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Expanding Upon Critical Storytelling to Inform Intersectional Disability Futures

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Abstract

Critical storytelling is a methodology that has been used to disrupt and transform deficit-oriented, Western colonial master narratives about marginalized peoples. This chapter expands upon critical storytelling as conceptualized by Dr. Nicholas D. Hartlep and colleagues to explicitly include intersectional disabled youth (IDY), a term used to refer to disabled youth at the intersections of race, language, class, and other identity markers of difference in middle school through higher educational settings. To include IDY, I draw from other critical methodologies that highlight storytelling as a tool to not only disrupt White bodymind normativity but also to honor and center marginalized IDY lived experiences within schools and educational environments. These include Indigenous storywork, testimonio, critical race theory's counter-stories, and cripistemologies. I synthesize key components from each of these methodological approaches that center one's embodied story as linked to critical storytelling and apply these to questions informed by the literature about youth with intersectional identities. From these questions and concepts connected to critical storytelling, an understanding of intersectional disability futures emerges to include key pedagogical considerations within teaching and learning that embrace IDY's stories as knowledge-making in current and future educational contexts. Accordingly, considerations of time, space, people, content, context, and form are analyzed for their importance in supporting IDY in co-creating and informing desired intersectional disability futures.

KeywordsCritical storytelling -Indigenous storywork -Testimonio -Counter-stories -Cripistemologies - Disabled youth -Intersectionality -DisCrit

Introduction

The future of humankind lies waiting for those who will come to understand their lives and take up their responsibilities to all living things. (Deloria Jr., [2003](#), p. 296)

In this quote Vine Deloria Jr., a scholar, activist, lawyer, and member of the Standing Rock Sioux (Lakota) nation, describes a future that hinges on our ability as humans to take accountability for our actions, to honor one another, and to extend respect to all living things. This imagined future is an onto-epistemological shift that ruptures carefully constructed and enforced realities rooted in a Western colonial mindset that privileges power over others through hierarchies of competition and individualism. Accordingly, this chapter is about shifting toward futures that embrace the inclusion of human variance and personal sovereignty through marginalized peoples' stories and storytelling (Archibald, [2008](#); Cruz, [2012](#); Johnson & McRuer, [2014](#); Solórzano & Yosso, [2002](#)). Applied to education, the “gift of story” (Annamma & Morrison, [2018](#), p. 71) when shared by marginalized students can benefit *all* students, including White students, in expanding their critical learning and achieving their academic goals (Cabrera et al., [2014](#)). When students (and educators) are exposed to critical narratives, they have the choice to believe in and reproduce status quo realities or to be active in transforming current circumstances to create more equitable and inclusive futures.

This chapter focuses on critical storytelling, a methodology to disrupt and transform deficit-oriented, Western colonial master narratives about marginalized peoples, including *intersectional disabled youth* or IDY. I use this term to refer to disabled youth—preteen to young adult ages—at the intersections of race, language, and other identities of difference. This term incorporates identity-first language to describe youth with disabilities to conscientiously “[embrace] all aspects of one’s identity” (Taboas et al., [2023](#), p. 565) while acknowledging “the wide range of cultures, cultural repertoires, ways of being, bodyminds, and languages of disabled people” (Thorius & Waitoller, [2022](#), p. xvi). I choose identity-first language as opposed to person-first language which emphasizes the person before the disability. By doing so I recognize that there are different ways individuals and communities prefer to be represented and that these preferences can be personal, relational, and contextual. I also recognize my own complicated intersectional insider/outsider identity as a bilingual/bicultural Mexicana with Italian and Irish heritages and as someone who continues to experience the long-term repercussions of stage 3 breast cancer. My positionality in writing this piece is one who recognizes and honors those who self-identify as IDY and those who love and support them. I write knowing that “oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation” (Delgado, [1989](#), p. 2436) and believe strongly that storytelling and its imaginings can build templates for a just and caring future.

