

DISRUPTING DISCIPLINE: A DISCRIT CRITIQUE OF BEHAVIOR “MANAGEMENT” IN THE ART ROOM

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ABSTRACT

Utilizing a required training module on restraint and seclusion as an example for analysis, this article employs a Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) lens to critique dominant classroom management practices that negatively and disproportionately affect disabled students, particularly disabled students of color. This article suggests that critical disability studies holds potential for informing counter-practice in the art classroom, connecting the radical politics of Disability Art with resistance to special education’s influence on art pedagogy. In suggesting disability studies as an alternative paradigm to inform art education, the article concludes by proposing art teachers can disrupt school-based cycles of harm.

KEYWORDS

disability critical race theory
(DisCrit), school discipline,
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Carceral systems of punishment, surveillance, and control—rooted in the capitalist economic machine—influence schooling on multiple levels. In the United States, this is often conceptualized as a “school-to-prison pipeline,” as scholars note how punishments at school seem to draw a straight line to later involvement with the criminal justice system (Duncan, 2000; Roque & Paternoster, 2011; Skiba et al., 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003). School resource officers (SROs), metal detectors at entrances, and student referrals to law enforcement are explicit markers of the ways schooling has normalized the influences of the prison industrial complex, yet the school-to-prison pipeline implicates daily interactions as well. Ranging from minor infractions like dress code violations to more severe instances of student restraint or seclusion, these encounters restrict students’ bodily autonomy and require teachers to act as observers, enforcers, and reporters. Critiquing the linearity of the pipeline model, Erica Meiners (2007) suggests instead a school-prison nexus that acknowledges the myriad historical, structural, and social forces that work together to connect schools and jails. This invites an acknowledgment of the outsized influence of neoliberal capitalism on schooling; teachers and school administrators function as agents of the state not only to prepare students for their future social and economic roles (Labaree, 1997) but also to do so as efficiently as possible, influenced by economics to determine the allocation of educational resources (Kraft, 2006). As many anti-capitalist organizers and teacher labor leaders argue, the compulsory nature of schooling itself is indicative of the carceral logics that underpin capitalists’ interests in education. Because schools serve to contain children while adults play their roles in the workforce, students learn early and often in their education that a primary function of the US public education system is to maintain the capitalist social order. This function of schooling has come even more starkly into focus during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

These intersections between economics, carcerality, and schooling have outsized effects on disabled students. Dolmage (2017), for example, describes schools as systematically quantifying disabled students’ needs as drains on scarce resources that are outweighed by what potential they have to contribute to future production, grouping students into two classes: one (the nondisabled) which is seen as capable, as having many uses within capitalism, and as worthy of

investment and one (the disabled) which is seen as in need of expensive, special accommodations and thus a disposable drain on the education system. Moore and Slee (2019) note that the U.S. special education system frames the provision of these special accommodations as a practice of “benevolent humanitarianism” (p. 266), which positions necessary—and legally mandated—disability accommodations as a service delivered by the nondisabled out of kindness and in response to the individual problem of disability, rather than supports provided out of a commitment to disability justice, solidarity, or educational equity. The art classroom finds itself caught in these crosshairs, an early site for inclusive education (Caustin-Theoharis & Burdick, 2008) which is often employed as a therapeutic intervention in service of educational efficiency (Kraft, 2006) or as a site for inspiring stories of disabled students celebrated for their childlike creations (Derby, 2011).

As a group, disabled students are monitored and labeled with greater frequency than their nondisabled peers (Annamma, 2018), a reality that—though underpinned by an intention to procure greater support—nevertheless contributes to greater surveillance. When coupled with frequent misunderstandings of or efforts to control disabled communication and behavior (see, for example, Attias, 2020), it is not difficult to understand the realities underpinning statistics that show greater proportions of disabled students subjected to harmful school disciplinary practices and involved in the juvenile justice system, especially when those students are additionally marginalized by their race and/or class. For example, disabled students are disproportionately subjected to practices of restraint and seclusion in US schools, accounting for 71% of students restrained and 66% of students secluded, despite making up 12% of the national student population in the 2015–16 school year (Keierleber, 2019). In the same year, Black students comprised 27% of those restrained and 23% of those secluded, despite comprising only 15% of the total student population (Keierleber, 2019). These trends mirror trends in juvenile incarceration, with disabled students making up between 33 and 40% of the juvenile prison population (Annamma, 2018), approximately three times their representation in the general population of students. For disabled students of color, the disproportionality is even more stark. Disabled Black students are four times more likely than their white counterparts

