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An Evolving Disabled Professor Training Highly Qualified Teachers Committed to Disability Rights and Social Justice

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Abstract: I use the disability studies framework and autoethnography method in this qualitative research to examine my lived experiences in education and their impact on the disability community. The qualitative research method focuses on obtaining data through open-ended and conversational communication. This method is about what people think and why they think so. Disability Studies is an interdisciplinary body of intellectual work that positions disability positively and complexly, interrogating rhetoric that disability is a deficit that experts should remedy. Autoethnography is a research method and methodology which uses the researcher's personal experience as data to describe, analyze and understand cultural experience. I focus on my disability community membership, professional development, and ways I integrate social justice in teacher education to correct education systems into ones that value disabled people. Using the self-study technique, I review my education journey and identities and how they have shaped me into a teacher educator who believes education leverages us to question happenings and provide solutions. I, therefore, reflect on the entwinement of my scholarship and community outreach and how they are geared towards creating and advancing a local and global pluralistic society that values disabled people. My values of collaboration, innovation, integrity, excellence, access, diversity, equity, equality, and inclusion are best practices that dismantle educational barriers and empower educators and disabled people.

Keywords: *Disability justice, inclusive education, special education, transformative teacher educator.*

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Introduction

Education is critical for society's civilization, and in particular empowerment of disabled people, and educators play a crucial role in that process (Danforth, 2017; Dewey, 1938, 1985; Dolmage, 2017). Yet, in the history of the United States and Kenya, formal education remained inaccessible to people with disabilities even as it gained footage in society as the key determinant of postschool outcomes (e.g., employment) and quality of life (Osgood, 2008). Quality of life is "an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns" (World Health Organization, n.d.). Since 1975, US Governments' attempts to make formal education accessible to disabled children and youth have involved legislation and funding of school programs and research geared towards enacting best practices amicable to diverse learner populations (Danforth, 2017; Valle & Connor, 2019). Such Global North practices have been implemented in Global South countries such as Kenya (Gebrekidan, 2012; Grech, 2012; Ohba & Malenya, 2020).

This paper discourses my childhood, studentship, and professorship; my educational experiences as a student with disabilities at pre-kindergarten through college, and training in inclusive education, special education, disability studies, multicultural and equity studies in education and ways I am involved in self-transformation and reformation of education systems to the benefit of the disability community (Bandura & Cervone, 2000; Couser, 1997). Finally, I dwell on how I have evolved and transformed into a teacher educator committed to disability rights and disability pride (Ciccione, 2021; Deaf News, 2020; Public Affairs, 2021; Ressa, 2009, 2022). These realms have solidified my commitment to social justice and ways I address education barriers and train highly qualified educators who value disabled students. First, the methodology that guided my study.

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Methodology

I use the disability studies framework and autoethnography method in this qualitative research to examine my lived experiences in the education realm and their influence on the disability community. “Qualitative research is the inquiry into what people do, what people think, and the nature of social systems that contextualize their experiences through the use of nonnumerical sources of data” (Niesz et al., 2020, p. 148). Disability studies is a framework through which disability within society is explored to understand the interaction of disability and environment and how people with disabilities are positioned within their communities (Garland-Thomson, 2007; McRuer, 2006, 2018). Two significant models are the medical and social models (Goodley, 2013; Siebers, 2008). The medical model locates disability within an individual body and mind, whereas the social model locates disability within the environment. The social model of disability examines how disabled people are marginalized within their communities on the grounds of their disability identity and how the deficit culture is created to discriminate and oppress people with disabilities. Therefore, the study takes the stance of the social model of disability to my life in relation to the broader society to locate how societal factors, including their institutions (e.g., schools and colleges), influence my life and the people around me. In achieving this goal, I use autoethnography.

Autoethnography is a form of self-reflection and writing that strives to explain and examine an individual’s experiences with investigated phenomena in the context of cultural norms, beliefs, and values (Ellis, 2004). It uses both self-reference and reference to culture to combine life history features and ethnography (Couser, 1997; Ferri, 2011; Garland-Thomson, 2007). The autobiographical approach involves story-telling but in the form of critical inquiry embedded in theory and practice (Niesz et al., 2020). Therefore, the autoethnographic approach fits very well with this research because it allows me to explore how I engage with others in a specific society at a particular period to understand how we influence outcomes of one another. Using the self-study technique, I trace, critically examine, and present how my life has changed within the education realm and its direct and indirect impact on the disability community. Finally, I use autoethnography to testify about disability matters in learning institutions and to discuss the locus of the disability community within education systems locally and globally. One of the shortcomings of solo writing about one’s experiences is that the outcome cannot be generalized to the broader community (Niesz et al., 2020). Nonetheless, I am guided by principles of disability personal narratives (Ferri, 2011) to share how my educational experiences that have revolved around my disability have evolved over the years from the time of my studentship to the period of my professorship and therefore to counter the dominant narrative of disability as a deficit. Next, a brief academic childhood story.

Findings

Author’s Account

Early Childhood Challenges

I am the only one with a known disability in our family, but luckily I could go to school. I schooled from nursery school through an undergraduate program in Kenya before attending a graduate program in the United States. Growing up in Kenya, all the odds seemed against me. I grew up in a village in rural Kenya with few modern-day conveniences, such as running water, electricity, or communication services. I was placed in a residential facility for disabled children at age four, almost 600 miles from home, a difficult decision for my parents but reasonably necessary considering that village hospitals and schools were inaccessible—distance-wise and infrastructure-wise. In the 1980s-2000s (as it is today), many schools lacked or had insufficient special education teachers and appropriate infrastructure (e.g., ramps, accessible toilets, assistive technologies) or related services (e.g., transportation) (Nyeris & Koross, 2015; Ohba & Malenya, 2020). I could not walk the two miles to and from home to the nearest primary school because of the rough terrain that was worse in bad weather, especially during the monsoon season between March and September. This only left me with the option of attending a residential facility for disabled children hundreds of miles away from home.

Attending special residential schools was the best option. But I would not see my family for several months once I was placed in the residential facilities. When home during school holidays, going back to school was unpredictable, especially during drought and famine or flooding season, which often contributed to food insecurity and therefore changed families’ priorities. Many families would buy food rather than pay school fees for their children. Nevertheless, my institutionalization enabled my rehabilitation and access to education when thousands of school-age disabled children remained home without resources and services. The high poverty rate among families of disabled children and the few available residential special schools with limited capacity meant that most disabled children could not access education (Grech, 2012; Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019; Nyeris & Koross, 2015; Ohba & Malenya, 2020).

