

Disability Studies:
Past, Present and Future

Edited by

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The Disability Press

Leeds

The Disability Press
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The Disability Press

The Disability Press seeks to provide an alternative outlet for work in the field of disability studies. The Disability Press acknowledges and draws inspiration from the work of all those countless disabled individuals and their allies who have, over the years, struggled to put this particular issue on to the political agenda. Its establishment is a testament to the growing recognition of 'disability' as an equal opportunities and human rights issue within the social sciences.

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INTRODUCTION

The Birth of Disability Studies

Twenty years ago there was no such thing as disability studies. However there were a few stirrings of interest within the academic world. Disabled people were beginning to politicise themselves around issues such as their poverty and incarceration in residential establishments. They were also beginning to write about themselves in ways which transcended the usual autobiographical 'triumph over tragedy' accounts which were and still are common.

Partly as an attempt to capture this newly emerging consciousness and to move beyond the dominance of psychological and medical discourses on disability, the Open University produced a new course titled "The Handicapped Person in the Community" as part of its undergraduate programme in the 1970s. This proved to be enormously popular and subsequently the University of Kent introduced the first masters programme in what later came to be called disability studies.

Following on from these small beginnings and the steady and ever growing stream of writings emerging from disabled people themselves, disability studies began to find its way onto the academic curriculum at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels as well as professional training courses of all kinds. There was no academic journal to support these developments and so in 1986 *Disability and Society* was first published, initially under the title *Disability, Handicap and Society*.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Two major motivations were particularly significant in contributing to the creation of this Journal. On the one hand, there was a powerful desire to provide an alternative forum for the generation of ideas and the encouragement of dialogue and debate. This included establishing a serious and sustained critique of the medical model of disability which legitimated individualised and personal tragedy perspectives. On the other hand, was the intention to create a journal that would endeavour to develop a balance between academic and non-academic needs. This would cover, for example, issues of language, values and interests.

It was essential therefore, that disabled people who had some experience of research and writing were clearly represented on the editorial board.

This was particularly important with regard to the small group of Executive Editors who play a major role in developing policy and monitoring the various aspects of the Journal's profile. Currently there are six members of the Executive Editors, four of whom are disabled academics.

One of the significant and largely unexpected growths of the Journal has been its gradual spread to international markets. Currently we have subscribers from 50 countries and we are increasingly publishing articles from people in a range of different countries. This comparative aspect of the Journal's profile is providing a much needed stimulus which is both informative and challenging in terms of new ways of thinking, different sets of presuppositions, questions and interpretations. Points of commonality and difference are evident within a more general appreciation of the complexity of the issues involved both at the policy and practice levels of activity.

A journal reflects the interests and development of its editors. One illustration of this concerns that of language. Some of the earlier publications did contain disabilist language. This became an increasingly serious issue which resulted in the editorial board unanimously agreeing in 1993 to changing the name of the Journal and removing 'Handicap' from the title. An editorial statement (Vol. 8, No. 2, 1993) was published on the question of language. It was intended to be both a public declaration of where we had now come to in our collective thinking and development and would also be helpful to intending authors when producing their articles. Another aspect of development was the decision in 1988 to include a Current Issues section in the Journal. This was related to our intention to provide an outlet within the Journal for a range of styles of presentation and a means of encouraging controversial ideas. The initial Policy Statement reflects these concerns.

A particularly successful innovation was the introduction of Special Issues of the Journal. These covered key themes and were intended to offer both an indication of the existing ideas and understanding available as well as provide new insights, interpretations and questions for consideration. Special Issues have covered such topics as: 'Researching Disability' Vol. 7, No. 2, 1992, 'Representation and Disabled People' Vol. 9, No. 3, 1994, and 'Disability, Development in the Changing World' Vol. 11, No. 4, 1996.

Different Review Editors have been responsible for the development and improvement of the Reviews Section of the Journal. The intention is to cover a

range of literature and offer different forms of review some of which are brief and others of a much more detailed examination.

We believe that the Journal has now achieved a degree of international reputation that places it at the forefront of developing ideas and establishing connections between disabled and non-disabled people in many societies who are involved in the identification and removal of the barriers of oppression including forms of impairment-led thinking and practice. Past and present editors are to be thanked for their efforts and support in this process of development.

On reflection we now look forward with optimism and a desire to see the quality and influence of the Journal increase beyond that of its first ten years of publication.

TEN YEARS ON

The idea for this book emerged out of the conference held in Ashford, Kent, in September 1996 to celebrate the first ten years of the Journal. The papers given and the speakers chosen were designed to reflect some (though not all) of the issues and themes that the Journal has been instrumental in both raising and developing.