to be educated in prison (Osher et al., 2012), and students of color with emotional or behavioral disabilities—a disability category noted for the subjectivity with which it can be diagnosed (Collins et al., 2016) and the disproportionality with which it is applied (Annamma et al., 2013)—comprise nearly half of the population of incarcerated disabled students, despite comprising only 20% of the national population (Losen, Hodson, Ee & Martinez, 2015).

The trajectory from school discipline to incarceration hinges, in part, on teachers' classroom management practices—commonly understood to be their methods for ensuring students are well-behaved and engaged during learning—which are also influenced by the interplay of economics/efficiency and carcerality/control. Despite its unique role as a non-core subject in U.S. schools, the art room is not immune from the pervasive culture of policing in schools. Hanawalt (2018) suggests that a systemic focus on accountability and compliance in schools shapes how art teachers respond to student behavior, pushing them to assimilate to dominant culture and administrator expectations, even if their training suggested a more progressive pedagogical orientation. Literature on behavior management in the art room is limited; a search for peer-reviewed articles addressing this surfaced only one result, a twenty-year-old instructional resource that responds to the challenge of managing student behavior by suggesting a “Top 10 List” of classroom management principles (Susi, 2002)—a formatting choice we might read as prioritizing educational efficiency. Despite a preponderance of studies about behavior management approaches in special education classrooms, no results specific to managing the behavior of disabled students in the art room were found. As art educators in U.S. public schools frequently teach every student in their schools (Gabriel, 2018; Dorff, 2018), this suggests a troubling dynamic in which even well-intentioned art teachers assume roles in the school-prison nexus, positioned by these systems to be complicit in oppressive pedagogical practices and carceral cycles of harm.

Despite this reality, art teachers' positions in schools suggest they have the potential to break these harmful cycles, both through restorative (as opposed to punitive) practices and also through classroom practices that support rather than criminalize racial and disability identity. Disability studies offers a powerful alternative paradigm to

special education's emphasis on pathologization, efficiency, and control and much that art educators can find useful in challenging the influence of ableism in their curriculum and instruction (Penketh, 2022; Wexler, 2022).

METHODOLOGY, POSITIONALITY, AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this article, I write from my position as a U.S.-based art teacher educator, a former arts teacher, and a critical disability studies scholar to critique the forces of control and surveillance displayed in classroom management approaches in the art room. I use a training module on restraint and seclusion, required of my students in order to receive their state teaching certification, as an example for analysis and I apply this analysis both to the pervasive practices of policing students' bodies broadly and to the specific, though extreme, practice of restraint and seclusion. I employ Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) as a theoretical lens through which to analyze dominant practices of behavior management as rooted in control and surveillance of students. I conclude by focusing on the art room, suggesting that disability studies can be a lever to challenge harmful practices in the art classroom and propose that teachers' potentiality as a disrupter of schooling's relationship to the carceral state is anchored at the intersection of disability studies and art education.

Put forth by Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2013), DisCrit is a framework that draws on disability studies and critical race theory to examine processes by which students are simultaneously racialized and disabled. DisCrit accepts as a fundamental truth that race and disability are social constructs, signified by societal ideas of “normal” and “abnormal.” In advocating for their entanglement, Annamma and colleagues (2013) tell us that racism and ableism work together to uphold white supremacy, pointing to examples such as how the logic of slavery relied on claims that whites were intellectually superior to enslaved Africans—a claim about ability that continues to have implications on race-based discrimination. DisCrit has seven core tenets, which can be summarized as: (1) Ableism and racism work together to uphold the normal ideal; (2) DisCrit disrupts singular understandings of identity in favor of more intersectional understandings; (3) While race and ability are socially constructed, their labels affect material and psychological impact; (4) Marginalized voices should be centered; (5) DisCrit looks to legal

and historical context to understand the role of ableism and racism in marginalizing individuals; (6) DisCrit names whiteness and able-bodiedness as forms of currency and oppressive systems which control the advancement of racialized and disabled peoples, and (7) DisCrit is anchored in activism and resistance.

