability culture is fundamental to critical disability studies, and must be incorporated into social work education if social work is to support the work of the disabled people's movement in demystifying and deconstructing the norms and practices of dominant able-bodied culture:

In order to engage with disability culture it is essential that social work education includes examination of culture, not only as a vehicle for recognizing and celebrating ethnicity and difference, but as a site for critical analysis, consciousness-raising and transformation (Dupré, 2012, p. 180).

An understanding of the role of culture in social work practice can provide social workers with important theoretical insights into the hegemonic activities of mainstream culture, which universalizes its own experience to establish it as the norm (Mullaly, 2007). Mullaly explains that our social institutions are based on the experiences of the dominant group, and therefore our education systems, the media, the entertainment industry, and the marketing of products all reinforce the notion of a universal culture. For example, American sociologist Ben Agger, found that there is an illusion of heterogeneity in sociology texts, and that intellectual hegemony is reflected and reproduced

in the “sameness” of the ideas and perspectives presented within the texts. A similar study of feminist, radical, and anti-racist social work scholarship in American introductory social work text books, published between 1988 and 1997, found that the knowledge contained within social work text books tends to assist in the reproduction of the dominant culture. This reproduction is aided by the suppression and marginalization of scholarship which seeks to challenge and transform it (Wachholz & Mullaly, 2000).

A recent unpublished Canadian multicase research study examined concepts about disability within three accredited bachelor of social work programs to identify major perspectives and themes of disability (Dupré, 2013). The study sought to determine the extent to which critical disability studies perspectives were presented, explained, and discussed in the classroom within core social work theory courses and specialized courses addressing disability. One major finding of the study was that critical disability perspectives have not yet been fully integrated into the core curricula of the three BSW programs. Another important finding was that current social work text books, used for core theory courses, had very little disability-related content, and in some texts the case examples describing social work practice addressing disability were clearly based on individual pathology. Developmental approaches to disability were found in the way that some course outlines were organized to cover the life cycle of the disabled person, beginning with birth and ending with death and dying. However, these longitudinal explanations prove especially problematic for disabled people because they tend to compare individuals to expectations, and determine the extent to which they fit or do not fit (DePoy & Gilson, 2011).

Based on the research work of the Person with Disabilities Caucus (2006, 2008), the *CASWE-CAFTS Standards of Accreditation* (2008) had clear educational objectives in relation to disability and social work education. Two of the curriculum standards for accreditation at the bachelor degree level were that, the curriculum should reflect social work values that promote a professional commitment to analyze and eradicate oppressive

social conditions; and that the curriculum should ensure that the student has an understanding of theories relevant to disability. More recently, the *Standards for Accreditation* (2014) have adopted an approach of recognizing diversity and difference as a crucial and valuable part of society. The *Standards* also include core learning objectives that promote addressing the structural sources of inequity, such as oppression, and states that social work students need to have the relevant knowledge and skills “to actively promote empowering and anti-oppressive practice” (CASWE-CAFTS, 2014, p. 12).

Any anti-oppressive social work practice approach addressing disability must be complementary to, and supportive of, the theoretical insights advanced within critical disability studies scholarship (Hiranandani, 2005; Meekosha & Dowse, 2007; Roulstone, 2012; Soldatic & Meekosha, 2012). As a starting point, social work must acknowledge the influence and important theoretical heritage of the social model of disability, which focused on the cultural and structural foundations of oppression experienced by disabled people. Social work theory and practice must also be able to incorporate and engage with the various critiques of the individual and social models of disability that have emerged from a range of social theory such as feminism, postmodernism, and critical anti-racism, to name but a few.

Anti-oppressive Social Work and Disability

Anti-oppressive social work practice is innovative, evolving and contentious (Hick, 2002). Anti-oppressive frameworks share values of equity, inclusion, empowerment, and community (Campbell, 2003). Anti-oppressive social work practice does not lend itself to a how-to-do-it procedure manual because social problems, social inequality, and oppression are highly complex phenomena (Mullaly, 2010). The anti-oppressive social work practice literature is substantial and growing exponentially. Three recent text books addressing oppression and anti-oppressive social work practice, based primarily on critical social theory perspectives, have contributed to understanding social work practice addressing ableism.

