Transforming Transformative Disability Experiential Learning

Steve Singer
The College of New Jersey

Introduction

Burgeoning island, inhabited seas. My friends circle around, faces beaming. Someone may have told a story about their work day or perhaps made a joke about my bald head. They laugh, so I laugh, but clearly I look a bit mystified because Eryk makes direct eye contact and mouths something with an exaggerated flair. Continuing to stare, he understands that I did not get it. He repeats the same lip movements and I chisel out "Family Guy" from the ten or fifteen words or maybe from him pointing at the television across the room. How my mind makes the leap from ignorance to comprehension is not always a cognizant process. I say aloud, probably too loud, "Yeah, Family Guy!" which permits everyone to laugh unabashedly again since I understand. "I could be up for watching a few episodes. I'm tired of just talking," I say, noticing the kinesthetic energy of the room diminish. A few awkward stares are returned, the others looking away. Eryk pulls out his phone and repeatedly stabs the screen with his index finger producing the text "We hate that show and were saying that both it and South Park are not worth watching." I feel my face instantly flush and brush it off "Oh yeah, I agree. They just don't have the same

---

Steve Singer is an assistant professor of deaf education and deaf studies in the Department of Special Education, Language, and Literacy at The College of New Jersey, Ewing, New Jersey. His e-mail address is: sjsinger@syr.edu

kind of punch they once did." Everyone sort of stirs in their chairs for a moment trying not to participate in the awkward moment, but they realize that their individual efforts to let the gaffe go have culminated into a symphony of uneasiness. Eryk uses his hand to fingerspell E-S-S-G-O-L-A . We are both working on learning how to spell on our hands and I understand him to mean "asshole" due to the similarity of the handshapes to the correct letters. He guffaws and addresses the group. This time it was easy to descry something along the lines of "HA! you guys have no idea what we are saying!" Eryk is incandescent with an air of pride and protection. I can see my friends visibly exhale and with that release, the room returns to dynamic conversation and the elephant in the room moves to the corner. Nodding when others nod, smiling when other smile, the night wears on and I wear down. Too little information to understand. Too much in need of companionship to withdraw. Too uncertain to act. But it's okay. It's fine.

The preceding narrative describes one of my early experiences after becoming Deaf ten years ago when I was 28 years old. This account, though specific in time, is not unlike many interactions even today, though my communication skills, interpersonal tools, and confidence have shifted. I feel a very certain and immense joy in my life as a Deaf adult that I cherish, but navigating various ecologies where aural constructs dominate prove to be struggles. Communicating the beauty, complexity, and sometimes frustration of the Deaf experience to able-bodied people or people with other types of disabilities is a difficult but important objective for me and for Disability Studies—my scholarly discipline.

The narrative represents an authentic account of experiencing disability, albeit the beginning of a life with a disability. In the narrative, we view the struggles and triumphs. We see the use of technology, multiple modes of communication, peer collaboration, and most importantly the personal nexuses of friendships, histories, potential futures, and the complexities of change. The context resists the sterile and function-based disability discourse. How could it be possible to simulate these types of experiences for the purposes of informing educational programs or preparing teacher candidates to think critically about their pedagogical methods and students' lives? Many have tried.

This article explores the potential benefits and the potential liabilities of developing study abroad courses that engage disability experiential learning objectives for postsecondary education programs, particularly teacher training programs. Disability simulation activities as a method of learning have been heavily criticized by scholars within Disability Studies, yet are widely used. After a review of these objections, I will discuss how the study abroad course model proposed addresses these concerns as well as the intersectional implications of this new model of experiential learning. Lastly, I will outline a general scaffold for developing an appropriate Disability Experiential Learning Study Abroad course.

Critiques of Disability Experiential Learning Activities

Traditional disability simulations based around “disability awareness” are short term “in another person’s shoes” experiences of single class meetings or sometimes even a few days. They typically employ some means of impairing one of the senses using, for example, blindfolds or having students use wheelchairs. These activities are popular with students and instructors because they are participatory and dynamic. In higher education, offices of residence life implement them for training staff and residents, offices of disability services hold campus events, and human resources use them for staff training. Lalvani and Broderick (2013) conducted a qualitative study of 25 graduate students in teacher preparation programs about disability simulation activities. Virtually all had participated or hosted disability simulation exercises. Few statistics exist about the prevalence of these types of activities in teacher training programs, but there is evidence of teachers using them in practice. Gordon (2008) randomly sampled 500 teachers in the K-12 educational setting and found that 32% of them conducted structured disability simulation activities within the last year. 75% of the sample hosted disability awareness activities.

