

Dustin Wunderlich:

Hello, I'm Dustin Wunderlich, communications director for the University of Washington College of Education. In this podcast, we interview researchers, practitioners, community leaders and policy makers who are working to transform inequitable systems of education and make learning come alive for all students. Today, we talked with doctoral students, Sarah Arvey and Boris Krichevsky about their work designing a course to help teachers bring disability studies into the classroom, drawing on Washington state's One Out of Five: Disability and Pride Project. Arvey and Krichevsky will present their work at the 2020 meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

Dustin Wunderlich:

So, Boris and Sarah, can you tell us about the story behind this course that you created to bring disability studies curriculum into the UW's Teacher Education program and what inspired you to explore that?

Sarah Arvey:

So, we actually started our project thinking about the One Out of Five project that I was involved in developing with the Office of Education and Rooted in Rights, which is a curriculum that centers, disability activists, both in the writing process, the majority of us had disabilities, including ourselves as well as Rooted in Rights made six Student Voice Videos so that we could really send you the voices of youth with disabilities to de-stigmatize disability and bring disability history, identity and pride to the classroom.

Sarah Arvey:

And so to follow that we created five lessons and the five lessons include an introduction to disability, intersectionality, because we want to make sure that we're... Or we're wanting to make sure that we're connecting this work to other work in equity. And so recognizing that intersectionality with students others social identities. A United States history and a disability history in Washington State and then an allyship lesson.

Boris Krichevsky:

Yeah. And so Carrie and Sarah and some of the folks who created this statewide project reached out to the College of Ed asking to sort of see if any of the programs wanted to partner. And Megan Kelley-Peterson, the director of our alternative route program, asked me if I was interested in bringing this into our U-ACT program because I am the team lead around special education in U-ACT to support our general ed teacher candidates in how they support students with disabilities in their classroom. And this project seemed like a really interesting opportunity for partnership to enhance the way that we support our teacher candidates. And that's where the partnership began.

Boris Krichevsky:

And so Sarah and I collaborated in building out the curriculum to add a teacher education perspective so that we could help the candidates engage with the lessons that were written and bring those lessons to their own students in the classroom.

Dustin Wunderlich:

Now could you describe the course that you developed and what did it involve for the teacher candidates?

Boris Krichevsky:

So the course that we developed was a pilot course for teachers who were coming back into the U-ACT program to work on their master's. So they had completed one full year of U-ACT, earned their certification, and have been classroom teachers for several years, some two to three years. A few others have been in the classroom for a bit longer, up to five or six years.

Boris Krichevsky:

And the course we developed was in several phases where we first met with the teachers via Zoom because they are teaching across the States and we engaged in conversations and readings and sort of discussions around disability from a disability studies perspective. So we thought about how do we conceptualize disability inside the classroom, outside of the classroom, how do we think about it? How did we think about it growing up and what does it mean for us as educators?

Boris Krichevsky:

And after that we introduced the curriculum that Sarah mentioned, the five lessons and helped teachers think about which of the lessons can fit best for their context because the teachers who were in this course taught across all grade levels and content areas. And so we help them think about which of the lessons might map onto or integrate best for their particular context. And the teacher then engaged in and enacted these lessons and recorded them. And then they reflected on the recording and we had an online conversation about their enactment.

Boris Krichevsky:

And then we had several other sessions where there was guided reflection on the process. So the teachers had an opportunity to think about what they learned, what their students learned, how this process helped them consider disability studies or disabilities in the classroom in different ways, challenges that they faced and then they sort of went on to continue thinking about this in their practice after the course.

Sarah Arvey:

Yeah. And I think one of the interesting and exciting things is also the ways that we utilize teacher feedback both from watching videos and their written reflections to also help support the development of the curriculum. So this wasn't a one way street, but really we were working together to ensure that the One Out of Five project also developed and was revised and we added resources so that it better supported teachers based on teacher feedback.

Boris Krichevsky:

Yeah. Just to sort of add on to that, Sarah and I are both classroom teachers first. We both taught for many years in the classroom, both have special education teacher experience and now are teacher educators and sort of emerging researchers. And so it was really important for us to make sure that the teachers in our, in our course were positioned as partners.

Boris Krichevsky:

And so we learned a lot from them and we engaged in this work as, as colleagues and so it was important for us. So the teachers brought in their knowledge and their experience of their own students with their own students and of their contents in their particular schools. And together we thought of

how to bring this to their schools as thought partners. And I think that we learned a lot from them and that they helped inform and improve the curriculum because of their expertise and what they brought to the work.

Dustin Wunderlich:

In observing how the U-ACT teachers sort of took this up where they're an example of, of how maybe one or two teachers did that and enacted this in their classroom that stood out to you or for its creativity or how they went about that.

Boris Krichevsky:

So I appreciate that question very much and gosh, I think we could spend the entire conversation just highlighting all of the ideas that we were able to experience and see. I think Sarah and I both can have many examples. One example of that that comes to mind is a teacher, so we had about oh 20, 19 or so teachers total in this pilot course. One example of that comes to mind for me is a teacher who had been teaching in the classroom for about five years and I actually taught this teacher in their first year in U-ACT and then they went on to teach for several years and so it was interesting for them to come back to my course to our course as a more experienced teacher and now as a partner and how and sort of seeing how they've grown.

