

# Intellectual Ability and Disability New Questions for Philosophy of Education

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[See table of contents](#)

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## *INTELLECTUAL ABILITY AND DISABILITY: New Questions for Philosophy of Education*

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This special issue of *Philosophical Inquiry in Education* germinated from conversations between Ashley and Kevin over a number of years at philosophy of education conferences. Among the many topics that we've discussed, the dearth of scholarship at the intersections of philosophy of education and disability studies, in particular, was always at the forefront of our conversations. As readers of this special issue may be aware, the disciplines of philosophy and disability studies have been regarded as disparate fields, despite the work of individual philosophers, especially feminist philosophers, who explore ability and disability, and the work of individual disability studies scholars whose methodological and theoretical contributions are philosophically situated. In recent years, philosophers have become increasingly interested in applying the insights from disability studies scholarship and activism to debates in ethics, political philosophy, epistemology and other sub-disciplines within philosophy. In turn, these philosophical engagements have enriched scholarship in critical disability studies, feminist disability studies, and disability studies in education (DSE). Certainly, some individual philosophers of education have participated in these dialogues and debates, but their work is often treated as specialized and even marginal within the field; that is, it has not been taken up in ways that define, revise, and redefine the field's central problems and questions, or in ways that challenge the scholarly boundaries of philosophy of education itself.

One of the interesting challenges of interdisciplinary engagement across these particular disciplines is the different ways that scholars proceed with respect to their treatment of intellectual disability as a concept. For example, where philosophers may want to hold open the conceptual content of intellectual disability for analysis, disability studies theorists share a basic – if diversely manifest – theoretical commitment to challenging a deficit view of disability. Such potentially divergent approaches seem fertile ground for analysis, especially given that philosophical work is perhaps most interesting when it confronts apparent tensions or paradoxes, and where it is confronted by the realities of complex identity experiences and lived embodiment. For example, the increasingly accepted view that disability is to some (greater or lesser) degree socially constructed suggests that disability--including intellectual disability--is best regarded as a concept with indeterminate meaning. And if our existing understanding of intellectual disability as a naturalized fact is untenable, we are faced with the question of what, then, is intellectual disability? How do conceptual understandings of intellectual disability shape

how educational aims are conceived, justified, and put into practice? And how do conceptual understandings of intellectual disability shape perspective on educational justice? It seems clear that philosophy of education and disability studies scholarship are primed to collaborate to answer these and other significant questions.

In planning this special issue, our goal from the outset was to bring together a theoretically and conceptually diverse set of papers on topics related to intellectual ability, intellectual disability, able-mindedness, and cognitive diversity. We explicitly called for submissions from philosophers of education that position analyses of intellectual dis/ability, cognitive dis/ability, autism, neurodiversity, able-mindedness (etc.) as central to philosophical work in education. Similarly, we invited submissions from disability studies scholars, disability theorists, and critical special education scholars that engage directly with philosophy of education as a discipline, methodology, and way of knowing about education. We also explicitly encouraged submissions that engage educational philosophy in ways that centralize, invite, and otherwise generate the participation of labelled individuals in the theorizing and research process. We were delighted to receive a batch of insightful and original papers and even more excited to be able to select a group of contributors whose scholarship and expertise draws from a spectrum of research areas--from disability studies in education, special education, educational policy and practice, philosophy of education, and philosophy. Our original objective of creating an opportunity for inter-disciplinary conversation and provocation had been realized.

While our original plan to convene an in-person paper workshop for contributors was upended by the COVID-19 pandemic, the virtual discussion of papers in spring 2021 was lively and generative. As we had hoped would be the case, contributors brought their particular disciplinary and interdisciplinary expertise and insights to bear on the papers discussion, yielding rich and challenging conversations about topics ranging from frameworks of inclusive activism, to epistemic barriers and possibilities in educational research and practice, to the meaning of educational justice for intellectually disabled students, to racial misrecognition and culturally circumscribed definitions of able-mindedness and cognitive diversity as conceptual barriers to educational equality. While each of these papers offer unique perspectives and methodological approaches to analyzing intellectual disability as a concept, they are also quite clearly in conversation--and sometimes in tension--with one another. We hope that these papers will inspire further inquiry, analysis, and critique from across philosophy of education, philosophy of disability, disability studies, critical special education, and educational studies more broadly.