In his book, *Challenging Oppression and Confronting Privilege* (2010), social work educator and activist, Bob Mullaly, describes and discusses major concepts associated with his oppression/anti-oppression framework. In this text, Mullaly adopts a critical social theory perspective, acknowledging the seminal work of British social work educators, Marie Macey and Eileen Moxon (1996), who call for analytical rigor in developing anti-oppressive social work practice. Mullaly emphasizes the need for clear theoretical frameworks of explanation in which to locate good social work practice (Mullaly, 2010, p, 32). The particular theoretical framework that Mullaly proposes for challenging oppression is one that is informed by the insights of postmodernism, feminism, post-colonialism, and critical cultural studies. Mullaly also includes a chapter dedicated to the exploration of the nature and dynamics of privilege in maintain systems of domination.

In her edited book on anti-oppressive social work practice, *Doing Anti-oppressive Practice: Social Justice Social Work* (2011), social work educator and feminist, Donna Baines describes anti-oppressive (AOP) social work as a set of politicized practices that continually evolve to analyze and address constantly changing social conditions and challenges. She explains that, as part of larger movements for social change, AOP is constantly refining its theory and practice to address new tensions and social problems, as well as underlying structural factors. For Baines, anti-oppressive social work practice is not limited to critical social theory, although it does draw on a number of social work theories and approaches found under the critical social theory umbrella. Rather than a single approach, AOP includes a number of social justice-oriented practice approaches including; feminist, Marxist, postmodern, Indigenous, post-structural, anti-colonial and anti-racist. "These approaches draw on social activism and collective organizing as well as a sense that social services can and should be provided in ways that integrate liberatory understandings of social problems and human behavior" (Baines, 2011, p. 4). Baines comments that, like social problems, AOP is a messy, uneven process that requires ongoing critical

reflection, debate, and refinement (Baines, 2011, p. 23).

In his book, *Undoing Privilege: Unearned Advantage in a Divided World* (2010), social work educator Bob Pease explains that his book was not written specifically for social work, although it draws on the social work literature to illustrate aspects of privilege and oppression. Rather than focus on theories of social dominance, which emphasize the importance of locating inequality within the context of institutional and structural arrangements, Pease explores the responsibility of privileged groups for maintaining these social arrangements (Pease, 2010). He acknowledges that there is no shortage of strategies for challenging oppression and cites the work of Mullaly in relation to anti-oppressive practice strategies at the personal, cultural, and structural levels of society. Pease differentiates his approach from other anti-oppressive practice strategies by asserting that oppression and privilege must be addressed by both marginalized and privileged groups. "This means that if the eradication of oppression requires us to transform material conditions, demystify dominant culture, and empower those who are oppressed, then complementary strategies need to be developed to address the reproduction of privilege by those dominant groups (Pease, 2010, pp. 169-170).

The seminal work of British social work educators, Marie Macey and Eileen Moxon (1996) emphasizes the importance of analyzing oppressive relations within a broader sociological theory which takes into account the interplay of political, economic, ideological, and historical forces (Macey & Moxon, 1996). The oppression/privilege frameworks of Mullaly (2010) and Pease (2010) both provide comprehensive theoretical and conceptual foundations in support of their respective perspectives, including a focus on ableism. However, in their social work text book on working with disabled people, British social work educators, Michael Oliver, Bob Sapely and Patricia Thomas suggest that the lack of a coherent paradigm for addressing disability has resulted in theory and practice developing separately. "While there is a claim that practice leads to theory there is little, if any, recognition that practice has been based on the underlying

The Challenge of Addressing Disability Within Social Work Education

assumptions and perspectives of the individual model of disability” (Oliver, Sapey & Thomas, 2012, p. 21). In addition to these frameworks there is a specific social work practice approach that uses the concept of the paradigm and has oppression as its focus – structural social work.