Fewer disabled children received medical attention and education pre- and post-independence through the 1990s compared to 2020, and most services were provided by non-governmental organizations instead of the government (Gebrekidan, 2012; Grech, 2012). Natural and built-in environmental barriers made my schooling unpredictable and my future life bleak. I had the right to give up because of the prevalent environmentally induced, disability-related difficulties—biases, prejudices, and outright exclusions (Ohba & Malenya, 2020). Despite the unpredictable realities that befell the Kenyan disabled community, I dreamt of a bright future that would enable me to redeem myself from deficit

culture, poverty, and ignorance. Deep in my heart, I knew I could liberate myself, leverage local and global disability communities with education, and improve other people's quality of life.

Called to Be a Social Justice Fellow

Born and raised in Kenya, I grew up in a family of teachers. My parents schooled in the era of British rule and became teachers a few years after Kenya's independence when the government emphasized formal education for Africans (Sifuna & Oanda, 2014). They invested in my rehabilitation and education at a young age, although the odds were against me due to environmental barriers. Nevertheless, the initial seed sprouted. They tendered it and nurtured it. Their support and encouragement pushed me through kindergarten to college, where I trained to become a special education teacher. These early investments saw me become a high school teacher and later emigrate to the United States, pursue master's and doctoral degrees, and become a professor of education. As a result, I am the first in my family to receive a Ph.D. and emigrate permanently to the United States.

I completed my undergraduate program at a university in western Kenya. The campus had a vibrant life, although it was several miles from the major cities. We enjoyed the ambiance of higher education in a rural world and the comradeship and camaraderie of learning in an isolated world. I was one of the less than ten students with obvious physical disabilities, so I experienced unique difficulties accessing this vast campus but with limited accessible infrastructure. Still, this learning time contributed to my personal growth and development as I learned interdependence on friends to navigate the college system. In addition, I interacted with many students from different Kenyan regions, exposing me to over 42 Kenyan ethnicities. Exposure to diverse cultures expanded my understanding of diversity, unity, equity, equality, interdependence, and co-dependence. I learned more about the significance of the partnership, collaboration, decision making, accountability, the importance of making judgments and questioning them, and seeking others' opinions.

Upon graduation, I taught as a volunteer teacher after the Kenya government froze teacher employment to meet the international financial institutions' austerity measures (Sifuna & Oanda, 2014). Still, some nondisabled peers got government jobs. I earned very little money, and my job depended on the school's financial health (which was poor because of the community's high poverty rate). Yet, the job created opportunities to practice ideas I learned in the teacher education program and interact with different stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, students and their families, and policymakers, which enriched my experiences. I also had access to daily print newspapers, later becoming my information gold mine.

One afternoon as I perused through the pages, I read an advert in the local daily newspapers on a US-based organization inviting people to apply for a master's or doctoral scholarship. The requirements included people who have bachelor's degrees in any field but are also interested in social justice. I applied and was selected to school at a US mid-eastern research one university, where I did my master's in special education. Upon completion, I decided to pursue my doctorate since I felt a gap in my understanding of the impact of a confluence of factors within and outside education systems on disabled students and their families. I needed to learn and interrogate impactful but invisible factors like culture and power. I, therefore, ended up pursuing teacher education with a focus on multicultural and equity studies in education, inclusive education, and disability studies. These exposed me to issues of access, diversity, equity, inclusion (ADEI), and social justice. My doctoral program enhanced my research skills and helped me understand the nature of education systems and how they fail disabled students, the significance of education to disabled people, and the need to reform it. I witnessed ills and experienced challenges and opportunities, which taught me to be courageous, resilient, persistent, optimistic, value others, focus on dreams, and live purposefully.

Living Purposefully

The US higher education system provides space to learn, engage the community, and dismantle unfair norms in learning institutions (Dolmage, 2017; Twale & De Luca, 2008). Education has made me disrupt the normative hegemonic culture of learning institutions. I am a researcher, an instructor, a coach, a mentor, a *loco parentis* to my students, and a disability rights advocate. I am a beneficiary of others' sacrifices. Therefore, addressing environmental barriers requires me to value ADEI and participate in social justice (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020). Thus, living purposefully to make this world a better place is not a choice but a requirement and obligation. My personal experiences and multiple identities—a Black, African, disabled, and immigrant professor—have taught me to address environmental barriers and champion disability rights. Having passed many educational and life tests, I am better placed and prepared to turn many stumbling blocks into a stepping stone to my destiny—to serve the disability community. I refuse to allow unfavorable circumstances to derail my dream of becoming a leader in my community. My disabled body is a text read, judged, and misjudged. So it disrupts higher education norms and, in the process, allows me to transform student and faculty's attitudes and practices and reform institutional culture to one that values disabled people. I manage this because of my philosophical perspective.

Discussion

Philosophical Orientation

My childhood experiences, schooling, and training influenced my value of education and the philosophy that educating is to serve. For this, ADEI and social justice (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Danforth, 2017; Valle & Connor, 2019) are the core of my scholarship and practice. My philosophy is an entwinement of ubuntu values (Nolte & Downing, 2019) and John Dewey's ideas (Dewey, 1938, 1985). My initial teacher training in Kenya was considerably influenced by ubuntu philosophy (Nolte & Downing, 2019) — and Dewey's concepts (1938). Ubuntu is an ancient African word meaning 'humanity to others.' It recognizes the existence of an individual as dependent on the community—*I am because we are* (Nolte & Downing, 2019). At the same time, Dewey maintained that the curriculum should be relevant to the lives of learners and envisioned an education where students learn to develop their practical life skills. Ubuntu and Dewey's philosophies emphasize the personal and social beings as critical for individuals and society. Caring for oneself also requires caring for other community members (Danforth, 2017). Thus, being a teacher educator has involved examining my locus in the community and how we influence each other. Accordingly, I consistently plan for and facilitate conversations in my classes and community while sharing different epistemological stances as a social constructivist (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Valle & Connor, 2019).