The popularity and rationale for these types of programs is reflected in scholarly literature. Disability simulations promote positive attitudes toward people with disabilities (Foley, Tindall, Lieberman, & Kim, 2007; Patrick, 1987). These positive attitudes result in more empathetic responses when interacting with disabled individuals (Crotty, Finucane, & Ahern, 2000; Williams and Datillo, 2005). Not only do the experiences break down attitudinal barriers, but after students have completed the activity, they are more aware of ideas related to inclusive education and physical barriers that make it difficult for people with physical disabilities to participate in various environments (Delamere, 2007). As a means to increase the effectiveness of simulations, many programs pair the activities with debriefing sessions. These sessions discuss participants’ experiences and assist in the transformation of their thinking (Timkin & McNamee, 2012) but can also attempt to engage the ideas of social justice and the social construction of disability that are so critical to this area of inquiry (Delamere, 2007). Burgstahler and Doe (2004) found that during a debriefing session, students did successfully grasp how the environment was socially constructed, evidenced by a discussion of how spaces were needlessly and thoughtlessly built for the able-bodied.

Many scholars feel that these positive findings either do not completely describe the consequences of disability simulation or should be accepted with caution. Flower, Burns, and Bottsfor-Miller (2007) analyzed ten studies frequently cited as support for the efficacy of disability simulations and found that the effect sizes of these studies were small, and therefore should be interpreted with great caution. Others studies show responses from participants varied greatly. Though some people displayed beneficial outcomes as described above, others found the activity difficult (due to time), frustrating, anxiety causing, or simply weird and strange (Armstrong, 2003). Similarly, Leo and Goodwin (2013) found three distinct themes in outcomes: “Thank God I don’t have a disability,” “I see things differently now,” and “I am just not sure about this.” Varied responses emerged again in a subsequent study: “Unnerving visibility”, “Negotiating environments differently,” and “Tomorrow, I will be fine” (Leo & Goodwin, 2014). Clearly, not all participants exit one of these programs achieving positive transformation. All teaching efforts have intended and unintended consequences and paying due attention to both are critical to effective instruction (Fehr & Sassenberg, 2009). Given that preceding studies have suggested that participants do have diverse reactions, it is integral that facilitators consider not only what they can achieve, but what they do achieve.

We should assume that all facilitators of these events intend the positive effects of improved attitudes, empathy, and awareness of social issues, but because the simulation cannot represent the real world experiences of people with disabilities, it is impossible to control for all of the outcomes (Mozier et al., 2009). Feelings of fear among participants flourish as they are forced to feel temporarily out of control (Valle & Connor, 2011). A blind folded person feels a sense of disorientation or feels incapable and this is not how most blind people report feeling. Participants then leave an activity greatly relieved that they do not have a disability and pity those who do have one, which is one of the specific discourses the discipline of Disability Studies wishes to extinguish (Brew-Parish, 1997; Reeve, 2000). Alternatively, participants may view people with disabilities as heroes for succeeding in life in spite of their disabilities. This inspirational “super-crip” misrepresents the life courses of people with disabilities, disregards the social and cultural constructions that cause disablement, and establishes a problematic model to which disabled people supposedly should aspire (Shapiro, 1993). Because simulations are very short term, participants never have the opportunity to develop skills that disabled people have and do not have the tailored supports or personalized equipment that most people with long term impairments have (Kuppers, 2007). What results are flawed impressions of life with a disability as well as a decreased sense of the capabilities of people with disabilities. Cuddy, Glick, and Fiske (2007) found that students who took part in a simulation activity felt that people with disabilities were more likeable but less competent than those who had never completed a simulation. These types of assumptions often result in benevolent stigmatizations where disabled people are patronized as kind, pitiable souls, though ultimately incompetent (Fehr & Sassenberg, 2009). Generalizations like these affect employment opportunities, participation in citizenship, and personal relationship dynamics.