Boris Krichevsky:

And the course asked the teachers to take up one lesson of the five choices and teach that lesson. And this teacher at the end of the quarter when we were sharing our reflections and their process shared with our group that they ended up teaching all five lessons. So they taught their first lesson and the feedback and the experience that they had with their students was so powerful and so revealing for them or illuminating in the need and also how much the students were able to think about the ideas that the teacher went above and beyond and taught every single of the other four remaining lessons and essentially did the whole curriculum and then brought that to their principal. And so there was conversations about the entire school or more classrooms engaging in bringing the disability lens to their classrooms, which we were surprised because or literally encouraged to hear that this teacher was beginning to impact some transformative change into their setting.

Sarah Arvey:

Yeah. And I think one of the things about that teacher's classroom is in his written reflection. He particularly talked about how students started taking up conversations of disability even outside of the classroom dialogues they were having. So particularly around there was a book *El Deafo* that they had in their classroom and they were reading it just in like a free reading choice time. And the students got into a conversation of like, well what parts of this might be ableist to is like what parts can we critique or what parts are really like helping support the way we think about disability.

Sarah Arvey:

And so he really thought that it was a cool opportunity and he also said as many other teachers said that it influenced not only the way that curriculum was written but also having like we have a lot of differentiated materials in the One Out of Five project as well as, so we took kind of a universal design approach recognizing that you have to know your students well to be able to make those accommodations, modifications accessible and inclusive practices.

Sarah Arvey:

But then a couple other examples a lot of folks used it and like advisories so especially when they were talking about identity or intersectionality when classrooms were talking about civil rights and would incorporate disability history in the United States. We have a lesson on Washington state history and so they were folks utilizing that in their Washington state classes and integrating primary source documents that talk about how disability has both activist movements in disability history as well as really problematic and oppressive situations that have happened in disability history in Washington state.

Sarah Arvey:

But just really giving opportunities to look at the ways that disability has been perceived, the way that it is shaped educational spaces, the way that it's been talked about in other spaces. The kind of innovative practices that, and technologies that people with disabilities have created that they might not get credit for. There was a request for more math-specific and science-specific lesson. So some of our teachers work to talk about multiple representations in math and connecting that to kind of ideas of constructions of ability and disability in their classrooms.

Dustin Wunderlich:

What are a couple of things you've learned in studying this pilot course that have really stood out to you?

Sarah Arvey:

Yeah. Thanks for asking that question cause it made me think about like, "Okay, how can I consolidate because we learned so much". So I kind of tried to condense it down to three things and one of them being just teacher awareness of ableism in their own classroom and in their classroom practice, but also thinking about their own histories and reflections on their community. And so going into grocery stores or walking into buildings or talking to people and really thinking about disability in different ways, both as classroom teachers and in their curriculum and pedagogical practice, but also as people.

Sarah Arvey:

And I think also that feeds on the second thing that I'm thinking about, which is that teachers came in, or many teachers came in, with a worry about student engagement and that ended up in their written reflections being more of a projection of their own fear or worry or insecurity about not knowing quite how to approach disability. And so there were a lot of teachers surprised that actually students shared really freely about their thoughts around disability. They were students with disabilities that felt more comfortable talking about their own disabilities or would share their accommodations after watching the student voice videos talking about accommodations. And so it was a really exciting moment for teachers and students to be also learning together.

Sarah Arvey:

And the third thing that we are thinking about was the connection between disability history and pride across content areas. And so teachers got really creative about the ways that they integrated disability and conversations around disability, not just as one off lessons, but really integrated into their lessons like talking about civil rights and then talking about disability rights movement and disability justice. And so it was cool to see the way that they were thinking about disability in a more nuanced way, both when integrating it into their curriculum and when applying it to classroom practices, especially utilizing things

like universal design for learning, even if this was just like a starting point where they were thinking about this.

Boris Krichevsky:

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I think that those are... Yeah, we have several themes that emerged and I think those three capture quite a lot of the work. I think this was a pilot course was a unique opportunity for us because these were in-service teachers, right, so they were teaching full time, they were teachers of record and they were coming back to U-ACT to continue their sort of education in teaching. And so they were pretty open to try this new idea. And as somebody... Since I've been teaching U-ACT for several years, the history of the course that this sort of course mapped onto or took a place of has traditionally been more focused on special education and sort of compliance, the history of special education law IDEA and sort of the process of the IEP 504 plans, which are all critically important ideas and important for general education teachers to know.

Boris Krichevsky:

However, that emphasis sort of didn't leave space in the program for us to truly step back and think about what does disability mean and how is it constructed. And I think another part that we learned in this course is that it's really important for teachers to have a space to engage in those conversations in addition to knowing the logistics of the IEP process. And I think the only other thing to add to what we've seen is that, or what we've learned, or what we continue thinking about, what we continue grappling with, is that because these teachers were a bit more experienced, they had some sort of they had that... What's the phrase? They've gotten their sea legs, right? So they were a confident in trying to make their curriculum flexible and think about their unit plans and where they could integrate this work rather than just sort of added on as a non-connected piece.