All children possess great potential and have the desire and capacity to succeed when provided with appropriate learning environments. So they have the inalienable right to education and humane treatment. Sadly, millions of disabled children in Kenya have no access to (quality) education (Nyeris & Koross, 2015; Ohba & Malenya, 2020; Sifuna & Oanda, 2014). Likewise, many of the 7.3 million students who receive special education in the United States receive low-quality education (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_204.70.asp). Some disabled students are failed by inadequate education systems (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Danforth, 2017). Then addressing environmental barriers is necessary. Some things need to be done differently to make learning institutions safe and welcoming, where all learners come together and thrive. This can be achieved by training highly qualified teachers committed to disability rights, ADEI, and social justice (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Danforth, 2017). My philosophy informs pedagogical methods and practices.

Pedagogical Methods and Practices

My Teaching Strategies

The transformation of student teachers into individuals who value ADEI and practice social justice is achieved through evidence-based best practices informed by research and interdisciplinary concepts (e.g., disability studies) and personal experiences, more so of disabled individuals. I prepare curricula according to the goals and objectives of my state's Department of Education Standards. Evidence-based practices are guided by state, national, and international standards, for example, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, Professional Standards for Michigan Teachers, Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education, Council for Exceptional Children, and International Society for Technology in Education. Evidence-based practices also ensure that educators do not corrupt standards based on their own discretion informed by their own orientations or dis/ability distinction among learners. Courses are designed to meet the learning experiences of student teachers who join our Teacher Education Programs with different expertise—those directly from high school and adults changing careers into teaching.

I teach undergraduate and graduate classes in teacher credential programs offered to student teachers on several pathways to teacher certification— in the traditional teacher-certification path and alternative certification program. Courses are delivered face-to-face and/or online/virtually/ (synchronously or asynchronously) or hyflex to reach many students, especially after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure diverse student teachers graduate on time to help bridge teacher shortage in the United States.

Teaching is an art and a science (Danforth, 2017; Dewey, 1938, 1985; Tomlinson, 2017; Valle & Connor, 2019; Vygotsky, 1978). So having the tools (the science of teaching) and knowing how to manipulate the tools (the art of teaching) is vital in facilitating learning. Good teachers possess the repertoires and charm to connect with their students and deliver transformative lessons that benefit learners and society. They use evidence-based best practices and accumulated knowledge to avail learning opportunities to all learners. Teachers with good repertoires manipulate learning materials to make a positive difference in the lives of diverse learners. I prepare student teachers to be knowledgeable and skilled in arrays of matters to value all learners and commit to advancing disabled people's rights.

I use various teaching strategies to meet student teachers and take them where they should be at the end of the semester and post-college life. These strategies include the universal design of learning (UDL) (Center for Applied Special Technology, n.d.), differentiated instruction (DI) (Tomlinson, 2017), culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) (Brown et al., 2019), social emotional learning (SEL) (Hill et al., 2021), assessment, technology, inquiry-based experiential learning, hands-on teaching activities, teachable moments, technology, team teaching, guest speakers, role modeling (Danforth, 2017; Valle & Connor, 2019). Besides, I use student-centered, counter-cultural, truth, and collective strategies (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Danforth, 2017). Next, I discuss how I integrate these teaching methods.

Individually Tailored Learning and Teaching Strategies

Using UDL, DI, SEL, and CRP have allowed me to contextualize learning and teaching to individual learners. The UDL framework aims to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all learners based on scientific insights into how humans learn (Center for Applied Special Technology, n.d.). The three main UDL principles are multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. DI aims to adjust the instruction of the lessons by ensuring the content, process, and product enable students' constructive engagement (Tomlinson, 2017). CRP aims to tailor instruction to diverse students' cognitive and cultural distinctions that populate America's classrooms (Brown et al., 2019). Finally, SEL seeks to support the positive emotional development of students so that they can understand and manage their mental health and empathize with their peers (Hill et al., 2021).

Disability Studies Strategies

For centuries disabled children have been denied (quality) education because of the politicization of disability (Danforth, 2017; Osgood, 2008). However, in the past five decades, disability activists have brought about a host of national and pan-national responses, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 (Department of Justice, 2020), and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Disability, n.d.). Western ideologies inform many disability concepts around the world, including in Kenya, due to a transfer of knowledge and culture clash and integration and appropriation of Global North practices (Grech, 2012). This is due to improved technological advancement, increased communication, improved transportation, and increased interactions due to colonization, neo-colonization, and imperialism, often through international agencies such as the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund (Grech, 2012). Because of the growing interconnectedness of the politics of disability across the globe, as exemplified by research and disability rights activism, I want student teachers to be aware of disabled people's needs and the effects of education systems on the broader society.

I am a global citizen by my locality, practice, origin, and members of society I interact with. For this reason, I do not ascribe to one convention or the other since it would be inappropriate to map US dialogues onto Kenyan contexts or vice versa without acknowledging the influences that go on as a result of physical and virtual migrations that happen and therefore enable interactions and exchange of material and immaterial culture (e.g., language, goods, artifacts). Whereas Global North scholars highly propagate disability epistemologies, most disabled people live in the Global South often in a dehumanizing state compared with their counterparts in high-income countries such as Germany, the US, Britain, Canada, Australia, and Scandinavian countries (Grech, 2012).

Therefore, disability studies in education (DSE) is a universal framework for teaching best practices related to disabled students and society (Danforth, 2017). This is because it sees disabled learners beyond the myopic deficit culture that maintain the status quo. DSE allows me to position myself as a teacher and learner in the learning spaces. By taking these positions, I expose student teachers to the varied experiences of disabled students and how learning spaces are friendly and/or opposed to disabled people. My expertise in this realm has helped me guide student teachers' critical inquiry and research. I focus on training critical thinkers in my classes and not just mere specialists in teacher education. Besides, I am not interested in regurgitating fallacies and flawed practices that do not allow student teachers to learn from history and the errors of others and their dangers to communities, especially the disability community. Critical is that teacher candidates become skilled in pedagogy and learn to work through the lens of social responsibility. Disability studies provide the tools to enter many spaces previously reserved for nondisabled people and provide the mechanism to interrogate, debate, and challenge norms related to education, policies, discourses, and professional practices (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Goodley, 2013; Grech, 2012; Siebers, 2008).