The concept of the paradigm in structural social work represents a consistent set of social, political, and economic ideas, beliefs, and values, and is important because it allows social workers to compare and contrast different views on the nature of problems and social work practices, emanating from different ideologies. The use of paradigms in structural social work is based on two assumptions: first, that critical theory and ideological analysis in the modernist tradition can make important contributions in critiquing the dominant paradigm and in conceptualizing a progressive social work theory and practice; and second, these analyses must be informed by the contributions of postmodernism, post-structuralism, feminism, and anti-racism, which by themselves are insufficient for formulating emancipatory forms of social work practice (Mullaly, 2007). Structural social work is based on what Mullaly refers to as a “revitalized socialism” that is informed and reconstituted by the critiques of other critical social theories.

Structural Social Work

Structural social work is primarily a Canadian social work approach, although the term “structural social work” was first used by Middleman and Goldberg in 1974 to identify an approach to social work that located the source of social problems in the context of the social environment (Mullaly, 2007). Structural social work was developed at Carleton University in Ottawa, by social work professor Maurice Moreau, with input from many of his colleagues at Carleton and elsewhere. The approach had its genesis in the 1960s and 1970s during a time of political upheaval and activism; environmental, labour, gay and lesbian civil rights movements, second wave feminism, and First Nations mobilization and politicization against colonialism (Carniol, 1992). In developing the structural approach, Maurice Moreau and his colleagues identified two general social work

roles: first, to explore the socio-political and economic context of individual difficulties and to help collectivize personal troubles; and second, to enter into a helping process that facilitates critical thinking, consciousness-raising, and empowerment (Lundy, 2012). In recent years, the further development and promotion of structural social work theory has been the ongoing project of social work theorist and educator, Bob Mullaly, a senior scholar with the Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba.

Mullaly (2007) explains that structural social work is part of a school of social theory known as critical theory: “Critical theory concerns itself with moving from a society characterized by exploitation, inequality, and oppression to one that is emancipatory and free from domination” (Mullaly, 2007, pp. 214-215). He believes that modernist critical theory departs from traditional social theory in a number of important ways:

It is normative in nature and practical in intent; it rejects such scientific elements of positivism as ‘science is the only means of obtaining knowledge’ and that objectively verifiable facts constitute the only legitimate form of knowledge; it does not believe that the subjects who create the knowledge can be distinguished from the objects of that knowledge and a commitment to emancipation (i.e., theory and practice) cannot be separated (Mullaly, 2007, p. 218).

Structural, feminist, anti-racist, and Marxist epistemologies all identify a key oppressed group or groups who require liberation through the fundamental reorganization of social relations, with this common central tenet providing a moral-political project for liberatory social work practice (Baines, 2011, p. 11). However, Mullaly recognizes that there are two competing perspectives on critical theory; a modernist version and a post-modernist version. Postmodernism is not a moral theory for political action but is a theory about ways of knowing, and of how language and discourse exercise power (Baines, 2011).

Mullaly argues that both modernism and critical postmodernism have an emancipatory purpose; both stand against domination and oppression (Mullaly, 2007). Critical

postmodernism has used postmodern analyses and criticisms of modernity to revitalize critical social theory (Mullaly, 2010, p. 24). American sociologist Ben Agger (1991) argues that it is possible to forge links between critical theory and postmodernism, and a number of scholars have done so (Ryan, 1982, 1989; Smart, 1983; Agger 1989, 1990; Kellner 1989; Aronowitz, 1990; as cited in Agger, 1991, p. 121). More recently, Kincheloe & McClaren (2011) have provided a “reconceptualized critical theory” based on their 20 years of studying critical theory and conducting critical research. They believe that critical theory has evolved over the years to become an umbrella term for a number of social theories concerned with particular issues of power and justice, and the way that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion, and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system (Kincheloe & McClaren, 2011, p. 288).

