

# **EDITORIAL: DISABILITY JUSTICE: DECENTERING COLONIAL KNOWLEDGE, CENTERING DECOLONIAL EPISTEMOLOGIES**

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This thematic issue of *Research in Arts and Education* derives from the presentations and keynote addresses of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Disability Studies, Arts & Education Conference (DSAE). In light of the ongoing global pandemic, the conference was held online for the first time from October 7 to October 9, 2021. In preparation for the conference, we recognized how the pandemic had fore-fronted social justice in disability studies, art education, and society: the inequity of economic resources, the exploitation of the most vulnerable people, systemic racism, and the disproportionate effects of climate change on non-industrial countries. The intersection of racial, able-bodied, ethnic, sexual, cultural, gendered, environmental, and economic power disparities are interlocking oppressions that cannot be detached from colonial history. Decolonial work is foregrounded in the lived realities of marginalized people who diverge from neurotypical and dominant systems. Thus, these issues were threaded throughout the conference presentations.

The theme for this conference and thematic issue is *Disability Justice: Decentering Colonial Knowledge, Centering Decolonial Epistemologies*. The authors in this thematic issue examine the global meaning of disability justice and anti-colonialism in the arts, activism, and education and how contemporary art, art education, and research intersect disability and anti-colonialism. The authors resist an “additive approach” to the arts education curriculum and advocate for an intercultural curriculum for social change, which challenges how colonialism exists in the white/Eurocentric system of knowledge production and research (Mignolo, 2000; Smith, 2021). They set out to validate the histories, narratives, and lived experiences of oppressed peoples that have been eviscerated from the art canon (Smith, 2021).

In the first article, “Decentering Colonialism and Ableism in Artistic Practice,” Alice Wexler and Mira Kallio-Tavin offer an exploration of the work of five young disabled artists, creative workers, and scholars of color who presented their work as part of a conference panel: *Decentering Colonialism and Ableism in Artistic Practices*. The artists Bani Amor, Pelenakeke Brown, Raisa Kabir, Yo-Yo Lin, and Alex Dolores Salerno shared their experiences of making, particularly during the pandemic, highlighting crip time/wisdom, colonialism, and care as themes that informed and were informed by arts practice. Wexler and Kallio-Tavin draw on key perspectives from critical

disability studies to offer a theoretical context for crip time, labor and care in the context of colonialization and neoliberalism. This introduction precedes a presentation of the artists’ reflections which include rich examples of practice that reflect Indigenous, embodied, and crip forms of wisdom. These practices have the potency to both disrupt and inform notions of taking care.

In “Staging Survivance: Intellectual Disability, De-institutionalization and Decolonial Arts Education,” theatre artist Victoria Freeman, Indigenous actor Jamie Oshkabewisens, Indigenous artist and survivor of Rideau Regional Centre in Ontario, Joe Clayton, and non-Indigenous art education professor Richard Fletcher share an illustrated conversation concerning research about and performance of the play *Birds Make Me Think About Freedom*. This dialogic paper offers insights into a performance that explored histories of institutionalization of Indigenous children whilst honoring those who did and did not survive. Here the evolution of the performance and theatrical staging of stories concerning institutionalization are shared through multiple voices that reflect the creative capacity of multimodal representation. The paper acknowledges and enacts the term *survivance*, a concept that brings disability justice and Indigenous activism together.

In the article “Disability Justice Praxis: Sick, Disabled, Deaf Women and Non-Binary Educators of Color Holding Each Other in Radical Love and Accessible Kinship,” Sara Acevedo, Hailee Yoshizaki-Gibbons, Paulina Abustan, and Holly Pearson offer collaborative insight into their experiences of academia. The essay immediately establishes itself as a site of resistance for “four sick, mad, neurodivergent, Deaf/disabled, early-career, international, transnational, diasporic, United States-based faculty of color.” The work is framed as an act of Accessible Kinship based on an ethic of love which promotes a process of honoring, sharing, and learning with and from one another. The authors offer storytelling as a means of presenting counternarratives to ableist, white-supremacist dominance in academia, each sharing their own stories, which trace childhood through to adulthood and adolescence as recollections of their emerging individual and shared identities. The paper concludes by asking, “Who is valued? Who is allowed to create and share knowledge?” encouraging others to find their worth through storytelling, dialogue, and

community.