Two essential features of DisCrit bear closer examination as overarching commitments that shape the lens through which I examine behavior management practices. First, DisCrit emphasizes intersectionality in analysis. Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality, based on the particular experiences of Black women at the intersection of their race and gender, demands we consider not only how specific marginalized identities intersect in experiences of oppression but also the particular ways in which oppression on the basis of race is deepened at its intersections with oppressions based on other marginalized identities. Beyond simply examining individual oppressions at the sites of these multiple marginalizations, my analysis begins with an acknowledgment that systems of oppression are structured to mutually constitute and marginalize non-normative (e.g., non-White, non-male, non-disabled, non-middle class, non-heterosexual, non-cis-gendered, non-English speaking, etc.) identities. Rather than deeply exploring the intersecting systems that inform oppressive classroom ecologies, my analysis begins with the truth that our public schools are structured to create a hierarchy in which marginalized students are already oppressed. Second, DisCrit emphasizes a commitment to action and resistance. I take this to mean that beyond its applications in ideational (Fetterman, 1998) research, in which thoughts and ideas are fundamental drivers in change-making, DisCrit is an explicitly materialist (Fetterman, 1998) framework, in which material conditions, resource allocations, and observable behaviors are central to generating change. Said another way, DisCrit analysis should not exist in a vacuum; researchers have a responsibility to ensure their work is rooted in changing the material conditions in which disabled and racialized students live and learn. As such, there is an animating ethical commitment in DisCrit work. I approached my analysis with an explicit commitment to working towards the abolition of carceral systems and the actualization of disability justice in all its forms.

THE POLICED STUDENT BODY: CONTROL, SURVEILLANCE, AND DISCIPLINE OF DISABLED STUDENTS

Throughout their day, students are policed by school personnel in myriad ways. Often presented to students under the umbrella of rules, expectations, and ostensibly-neutral "school policies," these small acts of control function in insidious ways to hinder students' bodily autonomy in schools. These rules typically do not invite student input and empower school personnel with extraordinary subjectivity in enforcement. Such policies might be couched in language of "professionalism," as is often the case with dress codes, restrictions on hairstyles, or rules around profane language. They often involve restrictions on movement or bodily autonomy, such as requirements that students utilize hall passes provided at the discretion of their teachers, restrictions on eating in class, or requirements that students ask permission before getting water or using the restroom. Finally, such policies are often marked by highly subjective definitions, such as rules around student "defiance"—a hard-to-quantify descriptor that invites disparate enforcement based on a teacher's cultural and relational understanding of any given student. Such policies privilege a neurotypical, Eurocentric norm.

At the more extreme end of classroom management are practices of restraint and seclusion, which allow school personnel to restrict a child's movement through the use of physical holds or restraints and/or through the use of separation in an enclosed, solitary environment as a practice of behavior management. Despite an abundance of information on its harmful effects (U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee, 2014; Schifter, 2019), particularly for autistic students and students of color, only 19 states limit the use of restraint to instances of immediate physical danger and only 12 ban seclusion in any form (Schifter, 2019). Given the reality that most states still allow some form of restraint and seclusion policy, many preservice educators, including art educators, receive mandatory training on state or school policies for restraint and seclusion—yet no critical context is provided to these trainings.

As a requirement of initial licensure to teach in the Commonwealth of Virginia, where I support preservice art teachers pursuing their degrees at a public university, teacher candidates must take part in an online training addressing regulations

that govern the use of restraint and seclusion in public schools across the Commonwealth. Completing these requirements results in a certificate that the educator has completed the Department of Education's behavior intervention and support requirements. Across five modules, preservice teachers are provided with a definition of restraint and seclusion, the policies that govern their use, strategies for preventing the use of restraint and seclusion, and strategies to reintegrate students who have been restrained or secluded. Modules can be publicly accessed at <https://cieesodu.org/initiatives/restraint-and-seclusion/#tab15=1>.

These modules were brought to my attention by one of my students, a preservice teacher who had taken a class I teach which utilizes disability studies to prepare art teachers to support disabled learners in their classrooms. The young woman included the link in an email conversation about disability studies and art education, noting the discomfort she felt upon viewing it (T. Johnson, personal communication, February 2, 2021). Together, she and I worked through the modules, discussing the various aspects of the training material we found harmful and at odds with the critical pedagogy we'd discussed in my class. Our viewing of the modules surfaced several areas of concern.