Assessment Strategies

Assessment is key to teaching, and every semester I ask student teachers to share their learning styles to identify and tailor my instruction to their needs (Esarey & Valdes, 2020; Prather, 2021). Previous assessments revealed that teacher candidates have different learning preferences, including but not limited to PowerPoints, lectures, group activities, and writing on the board. Others prefer online discussion boards, face-to-face whole-class discussions, short videos, reflections, ungraded online quizzes, analysis of empirical articles, and reviews of empirical and nonempirical websites. Besides, various national and state performance assessments inform my teaching (e.g., educative Teacher Performance Assessment, Michigan Test for Teacher Certification Courses). These allow me to centralize high-leverage practices to challenge mediocre education norms, focus on student teachers' wellbeing, and prioritize the needs of disabled learners. The diversity of learning styles has made me tailor teaching and learning activities and events guided by UDL, DI, CRP, and SEL.

Experiential Learning Strategies

Field experience is a significant component of my teaching since it exposes student teachers to realities solidifying their book knowledge (Danforth, 2017; Dewey, 1985). I integrate hands-on teaching activities and experiential learning

through field experience. Some of my courses require teacher candidates to spend 10-hour clinical experience at a facility with young adults with disabilities. This field experience, a prelude to student teaching, provides a broader view of disability and education to teacher candidates. Besides, in these courses, teacher candidates engage in community-building projects such as creating pamphlets of resources in the communities that they share with disabled students, families, school districts, public libraries, and organizations to support and facilitate the successful schooling of disabled students. These activities provide avenues for teacher candidates to develop their teaching, advocacy, and leadership skills through actual interaction with disabled students and stakeholders in education, research, and, therefore, an opportunity to stretch their experiences beyond the confines of books or classrooms.

Team Teaching Strategies

Teamwork is critical because interdisciplinary and interagency services are crucial for disabled students' academic and functional success (Danforth, 2017; Valle & Connor, 2019). It helps maximize the use of resources and services for the benefit of the students. I work with pre-kindergarten-12th grade (P-12) administrators, mentor teachers, and my college colleagues and deans to place student teachers in schools for their field experience. This exercise also requires student teachers' proactiveness. So it has led to reciprocal relationships with the stakeholders allowing us to continuously learn about local factors that impact the education of diverse learners. I also invite guest speakers to compliment my teaching, for example, disabled students, family advocacy groups, and technology experts. These guests bring diverse knowledge and experiences into our classes, enriching our teacher education curriculum. Besides, student teachers are exposed to varied skills and practices and learn work ethic, workplace diplomacy, networking, and resiliency.

Role Modeling Strategies

Student teachers in my classes are under my sphere of influence, and I have to mentor them to grow professionally. Thus, role modeling is a fundamental teaching strategy in my toolkit. Role modeling involves setting examples by doing (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Danforth, 2017). The role modeler is a leader that displays behaviors worthy of imitation by the imitator to the extent that the imitator's life is meaningful to self and society. A role modeler sets appropriate behaviors that help the imitator grow and have good qualities. I expect teacher candidates to be understanding, compassionate, empathetic, caring, and loving, especially when working with disabled students. I role model good behaviors so that student teachers can become highly qualified teachers competent in pedagogical practices and capable of serving diverse learners in safe, welcoming, and empowering settings, especially students that society underestimates.

I am a disability rights advocate committed to social justice, and I use my experiences to help student teachers understand how systemic biases suffocate disabled students. Though from humble backgrounds, some teacher candidates are oriented to normative hegemonic ideologies. Habitually, insecure educators hurt disabled students (Danforth, 2017). This can be addressed when educators tame their prejudices and have unlimited thinking about disability. I structure my classes to support teacher candidates' self-reflection and self-awareness and help them acquire the skills they need to address school and societal issues. My goal is to have educators override their egos and negative thinking about disabled students to be allies that champion the inclusion of vulnerable people.

Understanding and caring educators are keen to develop teacher-student reciprocal relationships and build allyship in and outside the school for the benefit of society (Danforth, 2017). Likewise, student teachers want to contribute to the wellbeing of society. Many are intelligent candidates for other programs that lead to "prestigious" careers with high pay (e.g., law, nursing, engineering) but choose to become teachers knowing teaching is a noble profession whose services cannot be quantified and compensated monetarily (Dewey, 1938). Therefore, I respectfully treat teacher candidates and live per an instructor's expectations, a mentor, a coach, and a *loco parentis*. I invest in building trust by developing reciprocal relationships and their positive characters, knowing that student teachers' appropriate dispositions are crucial to the success of disadvantaged learners under their care.

Teachable Moment Strategies

An equally important toolkit component is a teachable moment strategy. A teachable moment is an event or experience that presents an excellent opportunity to learn about a particular aspect of life (Jordan, 1996). The teachable moment has a more significant imprint on student teachers; it allows them to connect theories and practices and engage in praxis to solve human problems. I use teachable moments—for example, the recent demonstrations against racism, sexism, and ableism, the *Black Lives Matter Movement*, and the *Me Too Movement*—to revisit historical political and social turmoil of the mid and late 20th century and discuss the civil rights and women's rights, and disability rights movements of the 1970s, and other social justice events around the world including America. For instance, the story of George Floyd, the African American man who died under the policeman's knee, resonates with many disabled people worldwide. Disabled students are dehumanized; they are held to low expectations, segregated from nondisabled peers, and excluded from their communities; they attend underfunded learning institutions without appropriate infrastructure and educators committed to their rights (Danforth, 2017; Nyerys & Koross, 2015; Ohba & Malenya, 2020; Osgood, 2008;). That over 60 percent of Kenyan disabled citizens and over 28 percent of American disabled citizens lived in poverty during the pre-COVID-19 pandemic is a testimony to the victimhood of the deficit culture (Danforth, 2009; Dolmage, 2017; Grech, 2012;

Prince, 2009; Schweik, 2009; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006) that has denied them access to education, resources, and services. These content and teachable moments help student teachers understand intersectional issues (e.g., disability, race, class, origin, sex).

Personal Experiences Strategies

I owe my success to perseverance and dedicated stakeholders in education (e.g., parents, sponsors, and teachers). Therefore, I am intellectually endowed and obligated to train highly qualified teachers who value all students and are ready and willing to empower disabled learners. My familiarity with different educational configurations at the P-12-college levels; in an array of placements, special schools, and traditional learning institutions; in Kenya and the United States; as a student, a teacher, and a teacher educator—all of these have strengthened my interdisciplinary scholarship, pedagogy, and relationships with diverse communities around the world. These qualifications have also helped me enrich the teacher-education curriculum with ADEI discourses and inculcate repertoires vital for teacher candidates becoming highly qualified teachers capable of facilitating successful learning for diverse students.