Some scholars find the concept of disability simulation intractable. French and Swain (2004) state that there is no way to simulate disability authentically and when someone attempts to, disability most frequently becomes individualized and medicalized. When this happens, the personal tragedy view of disability is reinforced. In order to move away from the medical discourse, the interaction of the person with a disabling environment must be engaged and challenged rather than reinforcing ideas of inadequacy. The majority of simulations are unable to achieve this (Grenier, 2006). Even if these experiences do result in the exploration of social constructionism, they are rarely able to succeed in drawing the connection between society-as-it-is and social justice for people with disabilities (Scullion, 1999). Potentially, if these types of activities involved longer experiences or particularly, that the experiences take place in public spaces where participants are exposed to disabling environments and interact with non-participants, then better outcomes may be achieved. Unfortunately, this is typically not possible due to safety concerns and other ethical conflicts (Lalvani & Broderick, 2013). When simulations occur outside of a controlled space, participants report feeling afraid that they will offend people who actually have disabilities, which in turn, casts a dark shadow on their experience and disability in general (Burgstahler & Doe, 2004). To further complicate the issue, it is unknown how people with disabilities generally react to witnessing simulations because they are not adequately represented in or conduct much of the research on the topic. These issues are viewed as irresolvable by some and culminate in a severe condemnation of simulation events. Brew-Parish (1997) describes disability simulations as outrageous and objectionable that only serve to reinforce negative stereotypes about people with disabilities. Valle and Connor (2011) condemn disability awareness days and simulations as the same as “ non-Black students wearing blackface, males dressed as females, and straight, same-sex students holding hands” (p.19) as a means to understand what it is like to be Black, female, or gay.

A New Transformative Disability Learning Experience

Given the very apparent problems with disability simulation activities outlined above, a significant shift in how instructors conduct these programs must occur. It does not behoove educators to discard disability experiential learning all together due to their popularity and the increased attention they bring to disability rights, social equity, and general human understanding that scholars such as Davis (1997), and Siebers (2008) describe have long been marginalized in institutions of education. Instead, I suggest confronting the identified problematic aspects of these programs, revising how the programs function, and reassessing the efficacy of disability experiential learning. The following sections outline how I propose educators might address this process.

Recently, I joined a team of scholars observing primary and secondary education classrooms in Italy. Today, American Sign Language (ASL) is my primary mode of communication and two skilled ASL interpreters joined myself, faculty, and ten hearing graduate students on the three week trip, none of whom had more than a rudimentary understanding of the Italian language. Once in the classroom, an interpreter stood at the front of the room and signed "Speaking Italian fast" and communicated an amount of tonal information, but of course with no command of the language, could not understand what instructors or students were saying and then dropped their hands. Visual and emotional echoes of my early days as a Deaf person (e.g., the opening narrative) rattled around inside my head. I felt like an island once again with only my own thoughts to dub over the silent discourse going on around me. I looked around and saw that my colleagues, too, were islands. Their eyes were attentive, they tried to figure out this foreign landscape, but there was an internal dialogue visibly happening behind those professional visages that communicated to me a feeling of disconnectedness they wished to hide. Though difficult, and I emphasize this point, we did not feel pity for ourselves, we were not deficient, and we learned a great deal. How is it possible to interpret all of these facets of those interactions in an authentic way without reducing the experience to "positive" or "negative"?

I had taken part in many types of disability simulation activities prior to becoming Deaf and assisted facilitating several Deaf oriented simulations since. To varying degrees, they all suffered from issues of individualizing disability and promoting pity. My own experiences with disability quickly informed me that our experiences in Italy, though unplanned, were in fact disability experiences and that they could be utilized in a way that would be much more productive than traditional simulation activities. I discussed my observations in those classrooms with my colleagues and they corroborated my impressions of what was happening to us, with us, and about us. I review these collective observations in the following sections.

The Social Model of Disability recognizes that there are the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of bodily difference and then there are the sociological aspects of attitudinal and physical barriers that subjugate and stigmatize people with disabilities. The British model of disability differentiates these as impairment and disablement (Oliver, 1996). Within this framework, the concept of disablement extends to anyone who is un-able to participate in a given context because the way that the environment is socially constructed according to cultural norms does not align with individual characteristics or needs. Therefore, English-speaking American graduate students and instructors thrust into an Italian-speaking classroom experience disablement because of their inability to participate in the culturally expected way whether or not they have any impairments. As a result, the lack of accessibility results in significantly less socialization, less learning, potential self-deprecation, and any number of various pejorative observations from people who meet the status quo. This is not to suggest that the disablement that this contingent to Italy experienced is necessarily the same as what people with disabilities experience. We must consider multiple historical, personal, and cultural experiences, which contribute toward the multifaceted, shifting, and varied ways people with disabilities live. We also must recognize the power and privilege of these students and faculty as older, visiting, educated participants who largely speak English, which in itself carries a certain dominance in the global setting. Nevertheless, this authentic collective experience of disablement within higher education coursework creates a critical moment in which a great deal of learning might occur.