SUBJECTIVITY WITHIN THE DEFINITION

Physical restraint is defined in Module 1 as "a personal restriction that immobilizes or reduces the ability of a student to move freely," a relatively straightforward definition that nevertheless includes several subjective examples of what does not constitute an incident of physical restraint. These include physical gestures like "briefly" holding a student to "calm or comfort" them, touching or holding the student as part of "safely escort[ing]" them to another location, and "the use of *incidental, minor, or reasonable* physical contact or other actions designed to maintain order and control" (emphasis added). The same module defines seclusion as "the involuntary confinement of a student alone in a room or area from which the student is physically prevented from leaving [which must be] of *sufficient* dimensions and have *sufficient* lighting, heating, cooling, and ventilation to comport the dignity and safety of the student" (emphasis added).

These definitions offer school personnel a troubling degree of autonomy. Individual educators can determine what constitutes restraint, decide an appropriate length of physical contact, interpret what students might find calming, and determine what types of physical touch are "incidental" or "reasonable." The last phrase, in particular, presents such "minor" incidents of physical restraint as ancillary to the overarching goal of maintaining order and control in a classroom. The Commonwealth's definition of physical restraint thus acknowledges the fundamentally carceral goals that govern classroom instruction and presupposes all instances of physical touch—whether or not they rise to meet the highly subjective official designation of restraint—as practices of maintaining control over students' bodies. Similarly, guidance for seclusion invites interpretation, granting school personnel the power to determine the dignity and deservedness of individual students, as represented by the requisite sufficiency of the room in which they are detained—setting up a troubling dynamic in which it is entirely possible that the same educator could utilize vastly different rooms for different students, with no explicit policy in place addressing how disability status, race, or previous issues of restraint or seclusion might influence a teachers' decisions.

FRAMING OF DISABILITY AS PATHOLOGICAL AND IN NEED OF ADDITIONAL REGULATION

Module 2, which outlines policies and procedures governing the use of restraint and seclusion, offers educators the first distinction related to students with disabilities, a group of students the narrator defines simply as "student[s] who ha[ve] either a 504 plan or IEP" and for whom the preventative measures governing the use of restraint and seclusion look "a little different." In this manner, preservice teachers are introduced to disabled students in a context that immediately distinguishes them as "different" from their peers, without any discussion of the myriad ways in which status as a student receiving services under a 504 plan or Individualized Education Program (IEP) fails to account for all the disabled youth within a school. To qualify for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), a child must be diagnosed with one of 13 qualifying disabilities, a time-intensive and often expensive process that typically relies on the initial referral of either

a pediatrician or a teacher. The referral process alone allows students to fall through the cracks or be misidentified as needing behavioral, rather than educational or psychological, intervention—incidents that disproportionately affect disabled students of color and those living in poverty (Brown, 2020; Gabriel & Yingling, 2021). Harder to quantify but nevertheless important to address are issues of access to a medical evaluation in a trusting, racially unbiased, gender-affirming environment. Perhaps most importantly, to the specific context of teacher preparation, procurement of student services under IDEA relies on a system that operates within an understanding of disability informed by the medical, rather than social, model (Cornett & Knackstedt, 2020). Special education research and practice are similarly shaped by this deficit-based framing of disability, and it is within this paradigm that dominant approaches to art education reside (Derby, 2011; Wexler, 2022). Though the effects of this framing on students are outside the scope of this article, it is nevertheless important to note that by declining to engage educators in a more nuanced conversation about who our students with disabilities are, this training module reinforces teachers' understandings of disability as a pathological condition to be excised, remedied, and regulated—an understanding that hardly sets teachers up to challenge the assumptions foundational to restraint and seclusion.