Structural social work views both modernism and postmodernism as having strengths and limitations that can be effectively used as correctives for the limitations and contradictions of the other (Mullaly, 2007). Modernist social theory attends to pervasive structural issues of oppression and domination, recognizing the commonalities among all forms of oppression such as dominate/subordinate relations, the dynamics and consequences of oppression, and the hegemonic view of the dominant group. Critical postmodernism helps structural theorists to recognize that, although oppression and exploitation may be universal phenomenon, they will be experienced differently by different people, living in different places and in different contexts. Postmodernism also contributes to structural theory’s understanding that a progressive politics of difference, recognizing differences *within* oppressed groups, is important to avoiding oppressive inclusions and exclusions. Postmodern analysis of language and discourse has shown that the expert knowledge of traditional social work practice is derived from objective, scientific, and professional sources, and does not reflect the lived reality of people.

Mullaly believes that oppression occurs because of systemic constraints on subordinate groups in society that take the form of unquestioned norms, behaviours, symbols and the underlying assumptions of institutional rules (Mullaly, 2007, p. 261). He refers to the theoretical work of Michel Foucault (1977) in explaining that although there may be acts of intentional oppression, most oppression is systemic and unintentional, built into societal institutions and carried out unconsciously in day to day activities. Mullaly also supports the work of sociologist and feminist, Iris Marion Young (1990), who argues that modern forms of oppression are the result of nineteenth and early twentieth century scientific philosophical discourse which explicitly proposed and legitimated formal theories of race, gender, age, and national superiority (Mullaly, 2007).

Structural Social Work and Disability

Goodley (2012) identifies a number of key insights that arise from the theoretical frameworks informing critical disability studies. Mullaly’s (2007) theoretical framework for structural social work incorporates and engages with many of these same theoretical developments. Although Goodley highlights a move away from a materialist imperative, due to theoretical developments from postmodern and post structuralism, British disability theorists credit the materialist model of disability with emphasizing the ways society restricts the opportunities of disabled people to participate in mainstream economic and social activities, rendering them dependent (Oliver & Barnes, 2010). Structural social work is a politicized approach to social work practice which has its roots in both socialist and feminist social theory and analysis. One of the criticisms of structural social work has been that it is too political in advancing a socialist alternative to the dominant social order (Finn & Jacobson, 2003). However, Mullaly points out that many people today, both in and outside of social work, still subscribe to socialist values such as social justice, equity, and structured opportunities for achieving personal and social fulfilment (Mullaly, 2007, p. 210).

According to Goodley (2012) an intersectional analysis is needed to explore disability as a site of otherness and marginality. An intersectional analysis reveals how disability is the ultimate vehicle for understanding the dynamics of exclusion and resistance. There is heterogeneity within oppressed groups and any attempt to categorize groups of people based on physical, social or other ascribed characteristics oversimplifies the complexity and diversity of social realities (Mullaly, 2010). The intersectional nature of oppression has implications for social work practice. Social workers need to be aware of the ways in which different forms of oppression intersect with each other and to understand that there is considerable variation and heterogeneity within each oppressed group: “They will then recognize that not all members of a particular oppressed group experience oppression in the same way or with the same severity or intensity” (Mullaly, 2010, p. 203). The notion of intersectionality helps social workers to avoid the practice of identifying people as either oppressors or oppressed. Everyone in society occupies both roles (identities) at various points in time (Mullaly, 2002, p. 25).

Anti-oppressive social work and structural social work are mindful of the socio-historical and global conditions of oppression in relation to disability. Canadian social work educator and feminist Akua Benjamin insists that, “in light of our increasingly global context, strategies of resistance must involve an analysis of the overarching and specific forces that must be resisted” (Benjamin, 2007, p. 201). Mullaly (2007) believes that it is the dominant ideology of neoliberalism underpinning globalization that determines the forms and processes of globalization. Neoliberalism is described as “an approach to social, economic, and political life that discourages collective or government services, instead encouraging reliance on the private market and individual skill to meet social needs (Baines, 2011, p. 30). Neoliberalism, in particular, has had a detrimental impact on the lives of many disabled people. In the disability service sector, social workers struggle to maintain professionalism in a field that is primarily

technical and output driven. Within this managerial system, social workers end up policing disabled people on behalf of the state (Meekosha & Dowse, 2007). The use of psychological and physiological explanations of disability have been reinforced by the use of technology, a focus on quantifiable measures and outcomes, and the behaviorist nature of evidence-based social work practice (Oliver, Sapey & Thomas, 2012). Resistance to neoliberalism includes reclaiming the political with a rigorous critical analysis of social work’s role within the state and society (Ferguson, 2008).