Developing a Model of Experiential Learning:

Drawing from Experiences in Italy to Create a New Disability Experiential Learning Program

Intersectional

Since the objectives of this disability experiential learning exercise draw the connections between experiencing disablement due to linguistic difference and disablement as a result of impairment, ignoring the intersectional implications of this scenario would be negligent. For purposes of instruction, facilitators of this course might draw upon the groundbreaking intersectional writings of Crenshaw (1989), as well as: Crenshaw (1991); Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, (2013); and Collins (2003).

These scholars describe how people with multiple marginalized identities experience oppression at the nexus of the interactive social structures associated with each. This results in different experiences for people with multiple marginalized identities compared to those of any single identity marker or the sum of the experiences of each individual marker. Once students have developed a firm foundation in intersectional thinking, they can begin to analyze their own positions in the course spaces from a multidirectional perspective and access a broader understanding of difference. Questions then begin to emerge about their experience with their own ethnicity in a foreign country and how those ethnic identities, impairments, and other identity markers are simultaneously exclusive and confounded. These introspections may then be applied to relevant scholarship in the United States or of the hosting country. Instructors of the course may then continue to complicate student understanding by drawing on readings that investigate additional intersections, such as disability and class, gender, sexuality, and race, which may or may not be explicit in the students' experience abroad (See Caldwell, 2010; Erevelles & Minear, 2015; Matsuda, 2008; Thiara, Hague, & Mullender, 2011). Students then comprehend that the problems related to the social casting of disability extend far beyond impairment and return home with tools to interpret structures of power that stratify people.

With this foundation in intersectional thinking, students should be encouraged to interrogate the disability experiential learning program abroad. Instructors can highlight the limits of how well students can truly understand the identities of people and their experiences given the complexities of individual experience, drawing specific attention to drawing conclusions about disability or the culture of the country where they study. Further, students necessarily scrutinize their own position entering into the experiential learning program by asking questions such as who has access to the program, who has access to disability cultural discourse in general, how is inequity perpetuated, and in the broad social sphere, what can a students' participation in this program accomplish?

As students begin to comprehend the immensity and complexity of their interdisciplinary and metaphoric experience, which approaches intersectional themes, students can begin to scrutinize the conclusions that they draw from the program. Supplementing course readings with the limitations of metaphorical adaptation of difference (see Samuels, 2011) and tools of appropriate intersectional methodological analysis (see McCall, 2005) the learning environment shifts away from solely a limited internal self-reflective disability experience. First, students experience disablement as best as possible, learning about the sociological, cultural, and personal aspects of disability. They are then asked to shift from the role of participant to one of a social analyst by deconstructing their responses to the program in ways that expand their knowledge beyond the scope of the course context, thereby further promoting students' ability to synthesize what they learn in their daily lives. This shift is further described below in relation to student journals and assignments.

Study Abroad Courses as Authentic Disabling Experiences

How then does taking disability experiential learning out of the controlled classroom and abroad address these many and significant concerns raised by researchers and disability rhetoricians? One of the recurring commentaries is that a potentially stressful activity, which is only an hour or two, doesn't permit participants to acclimate to the conditions, and that it cannot move away from the medical model of disability. When the experience is extended to three weeks or even a semester abroad, yes, of course there are still moments of stress, but there is also opportunity to learn and grow. Anecdotally, I can attest to these changes. During our three-week course in Italy and after a period of uncertainty, my colleagues naturally began developing communication strategies, just as the participants in the opening narrative did. They learned who among us had the strongest Italian language skills and asked questions. They gestured for teachers and students to draw, point, or act out concepts. They utilized Italian people in the classroom who we identified as bilingual to help interpret. They learned important conceptual words in Italian so that they could try to understand some spoken sentences by using contextual information. They also consistently learned new ASL signs daily by watching me, my wife, and the interpreters or by asking questions. Was this laborious? Yes, sometimes. Did we feel deficient? At times, perhaps this feeling emerged, but the dominating tone was that of "we will figure it out," because communication is a universal need and a shared responsibility. At the end of the day, we reconvened and relaxed in the company of people we knew to be safe and who shared a similar experience of disablement. These descriptions seem to mimic many of the strategies acquired and used by Deaf and Autistic people, people who have had a stroke or a brain injury, or any number of other people with disabilities that affect how communication occurs. Having the time to develop these is integral to gaining a more accurate envisioning of the experiences of people with these types of impairments and mitigates most of the safety and ethical concerns raised by Lalvani and Broderick (2013) about long-term, publically engaged simulations.