Accordingly, this chapter explores possible futures, conceptualizing intersectional disability futures through the lens of critical storytelling. As maintained by Nicholas D. Hartlep and colleagues ([2019](#), [2020](#), [2021](#)), critical storytelling is a flexible methodological approach to sharing stories that center on marginalized students' voices, particularly in higher education. Critical storytelling privileges the onto-epistemologies of those who have experienced multiple oppressions including sexual abuse, racial politics, stigmatization, and other forms of struggle. For this chapter, I use Hartlep and colleagues' conceptualization of critical storytelling but place further attention on storytelling methods that explicitly highlight affinity groups, particularly disabled youth in middle school through postsecondary

education. Specifically, I draw from Indigenous storywork (Archibald, [2008](#)), *testimonio* (Cruz, [2012](#)), critical race theory (CRT) counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, [2002](#)) (including disability studies and critical race theory in education or DisCrit counter-stories, Connor et al., [2016](#)), and cripistemologies (Johnson & McRuer, [2014](#)). I then synthesize key components from each of these storytelling methods as linked to critical storytelling and apply these to questions informed by the literature about youth with intersectional identities. From these questions and other concepts explored in this chapter, an emergent understanding of intersectional disability futures forms and is then analyzed for its importance and implications in education.

Accepted

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Abstract

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Keywords: *critical storytelling, Indigenous storywork, testimonio, counter-stories, cripistemologies, disabled youth, intersectionality, DisCrit*

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Accordingly, this chapter explores possible futures, conceptualizing intersectional disability futures through the lens of critical storytelling. As maintained by Nicholas D. Hartlep and colleagues (2019, 2020, 2021), critical storytelling is a flexible methodological approach to sharing stories that center on marginalized students’ voices, particularly in higher education. Critical storytelling privileges the onto-epistemologies of those who have experienced multiple oppressions including sexual abuse, racial politics, stigmatization, and other forms of struggle. For this chapter, I use Hartlep and colleagues’ conceptualization of critical storytelling but place further attention on storytelling methods that explicitly highlight affinity groups, particularly disabled youth in middle school through post-secondary education. Specifically, I draw from

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Indigenous storywork (Archibald, 2008), *testimonio* (Cruz, 2012), Critical Race Theory's (CRT's) counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) (including Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory in Education or DisCrit counter-stories, Connor et al., 2016), and cripistemologies (Johnson & McRuer, 2014). I then synthesize key components from each of these storytelling methods as linked to critical storytelling and apply these to questions informed by the literature about youth with intersectional identities. From these questions and other concepts explored in this chapter, an emergent understanding of intersectional disability futures forms and is then analyzed for its importance and implications in education.

Critical Storytelling

Critical storytelling (Hartlep et al., 2019, 2020, 2021) is a methodological approach through which marginalized students' personal narratives are shared. In the act of sharing, students' stories become counternarratives that challenge systemic injustices while promoting reflective and reflexive practices that affirm students' lived experiences. Critical storytelling is also a teaching tool where *story* drives imagination toward a more just and compassionate world. Critical storytelling offers educators a vision for how to hold space for marginalized youth as they drive innovation in the classroom through their embodied and enacted imaginaries of the future. When implemented with respect and care in educational spaces, critical storytelling as an agentic tool can be used by youth to inform their own futures, both in education and beyond.

Though critical storytelling embraces all marginalized students' experiences as they navigate white dominant systems, it does not specifically focus on disability, with a few exceptions (see Webb, 2019). For this reason, this chapter explicitly centers disability as a primary identity marker along with other important marginalized identities. To conceptualize intersectional disability futures, I expand upon critical storytelling's foundational