I use high-leverage practices to support students with special needs and integrate my past experiences with diverse learning materials to enrich teacher education, and tailor my teaching style to student teachers' needs and learning styles to facilitate their learning. My personal experiences expose student teachers to the fundamentals of disability identities and dreams while also creating spaces where they bring their funds of knowledge to interrogate the happenings in education and society (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020). Funds of knowledge are cultural assets within a family unit that influence interactions and relationships (Moll et al., 1992).

I am a Black, African, disabled, immigrant, wheelchair-user educator who embraces disability pride. I embody multiple identities through my history, education, origin, sex, gender, abilities, and disabilities. These identities inform my worldview and navigation of different settings, including academia. Besides, my education and training in special education in Kenya and the United States and inclusive education and disability studies in the United States, as well as my vast personal experiences that stretch across continents, have broadened my understanding of disability beyond the confines of the localized American and Kenyan conceptualization of disability as a personal tragedy that requires the expertise of the informed scholar/educator/medic to identify, label, exclude, rehabilitate, treat, institutionalize, or even exterminate. Therefore, I question, borrow, and use appropriate knowledge from all realms of education to facilitate knowledge production, refinement, and exchange in my classes. Student teachers are beneficiaries of my varied expertise due to the numerous qualities and experiences I have accumulated over the years. My body and mind expose them to disability realities and the possibilities for disabled people.

Being a global citizen means I do not ascribe to one convention or the other since it would be inappropriate to map United States dialogues onto Kenyan contexts or vice versa without acknowledging the influences that go on as a result of physical and virtual migrations that happen and therefore enable interactions and exchange of material and immaterial culture (e.g., artifacts, language, goods, services, supports). Hence, my personal experiences, knowledge, and skills allow me to engage with Global South and Global North epistemologies to challenge normative hegemonic practices to benefit diverse communities, including student teachers and disabled learners. Integration of disabled people's personal experiences is vital in challenging normalcy (i.e., the condition of being normal; the state of being usual, typical, or expected; Siebers, 2008; Valle & Connor, 2019) in learning institutions. I have dealt with barriers throughout my life that have led to my consciousness of how ableism is deeply entrenched in society (Goodley, 2013; Ressa, 2009, 2022). Like many members of the disability community, I have experienced "the structural, economic and cultural exclusion ..." which has led to my consciousness of how ableism is deeply entrenched in society (Goodley, 2013, p. 631), including in higher education (Dolmage, 2017; Ressa, 2022). These experiences, however, have been my best teacher, and today I am better equipped to support the disability community. Sharing these experiences with student teachers to deepen their understanding of circumstances that impact the disability community, exposing them to different forms of barriers, and building allyship is necessary to address exclusionary forces that come in all forms.

Student-Centered Strategies

Human beings have shared qualities but are also naturally different. Differences are reflected in the diverse American society and the student body at all levels of schooling— pre-kindergarten through college, including my teacher education classes. Students are physically, cognitively, and socially different, whether from the same background—race, gender, class, ethnic group, or nationality (Danforth, 2017). Subsequently, no homogenous class or neurotypical learner exists. Instead, classes are naturally heterogeneous and neurodiverse (Valle & Connor, 2019). Diversity in my classes has seen me embrace a student-centered approach to training highly qualified teachers. The student-centered approach works with UDL, DI, SEL, and CRP. It allows me to tailor teaching to individual student teachers' learning styles and inculcate appropriate repertoires. The goal is to train teachers capable of individualizing learning to their student's abilities, strengths, interests, preferences, and needs. This way, I instill the culture of ADEI in student teachers to ensure they will not misjudge disabled or labeled students based on normative practices.

Learners are naturally heterogeneous. Consequently, aggregating attributes risk perpetuating myths and stereotypes and increasing gaps between teachers and students and between educators and families. I emphasize that teachers must treat each student as an individual and family as unique rather than aggregating characteristics and instituting measures based on presumed commonalities. Even within minority groups, diversity exists (Danforth, 2017; Ford et al., 2008; Tomlinson, 2017). I, therefore, help student teachers consider students' interests, abilities, preferences, and families' situations (family-centered approach) when making educational decisions. So in my classes, student teachers become aware of the needs of diverse students—those that are socially, politically, economically, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically different. This ensures that student teachers will not sustain biased systems but instead hold disabled students and their families in high expectations and support them in navigating education systems.

Counter-cultural Strategies

Humans are born with the instinct to survive, which involves creativity, violence, and evasion (Bandura, 1973). In this survival process, human behaviors are influenced by their environments and vice-versa. The instinct to survive is driven by many factors including fear (i.e., an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain, or a threat). But fear of disability, and hatred of disabled people is socialized learning behavior (Bandura, 1973; Danforth, 2017; Osgood, 2008). Disability is a source of fear, and as such, fear has nurtured phobias and hate of disabled people (Osgood, 2008). At the same time, disability has been weaponized and socially constructed as a disqualifying trait (Osgood, 2008; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006; Valle & Connor, 2019). Disability represents a marker of otherness that establishes differences between human beings not as acceptable or valuable variations but as dangerous deviations, challenging the ideology of ability and deficit culture (Siebers, 2008). Deficit culture is infectious; it perpetuates negative -isms (e.g., ableism, sexism, racism, xenophobia) and sustains systems that devalue the "otherized." It leads to low expectations and discrimination against disabled students (Valle & Connor, 2019). Cultural, social, political, economic, physical, and infrastructural environments have a great impact on students' and teachers' emotions and behaviors and therefore their influence on their relationships. Unfortunately, teacher-student relationships are often rife with tensions and so usually disastrous for many disabled students (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Danforth, 2017; Ressa, 2009, 2022). This makes addressing the fear of disability a key to solving the demonization quandary and deamination conundrum of oppression in schools and communities. I use a counter-cultural approach in my classes to inform student teachers about (mal)practices and enable them to interrogate corrupt ideologies so they can dismantle normative hegemonic practices (McRuer, 2006, 2018; Siebers, 2008), particularly in the education realm (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020).