The extended experience is authentic. By removing the simulation aspect of the program, students no longer need to feel the deceptive and mocking nature of "faking a disability." With some guidance, they quickly confront the idea that disability is socially constructed, because nothing about their bodies has changed. It is the change in context that has disabled them. The difficulty then is not establishing a legitimate context, but equating how this communicative social disablement is the same or different than disablement as the result of a recognized impairment.

Communicating a Broad Range of Disability Experiences through Engagement

Disability is experienced differently by everyone with that identity or label. Disability also occurs at different times throughout peoples' lives. Typically, simulations most accurately represent becoming disabled rather than being disabled (French, 1992). Even with the extended experience of an academic term abroad and with careful facilitation of reflective exercises and discussions, it is irresponsible to disregard the clear limitations of acquiring a communication disablement and extending its applicability to all disabilities, in all settings, for all cultures, for all ages, and for all ages of disability onset. Instead, the simulation experience created for student participants in a particular course should be aggressively framed as a start of a conversation about disablement and impairment rather than "walking in someone else's shoes." Student reflections and feelings are not evidence of how people with disabilities experience their lives, but can be extremely strong tools to initiate the drawing of connections between social concepts and potential areas of broad experience, and can also catalyze effective critical thinking and appropriate trajectories of questioning. In this way, the focus of such a program is much less tethered to students reacting to the disabling context and much more grounded in reflexive process as participants begin to establish or reform their relationship with disability. The primary question shifts from "How does it feel to have a disability?" to "What does disability mean?"

Since the inclusivity of all the varied disability life experiences is impossible to replicate, course lectures and readings should focus on generating queries and exposure to Disability narratives. People with disabilities with a broad range of characteristics should be invited to share their experiences with the class as a means to begin to fill in the many gaps from their own experience with disablement or at the very least come to recognize the limitations of it. However, lectures from visiting disabled people could revert the program back to a largely academic interaction. Rather than conclude with that information exchange, guest presenters are invited to participate in social and cultural events with students such as meals and tours. This permits students the opportunity to synthesize what they are learning and the ability to further observe disability within more natural settings after they have been provided with relevant historical and personal accounts. This approach to learning extends the experiential process because students attempt to experience with or from the perspective of a person with a disability rather than trying to emulate that experience. This aspect of the study abroad course seeks to help students shift back and forth between Pike's (1967) anthropological concepts of emic- the perspectives and meaning makings created by the studied population and etic-the perspective, conclusions, and significance to the observer or audience, reinforcing that the experiences students are having with disablement in the course are a grossly inadequate effort to represent the lives of people with disabilities. That is, students attempt to understand the authoritative perspective of people with disabilities about access, stigma, and cultural identity throughout the activities taking place in public spaces in which they participate (the emic), while simultaneously making meaning and learning the significance of those perspectives within students' own lives and in relation to the course objectives (the etic).

The existing literature about disability simulation is riddled with the words: Oppression, social justice, discrimination, marginalization, barriers, inaccessibility, civil rights, and stereotypes. It is no surprise that consumers of this kind of activity complete the program with a sense of dread or at least a sense of social burden. Not once while reviewing the relevant scholarship did the ideas of pride, identity, community, culture, disability gain, or anything remotely whimsical, commonplace, or human emerge. Though communicating the ideas of disability's social casting are the primary objective for simulations, without dialogue about how and why many of the assumptions about disability are flawed and the human experience of disability, participants are predisposed to draw only negative connections and maintain an objectified homogenous impression of disability compared to the lives of people. There is no particularly effective way to make traditional experiential learning programs simulate these concepts.

However, at the end of our often hectic travel days throughout Italy, students felt relieved to be among their peers where communication was less work and they were surrounded by people with similar backgrounds and experiences. They felt prideful of their day's accomplishments and shared silly stories about their days, including communication gaffes, problems, and in-group perspective. These were not moments of darkness, oppression, and marginalization, but of a celebratory community. It is reasonable to assume that most study abroad students will have this decompression time. While rudimentary, these moments set an ideal stage for beginning a dialogue about the social influences that affect the community aspects of disabled people and more importantly the cultural and personal identities that emerge from these communities, including the arts, traditions, Self, and language. This portion of the proposed course content focuses on these objectives by exposing students to disability performance, painting, sculpture, and writing, moving distinctly away from mechanical study and rhetoric toward passion and individuality. Ideally, at least a portion of these examples would be selected from authors and artists with disabilities from the hosting city, region, or nation.