Boris Krichevsky:

One challenge that we're considering is that the... Is that curriculum and what teachers have a lot of pressure when they are in their work. The daily work of teaching is complex. And we are now thinking about how do we support teachers in thinking about the pacing and the needs of their schools and the school context, especially when those pressures are around the curriculum map and the pacing calendar, while also creating space for this work. So we saw the experienced teachers take this up with fidelity and we are wondering how do we bring that to a larger audience or to a larger group.

Dustin Wunderlich:

And based on what you've learned, what are a couple of implications or recommendations that you might make to other teacher education programs?

Sarah Arvey:

Yeah, so Boris already alluded to this, but really thinking about conversation around equity and social justice and how those often leave out special education or locate disability kind of as an "other". And so instead integrating the idea of disability as a social identity and also thinking about it and integrating disability studies across the program. So not having it just necessarily in one space or one course. And also thinking about the way that disability intersects with other identities.

Sarah Arvey:

And so that's a really important piece that we're recognizing whole students in this work. And I think about too, that I was a special ed teacher for eight years and the opportunity for youth to be exploring their disability as something not to be hidden or something that is bad, but instead thinking of it as like, "This is something where I might have different ways of learning" and also the label of disability can be destigmatized. And thinking about where that even comes from and to think about disability in more nuanced ways as social constructions, as cultural identities. And so thinking beyond kind of a more medicalized or pathologizing construct in the classroom.

Boris Krichevsky:

Yeah, yeah, that's really a smart, and it makes me think a lot more about the work that we're continuing to do. You know, I think that as we recognize the landscape of our general ed teachers and teacher candidates in the classrooms along with the inclusion movement and, and the mainstreaming in schools, we know that all of our teachers have students with disabilities in their general classroom. And so we know that the responsibility, the duty, the privilege of the teacher is to make sure that they're, they're serving the needs and they are, they're creating a learning community for all of their students. And so I think as teacher education programs, we have to support our teachers candidates to do this work. And under the leadership of Megan Kelley-Peterson, we were given the opportunity to try something new to try something different with this course that allowed us to help our teachers make connections and engage in the disability ideas in a, I think like Sarah said, in a more nuanced way.

Boris Krichevsky:

And so, we're thankful to Megan for allowing us to try this. And I think that we would recommend other teacher ed programs take that risk or try to push themselves to go beyond thinking about the IEP process and truly grapple with the complexity of disability. Especially because we know that so many... Well because all of our teachers have students that you have needs in their classrooms. And because it also helps the teachers themselves learn so much more about themselves and their teaching in general in the practice.

Dustin Wunderlich:

Now what's happened since this pilot course and what does the future hold for this? Where do you hope to take this in the future?

Sarah Arvey:

Yeah, so one follow up to this pilot course is that we're really fortunate and it's really an awesome part of the project that it's a cross organizational project and so the Office of Education Ombuds especially like Carrie Basas is helping take the lead on this project Rooted in Rights, which is a local disability activist group and creation of media for and by folks with disabilities are really dedicated to work as well. And so we actually applied to a University of Washington Unit:Ed research, community research, project where we're watching another level of the project play out where I'm going into individual classrooms and observing lessons there and talking to teachers in more depth and also interviewing and watching and getting to know students and their experience. Talking and thinking about disability before the lesson and after the lesson and how that might also change some of their perspectives, or just give them a space to talk about things that they have thought about or curiosities that they have had.

Sarah Arvey:

And so that's a really exciting next step that again, like Boris and I were saying earlier, there's this awesome shared space for us to think about how this work can be utilized across programs. So utilize both to inform work and support parents who might be going to the Office of Education Ombuds and asking for support in classrooms. It can be broadcast by Rooted in Rights and ensure that we're reaching broad audiences and talking about disability in new ways. And then also thinking about the way that teacher ed programs are working, and then also how it's playing out in classrooms. And so we're really working on making it like a multifaceted project.

Boris Krichevsky:

Yeah, absolutely. And so to that end, maybe another next step for this work since the pilot course is that sort of due to the flexibility of U-ACT. The flexibility of U-ACT has afforded us to continue with this course in year two. So we are now in the second phase of this pilot course, which has entailed an expansion of the participants. So now we have about three times, nearly three times the amount of teacher candidates who are enrolled in this course.

Boris Krichevsky:

And we've taken up what we've learned from engaging in this work in our pilot course and what we've learned from our teacher partners and engaging with this once more this year to see how we can continue building this out and reaching more schools and more teachers and more students. And this year we are working with novice teachers. So these are teachers who are early on in their career. They're still in service. They're teaching full time, but they're concurrently working on their teacher certification. And so we're seeing the affordances and constraints that that brings to the course for teachers who are in the beginning stages of their practice.

Dustin Wunderlich:

Great. Well, thank you very much for your time today.

Boris Krichevsky:

Thank you, Dustin this has been a great opportunity.

Sarah Arvey:

Thank you.