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understandings. I draw and synthesize information from four different methodologies created by marginalized peoples. The first three interrelated methodologies have been identified by Drs. Luis Urrieta and Bett Hatt (2019) as well-established, methodological approaches that assist marginalized people of Color (POC) to narrate their lives. Importantly, these approaches also ground POC's stories in "community countering ... [that disrupts] individualistic thinking about identity, reciprocity between researchers and communities, ownership/purpose of research, and representation of research" (p. 13). Among several presented, Indigenous storywork, *testimonio*, and CRT's counter-stories have strong connections to key understandings presented within critical storytelling (Hartlep et al., 2019, 2020, 2021). Namely, in each of these approaches, stories are used to disrupt racialized perceptions of difference and center marginalized people's worldviews. The fourth methodology, cripistemologies (Johnson & McRuer, 2014), aligns with Hartlep and colleagues' work by challenging injustices such as racism, ableism, sexism and other forms of oppression (Hartlep & Hensley, 2020). Cripistemologies explicitly center the personal position of disability and problematize categorical definitions of disability (Johnson & McRuer, 2014).

In this chapter, I acknowledge critical storytelling as its own methodology, however, I also conceptualize it as an anchor to connect the four interrelated methodologies previously discussed (see Figure 1). The synthesis of the four methodologies offers concrete strategies that educators can incorporate into their classrooms for IDY to articulate current realities and desired futures.

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Figure 1

Expanding Upon Critical Storytelling to Inform Intersectional Disability Futures

Critical Storytelling as an anchor connecting four interrelated critical methodologies that can expand and inform practice for intersectional disabled youth (IDK) and their futures.



Critical Storytelling

(Hartlep & colleagues, 2019, 2020, 2021)

- A methodology, teaching tool, and applied strategy through which marginalized students' stories are shared as counternarratives that challenge systemic injustices while promoting reflective and reflexive practices that amplify and affirm students' lived experiences.
- It offers intersectional disabled youth the opportunity to have their stories drive imagination and transformation toward a more just and caring world (both now and in the future).

Indigenous Storywork
(Archibald, 2008)

- Remembering the past to resist forms of colonization
- Writing back or talking back to dehumanization and to false narratives
- Consideration of context

Testimonio
(Cruz, 2012)

- Person in authority becomes the bystander and acts as a listener and a witness
- Storytelling as an embodiment of trauma, abuse, and other life-changing moments

Counter-stories
(Solorzano & Yosso, 2002)
(DisCrit: Connor et al., 2016)

- Purposefully defy and resist deficit metanarratives of white dominant culture
- Consider context for personal stories, other people's stories, and composite stories
- DisCrit counter-stories consider interlocking, intersectional oppressions around race & disability

Cripistemologies
(Johnson & McRuer, 2014)

- Crip time and Crip space challenge dominant culture social constructions of "clock time" and traditional educational spaces
- Development of crip imaginaries centering disabled people's knowledge

Critical Storytelling Expanded: Considerations for Current & Future Practice

Time

- Consideration of storyteller's pace
- Alternative ways of viewing time

Space

- Crip spaces are created for safety and solidarity
- DisCrit Solidarity in classrooms

People

- Centering disability culture
- Consideration of ancestors

Content

- Curricular & instructional considerations for IDK
- What are the multiple ways the story can be expressed?

Context

- Who gets to tell the story?
- Steward vs. owner
- Storyteller and bystander
- When should the story be told?

Form

- How is the story told?
- Consideration of counter-story types (personal stories, other people's stories, and composite stories)

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Indigenous Storywork

Indigenous storywork is attributed to Q'um Q'um Xiieem tel skwi:x, better known in academia as Dr. Jo-ann Archibald. According to Archibald (n.d.a), “the term storyWORK signals that Indigenous stories are to be taken seriously and that ... storytellers and storylisteners/readers/learners can work together to learn from and with these stories” (para 3). Indigenous storywork reclaims the intergenerational, orally-transmitted stories that have been “commodified for white consumption over time” (Cavino, 2019, p. 97). It aims to disrupt “hegemonic versions” (p. 97) of Indigenous histories and false narratives while presenting Indigenous individual and collective lived experiences as “storied lives” (Archibald & Xiieem, 2018, p. 233). Importantly, storied lives hold dormant memories of the past as remembered by Indigenous peoples. Storied lives are a form of resistance against colonization and a medium through which Indigenous peoples can conceptualize their futures.