Interdisciplinary and Not a Disability "Spotlight"

The danger of specific coursework that focuses only on disability is that it can function to build up an image that people with disabilities are nothing more than, and think about nothing aside from disability. All people are the culmination of their various experiences, and parceling out one aspect of a life skews a holistic understanding of personhood. Ferguson and Nussbaum (2012) outlined what Disability Studies actually is and what the discipline should do. They emphasize the necessity for Disability Studies to be interdisciplinary, reaching as broadly as culture itself, meaning that Disability Studies seeks to understand a way of being rather than a bodily characteristic. While topic specific courses are important for in-depth analysis, disability content should be assimilated into all areas of academic pursuit. By promoting an interdisciplinary approach to cultural studies more people are exposed to the diverse panorama of life and an increased understanding of the interrelationships between identities and all fields of study can be accomplished. Approaching education in this way widens the "spotlighting" effect of studying disability.

Applying this concept to a disability experiential program establishes a directive that the course should not only encapsulate the single objective of parceled disability experience. Fortunately, it is unlikely that a college or university would sponsor a study abroad course which does not engage a topic of inquiry that requires or is enriched by the culture or nation that the course wishes to visit. Due to both the philosophical justification of interdisciplinary studies and the practical considerations of establishing such a course, the proposed disability experiential program would be best developed along with another topic of inquiry. For example, if an architecture department planned a study abroad course for students to study the palaces of China, in addition to the preceding disability experiential learning description, students might also investigate disability in Chinese culture and how that cultural landscape has affected architectural planning.

Suggested Course Components

As an instructor develops a study abroad course, especially one that contains as many facets as suggested in this paper, it would be helpful to list the most critical questions they wish their students to address to aid in the prioritization and scheduling of activities, assignments, and readings. The following is an initial list of potential questions:

> What is disability-disablement, impairment?
>
> What was my experience and how might it be similar or different than the experiences of people with various types of impairments?
>
> What are the social and personal aspects of disability and how do their synergy create the current and as well historical cultural landscape? (Stigma, identity, culture, barriers etc.)
>
> What is the relationship between disability, society, and the topic of this course? (Education, architecture, business, etc.)
>
> What are the relationships between social constructionism, oppression, and social justice?
>
> How might the experience differ for individuals:
> Within the same disability category?
> From different socioeconomic statuses?
> Of varying genders?
> In the culture where the course takes place versus in the United States?
> From different linguistic, cultural, or ethnic backgrounds?
>
> What can I learn from this experience and what can't I?

It is important for students to respond in divergent ways in order to stimulate various tracks of thought and analysis. Journaling should be a cornerstone of this coursework, especially while on the trip compared to post-course synthesis. Maintaining a journal is a relatively easy way to document thoughts and feelings without the burden of formal writing, which can be difficult abroad due to fatigue, limited internet connectivity, and a student's location when it is feasible to do work. For journaling exercises, students should be encouraged to write narratives about their experience with linguistic and cultural disablement as well as record an account for the presentations and activities with disabled people on the topics of art, identity, and lived experience. The writing should primarily record their feelings and the details of any given context rather than summarization. It should be clear to students that the journal be used as a safe place to write thoughts without concern of criticism. The journal should be more or less in the moment, experiential, descriptive, and personal, resisting the inclination toward meta-thought and meta-emotion. Later in the course, the journal becomes the student's own data, which they sample and analyze once they have gained a broader understanding of how to think about their experience, how to analyze it, and how to identify the gaps between what they experienced and the lives of people with multiple and diverse identities.

Short reflection papers can be used to help students begin to connect the readings and presentations to what they experience as part of the course's non-disability specific content (disability and Chinese palatial architecture in the example above). This is the location where students begin developing questions, identifying contradictions, and complicate some of the more simplistic conclusion students reportedly make during short disability simulation activities, which are still bound to occur despite the extended nature of this proposed coursework.