Critical disability studies has the purpose to shift attention away from disability and onto the able-bodied (Goodley, 2012). Anti-oppressive social work practice acknowledges the fact that social identities are never fixed, but are formed through representations available through various discourses (Smith, 2007). Ableism, for example, is viewed as the oppression of disabled people. This form of oppression is manifest in the combination of personal prejudices, cultural expressions, values and social forces that marginalize disabled people and portray them in a negative light (Mullaly, 2010). Despite legislation and policies to prevent discrimination and to improve accessibility, disabled people continue to be oppressed on a personal level (viewed as dependent, charity cases), at the cultural level (stereotyping and invisibility within popular culture, portrayed as victims of personal tragedy or as heroic), and at the structural level (discrimination, exclusion, deserving poor) (Mullaly, 2010).

Mullaly comments that oppression must be understood as a systemic situation produced and reproduced in everyday social processes and practices. An understanding of personal and individual oppression, and various types of internalized oppression, will assist social workers to better understand an individual’s situation and to assist the individual to develop counter narratives to the oppressive dominant cultural discourse (Mullaly, 2007). Interpersonal work, such as provided in group work, is the most effective way to have people who are experiencing similar problems develop political

awareness, self-define a more genuine identity than the one imposed by dominant culture, develop confidence to assert a new identity, and establish solidarity with others (Mullaly, 2007). The structural approach to social work practice affirms an objective of CDS to acknowledge the individual as the key site of everyday life, oppression and resistance (Goodley, 2012). At the structural or macro level of social work practice, Mullaly (2007) believes that structural social workers should encourage group-specific organizations as an important mechanism for oppressed people to discover themselves, to reclaim their identity, to create a sense of solidarity and community, and to develop a group-specific voice and perspective.

Many social work educators who study and engage with disability theory have commented that it is important for any social work practice addressing disability to be informed by disabled people's own theoretical developments which are based on personal insights and experiences (Dupré, 2012; Hiranandani, 2005; Meekosha & Dowse, 2007; Oliver & Sapey, 2006). Social work approaches to disability must be critically reflexive and open to the new and quickly evolving theoretical developments taking place within disability studies. For example, work on the psycho-emotional effects of ableism focuses on the comments and treatment an individual receives when impairment is visible/known to an able-bodied person (Reeve, 2012). While feminist approaches to social work theory and practice have developed analyses of embodiment and its psycho-social impact on women, many conventional and progressive approaches to social work practice have not yet explored or developed an analysis of the body as a cultural construction. Although structural social work incorporates a feminist critique, there is more theoretical work to be done in relation to this analysis and its importance for understanding the relationship between the cultural representations of bodies and people's lived experiences. Despite this limitation, structural social work appears to hold the most potential for embracing the theoretical developments within critical disability studies, for supporting the important work of activists and

scholars within the disabled people's movement, and for confronting ableism through anti-oppressive social work practices.

Conclusion

Social work as a profession has not been viewed as an ally of disabled people and much of the criticism from the disabled people's movement comes from social work's role as a gatekeeper for social welfare programs. The advent of neoliberal ideology within social welfare has not only negatively impacted service users, with reduced income support and more targeted (limited) eligibility for services and programs, it has changed the practice of social work to incorporate thinking and practices more in line with business and market approaches than with social work values. The predominance of more rational and technical approaches to social work practice appears to have subsumed the importance of theory for informing practice. Much of social work theory that is presented to social work students in educational text books is underpinned by conventional perspectives, with little theoretical development in the last 30 years. Social work needs to embrace disability studies, as suggested in the journal article by Carter, Leslie and Angell (2011). However, before social work can improve its relationship and effectiveness with disabled people it must become more critically reflexive in relation to its own theoretical progress in relation to disability. While both social work and disability studies are said to share critical, structural, and strengths-based perspectives, social work practice has not adequately explored these perspectives in relation to disability and ableism. First, social work education addressing disability must include an anti-oppressive analysis and practice which infuses theories of disability throughout the curriculum. This approach may be complemented by a specific class or module focused more specifically on disability and social work practice. Second, social work text books used by schools of social work should be reviewed to determine the congruence between theoretical approaches to disability and social work practice with disabled people. Texts should be supplemented with