This book is an attempt to make the original papers available to a wider audience (Part One), to include some of the important papers published in the Journal over these years (Part Two) and to offer insights into some of the controversies that have emerged (Part Three).

PART ONE

The theme of culture is one that has been discussed regularly throughout the Journal. Barnes in his contribution considers the importance of culture in shaping social attitudes to disabled people in pre-industrial societies and also suggests that contemporary attitudes can only be properly understood by reference to these cultural antecedents.

The development of theory has been an integral part of the history of the Journal. Abberley made a major contribution in his seminal discussion of oppression and here he argues that a truly liberatory theory of disablement needs to transcend the Marxism on which much current theory is based. He suggests that impairment will remain problematic in societies where notions of humanity and value ultimately depend on labour.

Other theoretical debates within the Journal have focused on the issue of normalisation. In this section Chappell provides a review and commentary on this developing critique as well as attempting to pose some difficult questions for disability theory; notably concerning the current exclusion and future inclusion of issues of learning difficulty in the mainstream of these debates. Walmsley, in her chapter, takes up some of these issues and describes a project which attempts to involve people with learning difficulties as equal partners. She considers the potential and limitations of such collaboration before finally raising some more general questions for both theory and practice. Disabled people's attempts to transform disability from a medical to a political issue have also featured prominently throughout the life of the Journal. Campbell in her chapter reviews this and discusses the ways in which the emerging collective consciousness of disabled people has developed into a full-blown social movement in Britain at least

An essential element in the politicisation of disability has been the recognition that the personal is political. Corbett uses this theme to discuss a series of papers she has written for the Journal over the years, documenting her changing understanding of issues of independence, difference and empowerment and showing how they made a contribution to the transformation of her own consciousness.

The rise of disability politics has had an important impact on research and this has been stimulated by and reflected in the Journal. Rioux, in the final chapter in this section, provides an overview of this, distinguishing between what she calls the individual and social pathology models of research. She reminds researchers of their ethical and political obligations as well as their scientific ones and concludes on a positive note in suggesting that, the emerging disability movement world-wide will force researchers to accept these obligations.

PART TWO

Selecting a few papers from the last ten years when the Journal has published more than 200 has been no easy task. We have tried to use the following criteria; (i) the paper has made an original contribution to disability studies (ii) it fits in with the themes and issues discussed in Section 1, and (iii) the popularity of the papers amongst the readership. This is not to imply that the papers not included are deficient in one or more of these ways but the process of selection has been an extremely difficult one.

The papers by Borsay and Barton were important in that they attempted to apply newly emerging disability perspectives to social policy and education respectively. Borsay takes the social model of disability as her organising theme

and Barton uses his own personal experience to inform debates about special, and indeed by implication, all forms of education.

Abberley and Liggett, in their papers made key contributions to the development of disability theory; the former drawing upon marxist, feminist and anti-racist perspectives and the latter utilising post-modernise perspectives and particularly the work of Foucault.

The next two papers look at the issue of politics. Oliver and Zarb provide critique of existing models of political representation and suggest that new social movement theory is a better way of conceptualising disability politics Shakespeare provides a similar critique of cultural representations of disable(people and argues that the negative imagery which predominates has to be challenged by developing a cultural politics of disability.

PART THREE

The Current Issues section posed similar problems in that since its inception it has served as a vehicle for debating a wide range of issues, for allowing disabled people a voice on issues that are important to them, for incorporating pieces from across the world and much more. Our selections here are chosen mainly to fit in with issues raised throughout the rest of the book in order to give it an overall coherence.

The first three papers appeared side by side and reflect a debate that began at an international conference held at the University of Leeds in 1995. Al three provide differing views on the nature of the research enterprise an(discuss issues that have been of concern throughout the life of the Journal.

INTRODUCTION

The paper by Vernon returns to the theme of oppression originally raised by Abberley and discussed subsequently by Stuart and Morris in the Special Edition on disability research already referred to.

The final three papers again appeared side by side and provide some of the latest thinking on debates around the social model of disability currently occurring both amongst disabled people themselves and within academic circles.

We hope this book will be widely read and provide a stimulus for reflection and debate and thereby contribute to the development of disability studies as a serious field of study and research.

Growing Pains' Disability Politics The Journey Explained and Described By Jane Campbell INTRODUCTION This paper will attempt to shed some light on the complex and often quite hidden political process of the Disabled Persons Movement over the past 30 years. Although the first stirrings of political 'protest' from organisations of disabled people go as far back as the late 19th century, this chapter will concentrate on the Movement from a time when impairment boundaries were crossed and a united approach to social oppression took off.