The counter-cultural approach enables me to problematize education matters and ensure that student teachers have a holistic understanding of education systems. Education is more than schooling (Dewey, 1938, 1985). Yet, student teachers are often exposed to certain curricula, for example, the official, null, or hidden curriculum (Danforth, 2017; Valle & Connor, 2019). The dangers of these curricula are exacerbated by the known unknowns and unknown unknowns of the intersectionality of disability and race, gender, sex, age, and/or class (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Grech, 2012; McRuer, 2006, 2018; Siebers, 2008). Depending on the student teachers' competencies, each curriculum can build, dwarf, or demolish their characters.

In the history of formal education, schools have used corrupt or corrupted standards, causing grievous harm to disabled learners. Guided by the standards, some educators have erred by misinterpreting disabled learners' identities, thus perpetuating disability myths. My courses incorporate many learning opportunities that allow student teachers to interrogate and exchange experiences outside the curriculum. Maximal interpretation of the curricula enables student teachers to debate and address education issues; it ensures the inclusion of varied worldviews. To mitigate the possibilities of curricula poisoning student teachers when minimally interpreted, I domesticate content and practices by designing syllabi that allow student teachers to relate happenings with their experiences and push them to be critical thinkers and engage in critical inquiry to understand the impact of cultural deficits and how the weaponization of disability causes oppression of disabled people and students of color. Helping teacher candidates see things holistically rather than partially helps them establish core teaching beliefs and see disabled students from a strength-based point of view.

Counter-cultural approaches help re-focus student teachers on identifying societal barriers constructed around deficit markers of difference (e.g., disability, class, ethnicity) and challenge discrediting elements that dehumanize disabled people. Student teachers frequently examine how school settings, cultures, policies, and infrastructures define and determine the success and failure of vulnerable students. After which, they engage in challenging normalcy (Siebers, 2008) and creating inclusive communities (e.g., writing a position paper on race or disability) (Danforth, 2017). It is essential to avoid situations where student teachers (will) (un)intentionally erect barriers and become dream stealers.

Learning resources (e.g., desks, books, computers) are important, but they only become beneficial when educators consume learning theories that are valid and valuable (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Brown et al., 2019; Dewey, 1938; Ford et al., 2008; Osgood, 2008). Student teachers versed in every branch of disability can discern happenings in the community that impacts disabled people and, therefore, are best placed to provide leadership in solving them. Schools frequently fail actual and imagined disabled students (e.g., African Americans and Hispanics) but often blame the students or families. Learning problems are linked to environmental barriers, not one's body and mind (Baglieri et al.,

2011; Danforth, 2017; Valle & Connor, 2019). A counter-cultural approach enables unraveling the fallacy of human typicality to expose the values-laden process and malpractices of school systems through which disability constructs ability and affords exclusion and oppression of demeaned people is necessary for dismantling the normative hegemonic practices (Dolmage, 2017). It allows me to infuse theory, research, and practice to enable student teachers to learn about procedures and policies such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) and Response to Intervention, and primary educational learning theories— behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, humanism, and connectivism (Danforth, 2009, 2017; Dewey, 1938, 1985); emerging knowledge of teaching and learning (e.g., CRP, DI, SEL, UDL); and research findings (e.g., high dropout rates of disabled students) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Positive Learning Environment Strategies

Learning is transactional, requiring reciprocal relationships (Vygotsky, 1978). The transactional element of the learning process means that knowledge is contextual, cultural, and spatiotemporal. Favorable learning environments nurture reciprocal relationships and allow constructive debates about disability matters. The crux of my teaching is to facilitate learning under appropriate conditions to address the learning needs of diverse learners. I avail a safe atmosphere and create democratic learning spaces to allow student teachers to exchange ideas, celebrate successes, and problematize and address societal issues (Dewey, 1985). A community of learners is a unit for a democratic class, so student teachers must affirm human diversity within school systems (Valle & Connor, 2019).

The challenges and opportunities I have encountered in education continually propel me to create a proper learning atmosphere that builds trust and promotes respect among students and me. I am open about my educational and personal issues, which usually encourages student teachers to share their worldviews unhindered. Our openness allows us to interrogate cultural practices of schooling. In the process, we learn and disabuse each other and re-learn and re-imagine ways to increase knowledge and skills in all realms of our lives to improve the learning conditions for diverse students.

Truth Strategies

Learning and teaching ideas have multiple truths, fallacies, and falsehoods that can only be debated and deliberated in an environment that values participants' presence and voice (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020). Therefore, it does not hurt to know and acknowledge the harm of the education system to disabled children and youth and the need to correct the wrongs (Danforth & Ressa, 2013; Grech, 2012; McRuer, 2006, 2018). In my classes, I allow the exchange of ideas for us to discover the truth. I let student teachers know that many disabled students fail to realize their dreams due to normative hegemonic practices less apparent to them. For instance, I share with them that special education, though aimed to support disabled children, its design has encouraged unfair practices, including prejudice and punishments that have caused the overrepresentation of Blacks and Hispanics in the special education program and exclusions of actual disabled students and led to their high rates of school dropout (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000). This truth often makes us think of ways to redesign the education systems, including teacher education curricula, and re-structure learning institutions to ones amenable to vulnerable students. Specifically, I take advantage of enlightened student teachers to discuss incendiary practices to address societal issues.

Besides my academic credentials, I was awarded a scholarship to pursue graduate studies in the United States because of my commitment to social justice. I spoke against corruption after I graduated from a university in western Kenya, believing that telling the truth would help correct crooked systems that marginalize disabled people. Truth sets us free from bondage and recolonization. Therefore, my experiences allow me to witness the truth as a counter-discourse to disability as a personal tragedy. Individuals who are afraid to speak the truth and stand for what is right because they think it is early to risk and lose their social status, prestige, wealth, job, or friends, or fear being judged or criticized, or fear dying, do a disservice to humanity. Martin Luther King Jr. said that a person might be successful but as good as dead from the moment they are afraid to stand up for righteousness, truth, and justice (<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/7256746-and-i-say-to-you-this-morning-that-if-you>).

Many good things in the world are due to the sacrifices of people who never lived to enjoy the fruits of their labor. Sadly, prolific social ills (e.g., hurtful -isms) keep communities asunder because many fear addressing them. Then it is upon the beneficiaries of the sweat and blood of others to right wrongs for the sake of future generations (Danforth & Ressa, 2013). Critical is to train educators to embrace truths that challenge warped and corrupt ideologies (Kanter & Ferri, 2013). In my classes, I expand the notions of ADEI beyond the traditional view of race or gender by looking at the intersectional nature of discrimination and oppression and their impact on vulnerable populations (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020). To consolidate my teaching, I employ backward planning in every lesson to address the teacher education process and outcomes geared toward producing highly qualified teachers who practice social justice to make meaning in oppressed individuals' lives.