Finally, near the end of the experience or after the students have returned home and have had the opportunity to process what they have done, they may be required to submit a final paper. Students apply what they have learned about the broad disability experience, integrating what they have learned about multi-perspective analysis and the limits of their knowledge (including limitations of the course) to respond to their own personal commentary in the form of excerpts from their journals as a disability studies scholar rather than as a participant.

Conclusion

Generally, I concur with Valle and Connor (2011) that disability simulations are inherently problematic in that they attempt to instruct a complex concept of a whole life and identity in the context of a short superficial activity, which ultimately reinforces many of the misunderstandings they seek to address. Simultaneously, given the popularity of these activities due to their participatory and potentially transformative nature, it behooves Disability Studies scholars and educators to investigate ways to revise how simulation activities occur rather than promote their eradication. An attentive, willing, and curious audience is an enormous resource to waste.

In review, revising the disability experiential learning program should focus on the following critical points: (1) De-individualizing the disability experience while politicizing it; (2) Creating an authentic and extended disabling context; (3) Draw from and continue to utilize people with disabilities in the program rather than essentialize disability; (4) Resist 'spotlighting' through interdisciplinary and intersectional critique; (5) Be a beginning of the disability conversation; and (6) Create a context that addresses disability from a culturalist purview.

The Disability experiential study abroad course I have outlined addresses the most significant concerns in regard to disability simulation activities. First, there is no simulation of disability whatsoever. The disablement students experience is the authentic consequence of linguistic and cultural difference. Differentiating the concepts of impairment and disablement inevitably shifts the disability dialogue in this course toward the social construction of disability. The persistent connection between disability and negativity is challenged both by addressing the medicalized personal tragedy framing of disability and after adequate attention is paid to social justice and oppression, the passionate, personal, and artistic biographies are represented.

Finally, I have presented significant revision to the traditional "spotlighting" of disability that happens during simulation programs. Disability does not exist in a vacuum. Disability simultaneously is and is not impairment, class, gender, race, ethnicity, education, politics, sexuality, history, and science. People undertake all of these facets of Self-identity and experience along with the politics associated with each concurrently. Those experiences inform, shape, and complicate each other making the analysis of any single part myopic without the consideration of the interactive aspects of Self.

Therefore, disability experiential learning must mimic life. Without exploration of these relationships as a holistic area of study, little transformation of students' understanding can occur. Otherwise disability remains only a condition, a thing, a person. Here students approach the topic of disability from the top down, then from the bottom up. They hope to gain some semblance of emic perspective through experience, buttressed by the accounts of people with disabilities. Later they analyze their own experiences, interpreting the etic scope and significance. Nevertheless, this course may not ultimately resolve all the issues raised. Unintended outcomes will still partner with the intended. Further study of the outcomes of such a class is warranted, but there is strong reason to believe that this type of experiential learning could make a positive contribution toward postsecondary educational programming.

References

Armstrong, E. K. (2003). Applications of role-playing in tourism management teaching: An evaluation of learning method. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education, 2*, 5-16.

Brew-Parrish, V. (1997). The wrong message. *Ragged Edge Online*. Retrieved from http://www.raggededgemagazine.com/archive/aware/htm

Burgstahler, S., & Doe, T. (2004). Disability-related simulations: If, when, and how to use them. *Review of Disability Studies, 1*, 4-17

Caldwell, K. K. (2010). We exist: Intersectional in/visibility in bisexuality &

disability. *Disability Studies Quarterly, 30*(3), 7.

Collins, P. H. (2003). The politics of Black feminist thought. In C. R. McCann & Kim (eds), *Feminist theory reader: Local and global perspectives* (pp. 318–333) New York, NY: Routledge.

Connor, D. , & Bejoian, L. (2007). Cripping school curricula: 20 ways to re-teach disability. *Review of Disability Studies, 3*(3), 3-13.

Connor, D., & Grable, S. (2013). "Cripping" the curriculum through academic activism: Working toward increasing global exchanges to reframe (dis)ability and education. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 46*(1), 100-118.

Crotty, M., Finucane, P., & Ahern, M. (2000). Teaching medical students about disability and rehabilitation: Methods and student feedback. *Medical Education, 34*, 659-664.

Cuddy, A., Fiske, S., & Glick, P. (2007). The bias map: Behaviors from intergroup affect and stereotypes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*, 631-648.

Davis, L. ed. (1997). *The disability studies reader*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Delamere, F. M. (2007). An experiential approach to understanding physical disability. *Schole: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education, 22*, 51-57.

Erevelles, N., & Minear, A. (2015). Unspeakable offenses: Untangling race and disability in discourses of intersectionality. *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 127-145.