Indigenous storywork, in action, is the “*rewriting and rerighting*” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p. 29) of Indigenous people’s position in history as told through their own accounts. It is a form of decolonizing because it is an active “writing back” or “talking back” (p. 8) to dehumanization suffered through imperialism and colonialism. Importantly, writing or talking back extend to Indigenous storytelling protocols that should be considered in teaching and in learning contexts. For example, Archibald (n.d.b) speaks to protocols that situate the storyteller as a steward rather than as an owner of a story (described in a later section). Context is also important in storywork. One must ask, “Who can tell stories and under what circumstances?” (Archibald, n.d.b). Context determines if a story is personal, familial, or public and when, where, and with whom it can be shared.

Testimonio

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Testimonio is the method through which feminist Latinidades are theorized (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Testimonios or “stories of our lives” provide a critical space for Latinas to “come together to engage [their] differences, face-to-face, and work to find common ground” (p. 1). *Testimonio* has been used to speak out against sexual harassment and violence, racism, and other oppressions. Dr. Cindy Cruz (2012) describes *testimonio* as “a genre of the dispossessed, the migrant, ... the queer, ... immigrants, the working class, African Americans, and others” (p. 460). According to Cruz, *testimonio* is “the process of radical storytelling” (p. 460) that begins with “an interrogation of our bodies” (p. 460). Cruz draws from Cherrie Moraga’s (1981) scholarship to discuss *testimonio* as a methodology to reveal, uncover, and explore through “a theory in the flesh” (p. 23). Accordingly, the embodiment of “scars and lesions” (Cruz, 2012, p. 460), both physical and emotional, “tell” the traumas of oppression.

Testimonio as a methodological approach is distinctive in that it requires the researcher or person in an authoritative position to become a bystander. A bystander in this context is a “listener and a witness” (Cruz, 2012, p. 461) whose role is to “remain silent in the face of oppression,” (Urrieta & Hatt, 2019, p. 13), where silence in this context is an act of supportive, active listening. *Testimonio* challenges the notion that researchers and educators should adhere to a Westernized positivist tradition of remaining neutral or objective to be strong observers and interpreters of data. With *testimonio*, instead of controlling the research agenda, the researcher is situated “in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression, or resistance” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 363). As bystanders, researchers are not passive recipients. Researchers bring their own “histories and experiences to [the] ‘hearing’” (Cruz, 2012, p. 468). Both the storyteller and the researcher can “travel” to each other’s worlds - as though transported by story - to experience love and humanizing compassion in the face of

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oppression (Lugones, 1987). Applied to both research and classroom settings, researchers or educators who are located as bystanders are able to listen to and witness storytelling that humanizes rather than objectifies the storyteller. Humanization results in “new understandings about how marginalized communities build solidarity and respond to and resist dominant culture, laws, and policies that perpetuate inequity” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 363). Thus, *testimonio* as a radical storytelling approach can shift power from teacher/school-centered narratives to student-centered ones as a process of healing, truth-telling, resilience, and solidarity that, through youth’s lived stories, offers new ways of understanding the world that can lead to hopeful futures (Correa & Lovegrove, 2012).

Counter-Stories

Counter-stories emerged as a part of critical race methodologies in the early 2000s with Dr. Daniel G. Solórzano and Dr. Tara J. Yosso (2002) leading the way. Counter storytelling, the act of sharing counter-stories, purposefully defied “cultural deficit storytelling” (p. 31) rooted in the majoritarian, dominant-white narrative. Counter storytelling, told by marginalized peoples who were “racialized, gendered, and classed” (p. 31), resisted the master narrative by exposing false mythologies of their lived, cultural experiences. Instead, counter-stories promoted marginalized peoples’ survivance and liberation against multiple systems of oppression.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) categorize counter-stories in educational settings into three types: (1) personal stories or narratives, (2) other people’s stories or narratives, and (3) composite stories or narratives. Briefly, personal stories often considered “autobiographical reflections of the author” (p. 32) recount the lived experiences a marginalized individual has with various forms of oppression including racism, classism, and sexism. Other people’s stories “usually offers biographical analysis of the experiences of a person of color” (p. 33) and is a