A FRAMING OF PREVENTION ROOTED IN ORDER AND CONTROL RATHER THAN SUPPORT FOR STUDENT HUMANITY

Other modules highlight strategies for creating safe schools, preventing uses of restraint and seclusion, and supporting student reintegration into the classroom following an instance of restraint and seclusion. Though the goals of safety and prevention are laudable, the modules present these strategies in a manner that privileges the teachers' role as managers charged with maintaining order and control in service of educational efficiency rather than in a manner that links such strategies to a daily practice of honoring students' dignity. The introduction to all modules describes the trainings' purpose as ensuring "compliance" with statewide regulations governing the use of restraint and seclusion. The goal of compliance does nothing to challenge the normality of restraint and seclusion as a practice; rather, it presents the practice as, at best, a necessary evil

and the task of school-based personnel as taking care to do it "right" rather than to prevent its use through asset-based, student-centered practices of care. This is seen in several ways throughout the modules.

First, the training modules present school-wide strategies like multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS) and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) as panaceas in which all students are supported and engaged, thereby avoiding the use of intensive interventions. The modules rely on language like "all students" to include disabled students rather than presenting any specialized strategies or describing how such schoolwide systems might specifically support such students. The effect of this ostensibly neutral linguistic turn is to effectively erase the particular experiences of students with disabilities, which is especially troubling because the modules have already established disabled students as different from their nondisabled peers and more likely to require such intensive interventions.

In providing teachers with strategies to de-escalate behavioral incidents that might lead to restraint and seclusion, the modules offer teachers a seven-phase "crisis cycle"—baseline, trigger, escalation, crisis, de-escalation, stabilization, post-crisis drain—with characteristics to help teachers identify when a student might be in each stage. Several escalated stages are depicted with characterizations that invite disproportionate attention and heightened responses for disabled students. The modules tell teachers that students have likely been "triggered" when they display behaviors such as rocking back and forth, a lack of focus, or limited spoken communication. Self-stimulatory behaviors such as rocking back and forth can, for many autistic students, be signals of joy or a means of connecting positively to their environments; presenting such behaviors as characteristics of a student in crisis without any clarification specific to the needs of autistic students privileges neurotypical modes of communication in a way that heightens the risk that an autistic student will be subjected to restraint and/or seclusion. Later stages are also normed to neurotypical children, as "nonconversational language" is presented as a characteristic of increased escalation. Echolalic communication and other nonconversational verbal stims are not atypical in the context of autistic communication, yet no additional context to help teachers discern the difference between non-crisis vocal

expressions and crisis escalation is provided. The module presents several nonspecific strategies for maintaining order—have a plan, provide students with a routine—that are not in themselves entirely unhelpful. However, they are not presented as measures implemented in service to students, such as a predictable routine that allows anxious or neurodivergent students to feel comfortable and supported. Rather, they are presented as strategies that privilege the teachers' need for an orderly classroom. Though the narrator mentions that teachers have the opportunity after a crisis to “restore relationships,” the modules offer no strategies for doing this, choosing not to provide teachers with any information about the principles and practices underpinning restorative justice.

Finally, in acknowledging the rights of school resource officers, employed through a memorandum of understanding with local law enforcement, to utilize restraint and seclusion, the modules provide their most explicit tie to the carceral system. Framed as a regulation that offers additional safety and protection for students and staff, the modules fail to address the disproportionate effects of policing in schools on students of color and disabled students and ignore all possibility that the mere presence of police officers might contribute to a student's feeling unsafe in their school.

ANALYSIS

Restraint and seclusion practices, such as those defined in the Virginia training modules described above, quite literally exert control over students' physical movement, location, and access to the classroom in ways that mirror jails and prisons. They give school personnel power over students' bodies, they exist within a school, district, and state-wide context that prioritizes the order in schools, and they respond to a specific behavior, not to the circumstances that may have informed it. In presenting these modules as a required component of licensure, the Commonwealth positions access to the profession as contingent upon a willingness to act as a guard and punisher within the system. In divorcing the modules' content from positive, culturally-responsive interactions with students (see, for example, Bucalos & Lingo, 2005), the state suggests a teacher's job is less about encouraging individual growth and more about an efficient production of well-behaved workers. This is in line with Hanawalt's (2018) description

of a “good” art student as someone who “follow[s] directions, adhere[s] to norms of school behavior, and produce[s] work (data) that shows tangible results of learning (such as appropriate use of line, the techniques of Van Gogh, or use of one-point perspective)” (p. 99). It further affirms the historical roles of art education for disabled students as vocational preparation (Kraft, 2006) and as rehabilitation (Blandy, 1991). In short, a pervasive culture of control in schools that positions teachers as prison guards trickles down into the art room, which, despite its potential as a space of creativity and individual growth, is not inherently a site of resistance to dominant school norms. Put another way, operating under the paradigm of orthodox special education, the art room becomes a site of complicity in the oppression and control of disabled learners (Derby, 2011; Wexler, 2022).