Fehr, J., & Sassenberg, K. (2009). Intended and unintended consequences of internal motivation to behave nonprejudiced: The case of benevolent discrimination. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 39*, 1093-1108.

Flower, A., Burns, M. K., & Bottsford-Miller, N. A. (2007). Meta-analysis of disability simulation research. *Remedial and Special Education, 28*, 72-79.

Foley, J. T., Tindall, D., Lieberman, L., & Kim, S. Y. (2007) How to develop disability awareness using the sport education model. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance, 78*, 32-36.

French, S., & Swain, J. (2004). Whose tragedy? Towards a personal non-tragedy view of disability. In J. Swain (Ed.), *Disabling barriers, enabling environments* (pp. 34-40). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ferguson, P., Nusbaum, E. (2012). Disability studies: What is it and what difference does it make?. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 37*(2), 70-80.

Grenier, M. (2006). A social constructionist perspective of teaching and learning in inclusive physical education. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly, 23*, 245-260.

Gordon, L. (2008). A preliminary investigation of disability awareness in the curriculum and teacher's attitudes toward inclusion. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*.

Kuppers, P. (2007). The wheelchair's rhetoric: The performance of disability. *TDR: The Drama Review, 51*, 80-88.

Lalvani, P., & Broderick, A. (2013). Institutionalized Ableism and the misguided "Disability Awareness Day": Transformative Pedagogies for teacher education. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 46*(4), 468-483.

Leo, J., & Goodwin, D. (2013). Pedagogical reflections on the use of disability simulations in higher education. *Journal of Teaching in Phys Ed, 32*, 460-472

Leo, J., & Goodwin, D. (2014). Negotiated meanings of disability simulations in an adapted physical activity course: learning from student reflections. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly, 31*, 144-161.

Matsuda, K. (2008). Counter-hegemonic discourse on the experience of disability: Retrieving the voices of female students with disabilities who are involved in the juvenile justice system. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A, 68*, 5032.

Mirza, M,. & Hammel, J. (2011). Crossing border, pushing boundaries: Disabled refugees' experiences of community and community participation in the USA. In A. C. Carey & R. K. Scotch (Eds.). *Disability and community [Research in social science and disability, Vol. 6]* (pp. 157-186). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Moizer, J., Lean, J., Towler, M., & Abbey, C. (2009). Simulations and games: Overcoming the barriers to their use in high education. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 10*, 207-224.

Oliver, M. (1996). Defining impairment and disability: issues at stake. In C. Barnes & G. Mercer (eds), *Exploring the divide: Illness and disability*. Leeds, UK: The Disability Press.

Patrick, D. G. (1987). Improving attitudes towards disabled persons. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly, 4*, 316-325.

Pike, K. (1967). *Language in relation to a unified theory of the structure of human behavior*. The Hague, Belgium: Mouton.

Reeve, D. (2002). Negotiating psycho-emotional dimensions of disability and their influence on identity constructions. *Disability and Society, 17*, 493-508.

Scullion, P. A. (1999). 'Disability' in a nursing curriculum. *Disability and Society, 14*, 539-559.

Shapiro, J. (1993). *No pity: People with disabilities forging a new civil rights movement*. New York, NY: Random House.

Siebers, T. (2008). *Disability theory*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Silverman, A., Gwinn, J., & Van Boven, L. (2015). Stumbling in their shoes: Disability simulations reduce judged capabilities of disabled people. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 6*(4) 464-471.

Thiara, R. K., Hague, G., & Mullender, A. (2011). Losing out on both counts: Disabled women and domestic violence. *Disability & Society, 26*(6), 757-771.

Timkin, G. L., & McNamee, J. (2012). New perspectives for teaching physical education: Preservice teachers' reflections on outdoor and adventure education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, 31*, 21-38.

Valle, J. W., & Connor, D. J. (2011). *Rethinking disability: A disability studies approach to inclusive practices (A practical guide)*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Vroman, K., & Elder, B. (in press). "The first day of school was the worst day of my life": Best practices in inclusive education for refugee youth with disabilities. In C. Ashby & M. Cosier (eds), *Enacting change from within: Disability studies meets teaching and teacher preparation*, New York, NY:

Peter Lang Publishing.

Williams, R., & Dattilo, J. (2005). Using wheelchair simulations to teach about inclusion. *Schole: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education, 20*, 140-145.