The Challenge of Addressing Disability Within Social Work Education

readings from the critical disability studies literature. Third, pedagogical strategies for introducing course material related to critical disability studies could involve participation and collaboration with disabled individuals and organizations formed by disabled people. Finally, disability culture and the dynamics of cultural hegemony in relation to disability are important aspects of critical disability studies. Social work education should have a cultural studies component so that social workers how the dominant able-bodied culture reflects and reinforces ableism at the personal and structural levels of society.

References

- Agger, B. (1989). Do books write authors? A study of disciplinary hegemony. *Teaching Sociology*, 17(3), 365-369.
- Agger, B. (1991). Critical theory, poststructuralism, postmodernism: their sociological relevance. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17, 105-131.
- Albrecht, G. L. (2002). American pragmatism, sociology and the development of disability studies. *Heilpädagogik Online* 03/03, 22-51. Retrieved from: <http://www.heilpaedagogikonline.com>
- Baines, D. (2011). *Doing anti-oppressive practice: Social justice social work*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.
- Barnes, C. (2007). Disability studies: What's the point? *Intersticios: Revista Sociológica de Pensamiento Crítico*, 1(1), 49-58. Retrieved from: <http://www.intersticios.es>
- Barnes, C. (2012). Understanding the social model of disability. In C. Thomas, N. Watson, & Roulstone (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of disability studies*, (pp. 12-28). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Benjamin, A. (2007). Doing anti-oppressive social work: The importance of resistance, history and strategy. In D. Baines (Ed.), *Doing anti-oppressive practice*, (pp. 196-204), Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.
- Campbell, C. (2003). Introduction: What is anti-oppressive social work, and theory? In C. Campbell, *Anti-oppressive social work: Promoting equity and social justice*. Retrieved from: <http://aosw.socialwork.dal.ca/index.html>
- Campbell, F. (2008). Exploring internalized ableism using critical race theory. *Disability & Society*, 23(2), 151-162.
- Canadian Association for Social Work Education. (2014). *CASWE-ACFTS Standards for Accreditation*. Ottawa: CASWE.
- Canadian Human Rights Commission. (2011). Resources and Publications. Dispute resolution Statistics, 2009, 2010, 2011. Retrieved from: http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/publications/ar_2011-ra/dr_stats_rd-eng.aspx
- Carniol, B. (1992). Structural social work: Maurice Moreau's challenge to social work practice. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 3(1), 1-20.
- Carter, I., Quaglia, C. & Leslie, D. (2010). Enriching disability through interdisciplinary disability studies. *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching*. Retrieved from: <http://celt.uwindsor.ca>
- Carter, I., Leslie, D. & Angell, B. (2011). Promoting accessibility and adding value to social work education. *Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education*, 14(1), 35-44.
- Carter, I., Hanes, R. & MacDonald, J. E. (2012). The inaccessible road not taken: the trials, tribulations, and successes of disability inclusion within social work post-secondary education. *The Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 109-142.
- Depoy, E. & Gilson, S.F. (2011). *Studying disability: Multiple theories and responses*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dupré, M. (2012). Disability culture and cultural competency in social work. *Social Work Education: The International Journal*, 31(2), 168-183.
- Dupré, M. (2013). *Social work education and disability: A multicase study of approaches to disability in core and specialized curricula at three Bachelor of Social Work programs*. Unpublished thesis, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba, Canada.
- Ferguson, I. (2008). *Reclaiming social work: Challenging Neo-liberalism and promoting*