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narrative, told in third person perspective, that exposes unjust and oppressive acts against a POC. Finally, composite stories can consist of both “biographical and autobiographical analyses” (p. 33) whereby authors create “composite characters” (p. 33) that interact within different historical, political, or social circumstances marked by challenge. The purpose of composite stories is for individuals to experience what it is like to be in another’s position when confronted by oppression and, at the same time, to engage in analyses of data that brings one in closer proximity to a deeper understanding of our collective accountability to one another (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

DisCrit Counter-Stories. Though CRT counter-stories address the importance of centering marginalized people’s stories, particularly those of POC, DisCrit counter-stories explicitly center disability in relation to other identities of difference. DisCrit, attributed to Dr. David J. Connor, Dr. Beth A. Ferri, and Dr. Subini A. Annamma (2016), conceptualizes the intersections of race and disability and their impact on disabled youth of Color. Citing seminal work from Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw (1993) and Dr. Patricia Collins (1990) among other critical scholars, Connor and colleagues (2016) focus on the interlocking oppressions impacting disabled youth at the intersections of other marginalized identities.

DisCrit is built on seven tenets (see Connor et al. 2016, p. 19). However, for the purposes of this chapter, only Tenet #4 relates directly to marginalized youth’s counter stories. Tenet #4 “privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research” (p. 19). When this tenet is applied to IDY, it invites them to counter disabling and racialized master narratives about disability. DisCrit counter-stories offer IDY opportunities to address injustices and misleading assumptions about their lived experiences while, simultaneously, engaging them in activism by “talk[ing] back” (p. 22) to narratives reified by racist and ableist

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stories. DisCrit teaches that by learning from IDY, educators can begin the hard work of changing implicit normative and racialized assumptions that govern conscious (and unconscious) learning and teaching practices. Thus, educators can engage in “a careful accounting” (Kafer, 2013, p. 33) of IDY by encouraging students to counter harmful narratives while demonstrating commitment to a disability future where intersectional disabled lives and stories are valued.

Cripistemologies

Coined by Merri Lisa Johnson (Johnson & McRuer, 2014), cripistemologies place primary importance on the personal position of disability and problematize categorical definitions of disability. Cripistemologies are informed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) and by Robert McRuer’s *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (2006) and “[expand] the focus from physical disability to sometimes-elusive crip subjectivities informed by psychological, emotional, and other invisible or undocumented disabilities” (p. 134). For context, crip subjectivities do not fit neatly into Westernized ideations of the human experience as informed by “empirical, and often medicalized regimes of knowledge” (p. 131); rather, these subjectivities evade and elude “bodymind normativities” (Chandler et al., 2021, p. 172) and lean into unknown realities. Moreover, cripistemologies posit possibilities for the future where disabled people’s knowledge will create “an explosion of the human body and psyche” (Wendell, 1989, p. 104) leading to massive, transformative change in how we, as human beings, understand who we are and of what we are truly capable.

In practice, cripistemologies center “crip stories” that challenge medical model, disability categorizations that, oftentimes, pathologize bodymind differences (Johnson & McRuer, 2024). From an intersectionality perspective, cripistemologies consider disability at the

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intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, language, and other identity markers of difference. By taking an intersectional view of disability, cripistemologies, like DisCrit, recognize the systemic oppressions and attacks on marginalized peoples (McRuer & Johnson, 2014). Crip stories are not stories of vulnerability, but of injustice (Kafer, 2013). Crip stories frame overt and covert injustices as those that strip disabled peoples of their sovereignty and independence. When enacted covertly, injustice is often cloaked in language or superficial acts of benevolence that claim to support disabled people, but, in practice, are ableist and disabling (Thorius, 2019).