DisCrit reminds us to disrupt singular understandings of identity and to employ a more intersectional understanding in analysis (Annamma et al., 2013). As noted above, seeking out restraint and seclusion data with an intersectional understanding of identity in mind surfaces disproportionate applications of restraint and seclusion across race and disability. This lends credence to Erica Meiner's (2007) conception of the “school-prison nexus,” a reframing of the relationship between schools and prisons that challenges the straight trajectory implied by the common school-to-prison pipeline metaphor and draws attention to the multifaceted relationship between legal, historical, economic, social, and political contexts and the punitive approaches utilized in schools and the carceral system. Stabler (2021) addresses the influence of these contexts on the art room, reminding us that the intentional omission of nonwhite artists, coupled with the promotion of a European settler canon, functions to maintain a racial hierarchy in schools. Artist representation can similarly serve to uphold an ability-based hierarchy; the inclusion of disabled artists can serve to challenge or support deficit-based perceptions of disability, depending on whether teachers' presentations of the artist resist or fall prey to common stereotypical tropes of disability (Gross, 2021).

The tenets of DisCrit further remind us that whiteness and ablebodiedness function as a form of currency and as a system of oppression that controls disabled students of color (Annamma et al., 2013). In schools, the symbolic capital held by disabled and/or racialized students is reflected in the

neurotypical and Eurocentric norms of behavior to which all students are held and the disproportionality with which disabled and/or racialized students are punished for infractions. In practice, this looks like white students being given the “benefit of the doubt” or avoiding punishment altogether, while students of color are often punished for similar infractions (Lewis & Diamond, 2015). In forcing conformity to a white, nondisabled standard, whiteness and ablebodiedness thus act to control and oppress students whose bodyminds exist outside of that norm.

Such practices enact both material and psychological effects on students. Many disciplinary actions are memorialized on students’ transcripts, which affect their futures in higher education. Involvement with the criminal justice system—which, for many students, especially those at schools that have police officers on the premises, begins at school (Sojoyner, 2016)—affects students’ job prospects. These material outcomes, linked disproportionately to race and disability, have very real consequences on students’ future economic potential, with rippling ramifications across health, housing, and more. Annamma (2018) also points to a cycle of labeling, surveillance, and punishment that occurs in schools, in which a disability label might lead to increased surveillance, making potential disciplinary infractions more likely to be seen and punished—an interaction with school discipline that is likely to add an additional label (such as “troublemaker”) that, in turn, is followed by increased surveillance. Beyond only labels attributed to disability, though, a student might receive a label as a result of punishment or as an informal piece of information from one teacher to another (such as “watch out for this one” or “if you can get them to pay attention”)—seemingly innocuous discursive turns that nevertheless have material impacts on students’ lives.

These involvements produce psychological effects as well. When school shifts from being a positive place where students feel teachers are invested in their well-being to a place with negative associations, in which students sense they are being divested from, it affects behaviors like school attendance or acting out in class—inviting encounters with school punishment (Annamma, 2018; Wun, 2016). Additionally, these practices shape how students understand their own behavior and the expectations placed on them. In environments in which students are

surveilled through overt and subtle methods, in which students are reinforced for conformity to a normative ideal they may not identify with, and in which students are denied autonomy over how they move through space, eventually students learn that the best way to avoid being policed by school personnel is to police themselves, a sort of Foucauldian control mechanism that produces compliant, self-policing student-citizens who independently function to uphold the racial and ability hierarchy already evident in our schools and society. The implicit expectation that successful students will grow up into self-policing, law-abiding citizens elicits an image of schools as a panopticon (Foucault, 1991), in which the mere threat of constant surveillance leads students to essentially surveil themselves. The satirical Pedagogopticon (Sweeny, 2009) draws attention to this outsized role for surveillance in service to a capitalist agenda in education; the Pedagogopticon is the future of classroom management, “fus[ing] the *control that is inherent to teaching* with cutting edge optical equipment, creating situations in which participation is guaranteed, disruptions are a thing of the past, and students are *efficiently yet gently coerced into learning*” (p. 32, emphasis added).