Collective Strategies

Many stakeholders are involved in the education sector, making collective action necessary to achieve a common goal (Danforth, 2017; Valle & Connor, 2019). In particular, home-school partnerships and collaborations of administrators, teachers, and families are critical in challenging malpractices that demean disabled students and students of color. Equal and equitable treatment of all is essential, irrespective of learners' backgrounds. Schools are societal institutions, so a constructive partnership is vital to dismantling hegemonic norms. However, this depends on teacher-parent reciprocal relationships and educators' respect for families. Unfortunately, relationships between teachers and families of disabled children are often troubled even though diverse families have rich but untapped resources. In my classes, I emphasize that educators should be mindful of the needs and strengths of disabled learners and their families, especially those from minority communities (Moll et al., 1992). I provide learning opportunities where student teachers assess school structures to understand how they create disabled students/students of color as adversaries of dominant systems. By doing so, teacher candidates reflect on their behaviors, ensuring they avoid being controlled by prejudices in their interactions with disabled students and their families.

Since the success of disabled learners depends on home-school partnerships and collaborations of various stakeholders such as teachers, administrators, and families, educators must map a clear plan for the individual and program to help guide involved persons' efforts towards achieving the goals. I let student teachers know that collaboration is critical to tackling societal issues and is difficult to enact. Many professionals initially find interdisciplinary and interagency collaborations uncomfortable due to differing philosophical orientations, discipline (e.g., ethos, language, procedures), and skillsets (Tomlinson, 2017). Still, I emphasize that collaboration is an essential skill for educators. So I encourage student teachers to embrace a collective approach and build alliances since they are necessary to dismantle oppressive systems (Department of Justice, 2020; Dolmage, 2017; Goodley, 2013; Kanter & Ferri, 2013; Siebers, 2008; Twale & De Luca, 2008). I use various group activities to foster relations, build trust, ensure group members have common goals and visions, and promote membership in the group by identifying strengths, addressing and solving, and preventing conflicts. Also, student teachers and I usually share diverse experiences that see us disabuse and learn from each other, challenge one another, and develop innovative, rigorous, and relevant ideas that enrich our praxis and transform us. These learning activities also help provide room for student teachers to become leaders who facilitate access, use, and management of resources to realize the individual and organization's goals.

Partnering with others is vital in teaching and sustaining best practices and correcting social ills. Teaching in the urban city has exposed me to a diverse population, varied opportunities, cultural and socioeconomic issues, and people's resiliency and optimism. I have come to understand how cultural biases and systemic biases can impede the success of otherwise very talented and gifted members of society. I am committed to providing scholarly and curriculum development leadership to promote ADEI and prepare teachers who respect all students. I have designed a master's program in special education with colleagues and served on various committees, for example, the Honors Advisory Council, the Academic Standards and Policies Committee, and the Recruitment of High-Need Areas Committee. I have also worked with diverse students from affluent and under-resourced communities in the US and Kenya. Partnerships and collaborations have led to constructive initiatives that benefit student teachers and disabled people. Besides, these efforts have encouraged community members to address multifaceted factors influencing quality education for diverse learners.

My Commitment to Local and Global Social Justice Movement

Given my position as a teacher, educator, researcher, and practitioner, my scholarship provides the tools to challenge hegemonic norms, promote ADEI and practice social justice locally and globally. Creating a community that values disabled students and sustaining teacher training in a shifting environment requires innovative professors. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that educators must be flexible, dynamic, and creative and continuously learn how to teach in different settings and deal with broader societal issues. As an agent of change, I am involved in local and global disability awareness. I use my experiences as a counter-discourse to the dominant story of disability as a tragedy and to elevate the voices of disabled people in public. Personal narratives are tools the disability community uses to make sense of their world (Couser, 1997; Ferri, 2011; Garland-Thomson, 2007). My heritage, environment, personal experiences, knowledge, and skills allow me to engage with Global South and Global North epistemologies related to the disability community to constructively contribute to the welfare of society. The porous international borders mean that Global North ideologies diffuse to the Global South and vice versa. Cultural diffusion between Global North and Global South is due to technological advancement, improved communication and transportation, increased interactions, immigration, colonization, and neo-colonization and imperialism, often through international agencies (Grech, 2012; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Disability, n.d.; World Bank, n.d.; World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011). Therefore, my personal experiences and disabled people's testimonies provide informational materials that build protective factors and promote disability rights.

Research for Furtherance of ADEI

Schools play a critical role in learners' adult quality of life (World Health Organization, n.d.). Sadly, school graduation and dropout rates in the United States are still unfavorable, especially when ethnicity, race, gender, and disability identities are considered (Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2020). Often, disabled students are blamed and punished for low academic performance: they are placed in segregated settings or under-resourced special education programs and, therefore, are virtually prepared for failed adulthood (Aud et al., 2011; Ford et al., 2008). Teachers are continuously amid a blend of theory and practice (Schubert & Ayers, 1992). Therefore, the infusion of theory, research, and practice molds me and helps me create awareness about ADEI, which helps student teachers understand how demeaned identities oppress vulnerable students. A combination of theories and practice (praxis) enables student teachers to see the intersection of disability and other identities and how the interplay of hurtful-isms (e.g., ableism, sexism, ageism, racism, classism, nepotism, tribalism, jingoism, homophobia) predispose disabled students to academic failure and failed adulthood. It also helps them see the connection between theory, research, policy, and practice as essential to their professional growth and development.

Despite my quest for knowledge, I have not fully solved why education systems in Kenya and the United States do not work for the majority of disabled students. Besides, learning institutions are social laboratories. So there is a lot to learn and many issues to solve. Continuous research is vital to know the factors causing teacher shortage and their effects on diverse learners. To enrich my understanding of disability and structures of inequality in education, I study ableism, racism, ethnicity, social justice, and power. My primary research interests lie in equity and access to higher education, focusing on disabled people. The realm of higher education is fascinating because it influences policies that impact societies. It focuses on factors influencing post-school outcomes for students with disabilities—postsecondary education, employment, community living, independent living, and leisure and recreation involvement. I specifically study how environments and teacher education programs and how teacher educators impact teacher candidates' pedagogies, repertoires, beliefs, and values, and how pre- and in-service teachers influence the schooling and postschool outcomes of disabled learners. My research trajectory has unearthed un/acknowledged structures, ideologies, and practices that dis/empower disabled people.

