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On Turning Tables, Hubris, and Humility: Reflecting Upon Carol Rogers-Shaw's "Disabled Lives & Pandemic Lives: Stories of Human Precarity"

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What can be learned about the pandemic through the lens of disability, and conversely, what can we come to know about disability through the COVID-19 pandemic? Rogers-Shaw contemplates these reciprocal questions in a highly original essay that is wide in scope. After thinking about how to best describe the experience of reading her work, the word "wondrous" came to mind, as the essay is both delightful and powerful. Why? Because she examines and explores what has recently concerned many of us in education, that is, the pandemic's impact upon the lives of both teachers and students with and without disabilities. We have heard all kinds of stories in social media (Selwyn, 2020), along with formal reports (Barbour, 2021) and journal articles on the crest of an anticipated wave of information (Osofsky et al., 2020). Still, we don't yet have a cohesive, substantial body of knowledge that makes sense of the pandemic's ongoing impact on education in the United States and around the world. Amid these scary and confusing times, Rogers-Shaw has given us useful ways to (re)consider dis/ability in light of the pandemic, and vice versa, illustrating shortcomings of society at large and education in particular, while offering some possibilities for much-needed change.

In "Disabled Lives & Pandemic Lives: Stories of Human Precarity," the author uses herself as a prism through which to view many of the interconnected issues COVID-19 has raised. The professional and personal experiences of Rogers-Shaw, a lifelong teacher of students identified as disabled who has managed her own disability of Type 1 diabetes since she was 20 years old, inform her perspectives about human differences. Her goal in this essay is to turn the tables on the reader, making clear "how a life with disabilities can uniquely equip [all of] us to live with precarity and to offer insights to others for whom a profound sense of precarity is a new experience." In other words, she uses disability as a teaching tool that possesses epistemological value—a phenomenon that most people, including traditional scholars within the field of special education, don't recognize.

From my own perspective, Rogers-Shaw's essay exemplifies why we need more autoethnographies from teachers with and without disabilities to reflect on dis/ability as a complex, multifaceted, contested, unpredictable phenomenon that can teach us about humanity (Connor & Ferri, 2021). Using autoethnography allows the author to cull from, and combine, multiple realms of her own experiences, including how she viewed herself and her disability at different stages of life; relationships with her husband, mother, daughter, and friends; connections to colleagues, students, and their parents; and her observations of how society views herself and other disabled people. Taken together, these sources convey the context of who she and her students are in society—their location in history and culture, including their relation to social norms and societal expectations. Each aspect of experience informs the others, uniting holistically through embracing the intricacies and convolutions forged through these dynamics.

Rogers-Shaw's essay reminds me of a quilt in which all aspects included—stories, vignettes, observations, memories, original thoughts—can be individually analyzed, yet are ultimately meant to be read in relation to all its parts. In other words, each unique piece of the quilt offers particularities inviting us to think in nuanced ways. Simultaneously, all of these carefully selected segments are woven to purposefully interanimate the others throughout the entire work. Rogers-Shaw uses the thread of her own truths to stitch them all together. Ultimately, by shifting the lens about disability to one of value, she creates a powerful testimony about possibilities to counter the hubris of ableism.

Drawing from her own experiences, Rogers-Shaw uses the method of storytelling to highlight three major themes:

> (1) Living creatively in the face of limitations. (2) The irony of being in proximity yet separated, of never quite fully feeling a true sense of belonging. (3) The necessity of learning to live with precarity, and the sense of loss, grief, and longing that come with it.

The author's own positionality as a person with a disability and a teacher of disabled students both propels her interest and grants her authority in discussing these areas. Insights shaped by her identity are forged from experiences including accepting human precarity, adapting to changing rules and expectations, going without the familiar, inventing new ways of doing things, problem-solving, and managing life in general. In brief, the author asserts the value of a disability epistemology—specific knowledge generated by disability experiences—to broaden our intellectual horizons and help guide social change. Recognizing disability as a way of framing, analyzing, and interpreting the world, Rogers-Shaw writes:

> Disability experiences are as valuable as other life experiences that are the result of academic scholarship or professional development or athletic training or practice in the arts. The area of expertise may be different, but it is just as important.

Disability knowledge, therefore, is currently an untapped and/or undertapped resource for helping us think about new ways of understanding human differences in a shared world (Wong, 2020). Knowing firsthand how people with disabilities make evaluations, take risks, embrace creativity, problem-solve, and have contingency plans should situations go awry, the author offers an analogy to characteristics of flexible and creative classroom teachers.

Using her own stories and those of her students, Rogers-Shaw provides readers with truths to consider, such as how disabled people sometimes know far more than those who are non-disabled—including about pandemic-related topics. For example, she notes how people with disabilities possess wisdom related to overcoming mental health issues resulting from longing and languishing. Such wisdom manifests in rejecting the notion of needing a perfect body to be happy, facing and managing physical and psychological pain, and accepting certain weakness as an indication of good mental health.

Recognizing that human precarity has been universally experienced, Rogers-Shaw confesses to a very human desire to seek revenge by pointing out the pain, humiliation, imposed limitations, and absurdities she's encountered in society's ableist thinking. Transcending rightful anger, she takes the high road to show readers, through many examples and numerous insights, the value of using a disability-based framework to study a phenomenon such as society's response to COVID-19. Through her lens as "a disabled person who has lived and even thrived with a disability and has worked with children, youth, and families who have developed significant strengths and understandings of the realities that result from a disability diagnosis," she turns the tables and writes of everybody adjusting to a new reality brought on by the pandemic.