DISABILITY STUDIES AS A COUNTER-PRACTICE IN ART EDUCATION

Ultimately, a materialist analysis informed by DisCrit demands a reframing of classroom and school-based decisions as having resource-laden implications for students’ lives and exposes the ways in which these resources are inequitably accessed across disability and race. It also urges action connected to that analysis—work I suggest is not only within the purview of scholar-activists but also within the purview of art educators. As some of only a few school-based personnel in their schools who support all students, art educators in American public schools find themselves in a unique position from which to challenge the influences of carcerality inherent in orthodox special education and the deficit-based framings of disabled students it informs.

Disability studies suggests principles that can support art educators in these efforts. As a field of study that draws on the social, rather than medical, model of disability, disability studies asks art educators to interrogate the primacy of rehabilitation in art experiences for disabled students and instead to encourage the benefits

of creative practice (Penketh, 2022). Disability studies represents an alternate paradigm for the art education of students with disabilities that resists the oppressive effects of orthodox special education, including the effects of excessive punishment (Derby, 2011, 2013; Gabriel, 2022; Wexler, 2022). The emphasis on student independence in most special education classrooms reflects the logics of neoliberal capitalism and individual exceptionalism and it sets up a classroom ecology in which the support teachers provide to students with disabilities are viewed as burdensome (Penketh, 2017). An embrace of interdependence in the inclusive art classroom would draw on the anti-capitalist politics of disability justice (Sins Invalid, 2019) and represent a radical departure from models of educational efficiency (Kraft, 2006).

The destructive power of the restraint and seclusion training modules discussed above hinges, in part, on the material effects of their discursive treatment of disability. Wexler (2016) connects this “institutional language” (p. 33) of special education to students’ experiences, suggesting that the language of disability in the special education context invites increased surveillance and power imbalances that dismiss the expertise of disabled students. In this way, special education functions as a site of critical avoidance (Penketh, 2014). The arts, as a space that welcomes disability self-representation and alternate ways of knowing, can thus draw on principles of disability studies and the political agenda of Disability Art to imagine otherwise (Eisenhauer, 2007; Penketh, 2014; Wexler, 2016). An arts movement representing disability culture, Disability Art embraces a sociopolitical understanding of disability identity and affirms the contributions of disabled artists (Eisenhauer, 2007). Just as recent scholarship has challenged superficial approaches to multiculturalism in the classroom and advocated for critical pedagogies that challenge racial hegemony (Acuff, 2013; Sions & Wolfgang, 2021), Disability Art asserts a need to reject representations of disability in the art room that reinforce deficit-based perceptions and instead challenge ableism through representations of disability culture (Eisenhauer, 2007; Gross, 2021). Wexler and Derby’s (2015) examination of the identity formation of three disabled artists creating in community-based arts centers indicates that art education settings can be spaces in which disabled identity is de- and re-constructed. They draw a distinction between the treatment of

disability identity in community spaces and in the art room that operates within a special education paradigm, suggesting that an art educator who aims to challenge the carceral influence of orthodox special education should seek out pedagogical approaches beyond what is traditionally found in schools. Annamma (2018) suggests a DisCrit Pedagogy of Resistance rooted in Curriculum (what is taught), Pedagogy (how it is taught), and Solidarity (who is centered) to challenge the reaches of the school-prison nexus. Though not presented for the art classroom, art educators can embrace this framework as a means to challenge the influence of special education in the art room. They can include Disability Art in their curriculum and represent disabled artists without falling prey to negative stereotypes of disability. They can adopt principles of disability justice, especially those that take an explicitly anti-capitalist stance through practices of interdependence and collective care (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Sins Invalid, 2019), as pedagogical practices in their classrooms. Finally, art educators can approach disability as a sociopolitical identity (Blandy, 1991) and view solidarity with their students as an act of radical love.

The intersection of disability studies and art education is rich ground for art educators seeking to disrupt school-based cycles of harm for their disabled students. As an interdisciplinary field that encourages interrogation of accepted norms, disability studies offers strategies for art teachers to challenge the carceral influence of orthodox special education practices on their disabled students and, in so doing, suggests a way forward for justice-based art education.

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