Ideologies and practices are embedded deeply in learning institutions (Danforth, 2009; Dolmage, 2017). They prevail with such gravity and regularity that disabled individuals often accept their in/validation as an inevitable product of their own bodies rather than the consequences of un/just systems that surround, dictate, and control their lives. My research is informed by the works of diverse disability studies scholars (e.g., Danforth, 2009; Dolmage, 2017; Osgood, 2008; Prince, 2009; Schweik, 2009; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006). These scholars' theoretical frameworks shed light on how the agrarian economy, industrial economy, and now the neo-liberalized globalized digital capitalist economy have enabled the social construction and degradation of disabled people. I use the disability theories and the ontology of disability studies to interrogate local and global disability matters at different research sites (both in the digital and physical worlds in Kenya and the United States). A disability studies framework with a transnational lens disrupts the traditional conceptualization of disability as a personal catastrophe. Hence, it helps broaden our understanding of varied factors at different geographical levels that impact disabled people.

Preparing Highly Qualified Teachers

Teacher shortage in the United States has led to different teacher preparation programs. I have taught student teachers in the alternative certification route and students who take the traditional teacher certification path. Central to my teaching is to help student teachers undergo a transformation and understand that inclusion is an ongoing process that requires personal commitment and community involvement. I plan to expand our knowledge about diverse teachers. America is diverse and having a diverse teacher body to teach a diverse student body is vital for society. Equally important is understanding the impact of the national teacher shortage on education. This is key to recruiting and training highly qualified teachers committed to including disabled students in regular schools and general classes. Institutionalizing evidence-based best practices in teacher preparation programs is key to increasing the learning of ADEI and social justice in all learning institutions and communities, recruiting and training more student teachers, and nurturing educators committed to inclusive education.

Regular P-12 and college-level classes are a microcosm of American society; they are naturally heterogeneous in ability, race, sex, gender, orientation, and origin, among other human identifiers. Thus, correcting oppressive systems is a community affair, and education is a vehicle to understand and address issues that affect disabled people. I engage in critical inquiry in my classes and promote ADEI and social justice through publications and presentations of my studies at conferences nationally and internationally. My participation in many professional gatherings around the world allows me to share my research on the intersectionality of disability and class, tribe, sex, gender, and the influence of best practices around ADEI and social justice tenets.

Role modeling best practices are critical to training highly qualified teachers committed to social justice (Danforth, 2017). Martin Luther King's concept—*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere*—guides my social justice practice. Every December 3, during the UN International Day for Persons with Disabilities, I participate in disability rights

awareness in different ways by interacting with disabled and nondisabled persons, where I highlight issues of disability in learning institutions. Such exchange of ideas has led to setting goals and establishing the Global Disability Alliance, for example. In addition, I am featured in various university magazines and have podcast series on access to education for disabled children and youth. I also participate in multiple demonstrations to create awareness about the importance of gender, disability, origin, or racial tolerance.

Conclusion

My teaching, research, and services are based on the tenets of social justice. I am committed to anti-hurtful-isms and ADEI practices. My schooling, training, location, origin, traveling, emigration, and community membership shape my personal and professional identity and worldviews. As such, I am an evolving scholar. My interactions with various stakeholders in education, in and out of school, in the United States, Kenya, and worldwide, continue to inform and reshape my beliefs, values, knowledge, experiences, and practices. Therefore, I revise myself, reflect on my life, and research disabled people's experiences. These activities have helped me realize the significance of meaningful relationships with colleagues and facilitated learning that has significantly influenced teacher candidates' practices into individuals who value ADEI and social justice.

Since completing my initial teacher education in Kenya, I have been fortunate to learn /formally alongside many people in different regions worldwide, many with dis/similar worldviews, beliefs, values, philosophies, and practices. My interactions have created opportunities and challenges that have continued to enrich my expertise in disability and education. These people have contributed to my growth and development; they have been key players in my transitions and transformations as a disabled professional and teacher educator.

Mind is the worst thing to waste and a significant investment. Since childhood, I have invested in empowering myself and disabled people, knowing it is for the common good. For centuries disabled people have been constructed as unworthy. They have been blamed for societal messes and treated inhumanely. Distortions of the being of disabled people have not fully been tamed despite the disability civil rights and human rights laws that prohibit discrimination against disabled people. Unfortunately, learning institutions have been complicit in perpetuating deficit culture and, therefore, the marginalization of disabled people. This should not be the case in the 21st century when discoveries show disabled people are uniquely valuable members of society with untapped resources. Learning institutions should promote co-existence, and educators, as custodians of knowledge, should advance diversity, equality, equity, inclusion, and belonging. The inclusion of disabled people in every realm, including schools, is critical for the societal advancement of societal institutions and humanity. In this direction, I examine environments (i.e., culture, education, economic situation, political climate, infrastructure, and technology) to train teachers and inclusion champions committed to social justice and correcting systemic biases against learners with disabilities. I am no longer the person who is struggling to know who I am. Instead, today I am working to create places and spaces conducive to the disability community, environments that positively impact disabled learners. I am using my mind to develop resources and dismantle barriers that have pushed disabled students to the margin of schools and disabled people to the periphery of society for centuries.

Recommendations

Teacher shortage in the United States has led to different teacher preparation programs. Therefore, more studies are required to understand how the teacher education curriculum influences teachers' attitudes toward including disabled learners in regular schools and general classes. Besides, more research is vital to know the factors causing teacher shortage in the United States and how a diverse, highly qualified teaching force can be recruited and sustained, especially in low-income communities.

In particular, the faculty in teacher preparation programs need to reflect on their experiences to transform themselves into individuals committed to social justice and reforming learning institutions that are friendly and accessible to a diverse student body.

Limitations

This study uses autoethnography to examine the educational contribution of the author. Therefore, the findings are not generalizable. Nonetheless, they inform and expand our understanding of how education systems impact disabled people and the importance of transforming stakeholders in education, especially educators.

Ethics Statements

This study focuses on the author's experiences, and no other human beings studied.

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