Rogers-Shaw sees disability as a natural part of human variation—and in many ways an asset rather than a deficit synonymous with tragedy—which reveals that her academic grounding is rooted in Disability Studies in Education (DSE), a field that seeks to foreground the perspectives of both disabled teachers and students. Like most of us who work in DSE, the author notes how it wasn't until she was in her doctoral program, engaging in substantial research on disability, that she began to see herself reflected in DSE-based articles. One of the many implicit questions raised by her essay is: why aren't more, or better yet *all,* teacher education programs utilizing a DSE framework to counter the pervasive deficit-based understandings of disability throughout society, including in the field of traditional special education and educational laws?

Interestingly, critiques of DSE by traditional special educators often dismiss the field as *comprising only of stories.* I have heard this erroneous understanding in my own departmental meetings and have read about it in special education journals. Sadly, critics of DSE pit "just stories" against "hard science" in ways that caricature both fields (Kauffman et al., 2017). Of course, science is valuable, but it cannot always be the primary source, or the only source, of knowledge about what constitutes a disability in what circumstances, and how best to educate individuals identified as disabled. As a career-long special educator who has been deeply disappointed in the narrowness of my own discipline, I also recognize that the social sciences and interdisciplinary approaches have much to offer. Like Rogers-Shaw, I know that disability is a far messier topic than reductive clinical definitions listing a series of static characteristics located within the individual; rather, it is a complex, dynamic, and deeply human experience across all contexts. I argue that the realities of disabled students' lives are significantly different than portrayals in glossy college textbooks and mere statistical analyses. That's why Rogers-Shaw's work is so important. We should never lose sight of storied experiences of real people in real classrooms.

Which brings me to pedagogy. One of the many things I loved about Rogers-Shaw's essay is how the author portrayed the realities of teaching classrooms of teenagers. I could feel the students' joy in the lessons described, and I personally identified with the pleasure of teaching. Moreover, these scenes took me back to my own epiphany as to how much students teach teachers if we are open, if we listen, if we constantly reflect and trust ourselves as thinkers, analyzers, and problem solvers (Connor, 2018). In her classroom descriptions, Rogers-Shaw rendered the raw energy of students, the unpredictability of classroom dynamics, and the "in the moment" thinking teachers must manage in every lesson. Her ideas for making the curriculum personally meaningful, honest, and relevant to disabled students' lives resonated with me, as there's a clear parallel between people with disabilities and other minoritized groups. For example, ethnic studies scholars also seek to center meaningful, honest, and relevant information for all students (Cuauhtin et al., 2019). After all, if only dominant deficit-based perspectives of dis/ability and/or ethnic and racial histories are taught, the realities, heritage, and knowledge of many children, especially those who are multiply marginalized, are erased. In contrast, using an affirmative assets-based lens in classrooms works to build a strong sense of self in students and creates an atmosphere of belonging and respect (King Thorius & Waitoller, in press).

Rogers-Shaw's experience of creating classroom communities respectful of all students helped her see what could be learned by educational systems responding to a pandemic. Noting that "During the pandemic, students and teachers felt a loss of their schoolroom identity as they moved to online education. Their teachers and classmates were still there, but it was not the same," she reminds us of a sense of "normalcy" we once took for granted but no longer have. In describing her family gathering on Zoom to celebrate her mother's birthday, Rogers-Shaw writes of how two-dimensional and disembodied it all felt, reminiscent of losing certain able-bodied privileges years before when adapting to her own disability. Fast forward to her mother's birthday a year later, when Rogers-Shaw was now able to once again sit physically side-by-side with her mother. As the two of them then engaged with other family members via Zoom, Rogers-Shaw noted a significant qualitative difference in the experience, concluding "we are all our best selves when we are in one another's vitally-felt, co-constructed emotional presence." Her sentiments are echoed in contemplating classrooms when she asserts, "We can find joy if we do it together, if we concentrate on building those relationships, if we adapt to living with the constraints we face, whether due to disability or a pandemic."

In her essay, Rogers-Shaw succeeds in turning the tables to show the value and usefulness of knowledge generated by people with disabilities. The author's writing style personifies her philosophy in that it is inclusive, seeking to engage the reader, willing to accept wherever they are in terms of their knowledge of disability and ableism. At the same time, she is asking all readers—the majority of whom are non-disabled—to listen and to practice a form of humility by ultimately questioning the origins of their knowledge about disability and the implications of that knowledge. She also illustrates the commonplace ableist attitudes, practices, and structures in our society, all of which largely portray disabled lives as less worthy, even expendable. In doing so, she addresses the hubris of ableism by proving "Non-disabled people can develop more humility if they realize they are not the only ones who have something to offer, that they too have limitations."

In closing, it is my sincere hope that Rogers-Shaw's essay, and her advocacy of reciprocity, will capture the imaginations of many teachers and teacher educators, helping them to move toward progressive understandings of dis/ability and more equitable practices. Finally, even as a relentless optimist, I acknowledge our world—

including our education systems—can often seem unkind, unfair, and unjust. To counter this phenomenon, drawing from the author's powerful final words, and knowing it's easier said than done, I encourage all teachers to be mindful in nurturing their own strength, leaning toward kindness, fairness, and justice.

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