Jenna Gabriel's article follows the trajectory of questioning and decentering the academy through her exploration of racialized disciplinary processes in school, particularly in the art classroom. In "Disrupting Discipline: A DisCrit Critique of Behavior 'Management' in the Art Room," she examines the intersection of disability and race, recognizing the disproportionate representation of pupils in the so-called school-to-prison pipeline. Whilst the paper offers points for education more generally, it goes on to explore the particular case of art education and classroom practices that are concerned with managing pupils' behaviors and their complicity in "oppressive pedagogical practices and carceral cycles of harm." Gabriel employs Disability Critical Race Studies, or DisCrit, as a theoretical tool for analyzing practices in the art room and, in particular, draws on work in disability studies that has offered counter-practices for a more socially just art education. She concludes with a call for art educators to include disability art in their curriculum as a way forward for a justice-based art education.

In "Pedagogical Encounters with the Indigeneity & Disability Justice Art Exhibition," Kelly Gross and Karen Keifer-Boyd detail a series of student-developed curricular encounters that respond to the virtual exhibition, *Indigeneity and Disability Justice Art*, that ran concurrently with the DSAE conference. As curators of the exhibition, the authors provide an overview of the artists featured in the exhibition who engage in anti-colonialism by "offering creative rethinking of historically marginalized positionalities to rebuke dominant colonial narratives of place." The authors encourage art educators to engage with this exhibition as a way to investigate issues of anti-colonialism through a critical disability studies perspective, which promotes socially engaged artistic practice that can become a form of "activism against ableist, normative assumptions."

In "Decolonizing Relaxed Performance: A Visual Translation of Vital Ecosystems," Kimberlee Collins, Chelsea Temple Jones, and Carla Rice introduce relaxed performance (RP) as an artistic method rooted in disability justice that challenges normative comportment in performance. The article features artist Sonny Bean and his visual translation of the 2022 arts-based

research report, *Relaxed Performance: Exploring University-based Training Across Fashion, Theatre and Choir*. Bean extends human-centric data about RPs to the more-than-human world by exploring the interconnectedness and bodily nature of performance, thus revealing its incompleteness. The authors situate Bean's visual translation work as vital to access praxis and, thus, the decolonization of the arts and performance spaces, university classrooms, and other institutions. The authors write, "This means learning about traditional territories in which the RP will take place, as well as challenging disciplinary and community norms through which the RP unfolds and attending to what our bodies can do, and where they can be, on colonized land."

In the article "Corpogravure of a Circle Meeting: Poetics and Politics of Blind Women in Brazil," anthropologist Olivia Von de Weid and members of the Brazilian Movement of Blind and Low Vision Women, Gislana Maria do Socorro Monte do Vale, Clarissa Cristina Oliveira Gonçalves, and Rita de Cássia Guaraná Bello, share ethnographic embodied narratives that explore "the interweaving of bodies and emotions and the political, personal and poetic engagements of blind women." Through this somatic investigation that took place during a Poetics of Being Workshop, the resulting image of this process, referred to as corpogravure, is described as "an exercise in creating words or images that helps to embody the forces and the meanings that are in germination in the singular experience of being a woman with visual impairment." This poetic weaving of narratives uses embodied words as an act of empowerment that disrupts colonialist views "about the corporality of women with disabilities" and challenges ableist attitudes toward blindness.

Erin Hoppe's book review of Petra Kuppers's *Eco Soma: Pain and Joy in Speculative Performance Encounters* (2022) leads the reader through Kuppers's eco soma method, which she employs for an ethical, relational, being with the world, each other, and ourselves. Hoppe describes Kuppers's extreme audience engagement as grounded in somatics, performance art, and disability culture. Hoppe calls this latest book an opus, bringing together Kuppers's ongoing work in ecosomatics emerging "from disability culture, queer phenomenology, ecopoetics, experimental anthropology, psychogeography, affect theory, and from long immersion in somatic movement modalities and

performance practices” (Kuppers, 2022, p. 2). Kuppers’s engagement with the reader appears in intermittent questions that bring awareness to our senses and positions in space, which is integral to her method of ethical relationship between self and environment. Likewise, Hoppe wrote the review as a sensory encounter by embracing Kuppers’s method, revealing how and where she read/listened to *Eco Soma*, and bringing us full circle.

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