- social justice*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Goodley, D. (2012). Dis/entangling critical disability studies. *Disability & Society*. Retrieved from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2012.717884>
- Hick, S. (2002). *Social work in Canada*. Toronto, ON: Thompson Educational publishing, Inc.
- Hiranandani, V. (2005). Towards a critical theory of disability in social work. *Critical Social Work*, 6(1).
- Kincheloe, J. L. & McClaren, P. (2011). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In K. Hayes (Ed.) *Key work in critical pedagogy* (pp. 285-326). Rotterdam, NL: Sense Publishers.
- Linton, S. (1998). *Claiming disability*. New York, NY: University Press.
- Lundy, C. (2012). *Social work, social justice & human rights: A structural approach to practice*. Toronto, On: University of Toronto Press.
- Macey, M. & Moxon, E. (1996). An examination of anti-racist and anti-oppressive theory and practice in social work education. *British Journal of Social Work*, 26, 297-314.
- Meekosha, H. & Dowse, I. (2007). Integrating critical disability studies into social work education and practice; An Australian experience. *Practice*, 19(3), 169-183.
- Meekosha, H. & Shuttleworth, R. (2009). "What's so 'critical' about critical disability studies?" *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, 15(1), 47-75.
- Mullaly, B. (2002). *Challenging oppression: A critical social work approach*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.
- Mullaly, B. (2007). *The new structural social work*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.
- Mullaly, B. (2010). *Challenging oppression and confronting privilege*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.
- Oliver, M. (2010). *Understanding disability: From theory to practice*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan
- Oliver, M., Sapey, B. & Thomas, P. (2012). *Social work with disabled people*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Oliver, M. & Sapey, B. (2006). *Social work with disabled people*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pease, B. (2010). *Undoing privilege: Unearned advantage in a divided world*. London, UK: Zed Books Ltd.
- Prince, M. (2004). Disability, disability studies and citizenship: Moving up or off the sociological agenda? *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 29(3), 459-467.
- Rees, J. & Raithby, M. (2012). Increasing strange bedfellows? An examination of the inclusion of disability issues in university – and agency-based social work education in a Welsh context. *Social Work Education: The International Journal*, 31(2), 184-201.
- Reid-Cunningham, A. R. & Fleming, V.C. (2009). Theories of disability: Findings from an analysis of textbooks on human behavior and the social environment. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 19 (1), 10-25.
- Roulstone, A., Thomas, C. & Watson, N. (2012). The changing terrain of disability studies. In N. Watson, A. Roulstone & C. Thomas (Eds.) *Routledge handbook of disability studies* (pp. 3-11). Routledge.
- Roulstone, A. (2012). 'Stuck in the middle with you': Towards enabling social work with disabled people. *Social Work Education: The International Journal*, 31(2), 142-154.
- Shakespeare, T. (2008). Debating disability. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 34, 11-14.
- Society for Disability Studies (2003). Mission. Retrieved from: <http://disstudies.org/about/sds.mission/>
- Shildrick, M. (2012). Critical disability studies. N. Watson, A. Roulstone & C. Thomas (Eds.) *Routledge handbook of disability studies*, (pp. 30-41). Routledge.
- Smith, K. (2007). Social work, restructuring and everyday resistance: "Best practices" gone underground. In D. Baines (Ed.), *Doing anti-oppressive practice*, (pp. 145-159). Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.
- Soldatic, K. & Meekosha, H. (2012). Moving the boundaries of feminist social work education with disabled people in the neoliberal era. *Social Work Education: The International*

The Challenge of Addressing Disability Within Social Work Education

- Journal*, 31(20), 246-252.
- Thomas, C. (2012). Theorizing disability and chronic illness: Where next for perspectives in medical sociology? *Social Theory & Health*, 1(3), 209-228.
- Wachholz, S. & Mullaly, B. (2000). The politics of the textbook: A content analysis of the coverage and treatment of feminist, radical, and anti-racist social work scholarship in American introductory social work textbooks published between 1988 and 1997. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 11(2), 51-76.
- Williams, G. (2001). Theorizing disability. In G. L. Albrecht, K. D. Seelman & M. Bury (Eds.) *The handbook of disability studies*, (pp. 123-124). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.