In relation to storytelling, crip stories counter ableist narratives. A requisite for crip stories is that disabled youth's narratives should be shared on their own time (i.e., crip time) and in spaces of safety and solidarity (i.e., crip spaces) (Kafer, 2013). Through crip stories, disabled youth can engage in “knowledge-making ... [in] play, dialogue, experimentation, and desires for new ways of knowing disability” (Johnson & McRuer, 2024, p. 121). Part of this knowledge-making considers the temporalities of time and space that challenge dominant culture social constructions of linearity and “clock time” as well as what learning spaces should prioritize (Kafer, 2023). Centering IDY as knowledge-makers shifts what is possible for “those who have been cast out of straight time's rhythm” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 182), locating them as visionaries and leaders for futures where “temporal and spatial configurations” (p. 182) bend and shape to include all forms of human variance.

Expanding Upon Critical Storytelling to Inform Intersectional Disability Futures

In this section, I synthesize and describe key components from Indigenous storywork, testimonio, counter-stories including DisCrit counter-stories, and cripistemologies to expand upon critical storytelling as a method for educators to consider in their commitment to honoring

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and affirming IDY's current realities and desired futures. I analyze each of the four interrelated critical methodologies in consideration of Hartlep and colleagues' (2019, 2020, 2021) conceptualized understandings and practices of critical storytelling. For succinctness, the descriptive synthesis of each methodology has been organized through six distinctive, but interconnected categories that capture ways critical storytelling can be further structured to explicitly include disability and to support IDY. These categories include time, space, people, content, context, and form (see Figure 1). As part of each category, I provide questions that urge educators to explore their own cultural biases and conditioning to transform their pedagogical practice. From these questions and from other analyses, possibilities for intersectional disability futures emerge and will be explained in the conclusion and implications' section.

Time

I draw primarily from the concept of "crip time" to expand upon temporal considerations of critical storytelling in educational settings. Accordingly, crip time orients illness and disability through frequency, incidence, and occurrence and connects disability-related events to more flexible standards of wait time, extra time, more time, event time and other understandings of time (Kafer, 2013; Muñoz, 2009). Essentially, time operates at a different pace for disabled youth that educators need to recognize and honor. Crip time brings an awareness to ways that societal norms create "ableist barriers" (Kafer, 2013, p. 6) that reduce access and opportunities for disabled youth to "arrive" to their destinations and "accomplish" what is needed for them to succeed in their personal and educational goals (Kafer, 2013). For educators, understanding that IDY may need flexibility within and outside of normative timeframes is important (Muñoz, 2009). Flexibility translates to more time on assignments, with schedules, and with different tasks (Kafer, 2013; 2023). Importantly, flexibility also accounts for "grief time" and "broken

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time” (Samuels, 2017, para 8, 11). The former encompasses time for loss, mourning, illness, chronic fatigue, depression, and other bodymind conditions. The latter requires the body and mind to stop, pause, and adjust to “new rhythms, new patterns of thinking and feeling and moving through the world” (para 11).

Flexibility also extends to cultural orientations of time linked to those whose “temporalities are different and outside” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 183) of the dominant culture. According to Muñoz (2009), those who are “out of time” (p. 182) include people of Color, queer, transgender, and others living on the periphery or outside of the margins because of difference. When asked to share their personal lived experiences within classroom contexts, this flexibility of time can extend to how storytelling “plays an important role in the way we create and recall memories” (Archibald & Xiiem, 2018, p. 233). Some stories may only be shared at a particular time or age to mark certain life phases or cultural events. Moreover, because stories can span timeframes (past, present, future), it is necessary for educators to allow time for youth to share memories important to their identity formation and familial connections. Time may need to stretch outside the confines of “clock time” that regulates the school day for youth to experience the completion of their stories. In addition, it is through critical storytelling that IDY can imagine time through desired futures while, simultaneously, remembering those who paved the way for their current stories to be told. Importantly, onto-epistemologies undergirding these stories may also include ways IDY experience the world through their bodyminds and their relationship with the self, others, space, technology, and the material and spiritual landscapes they navigate (Johnson & McRuer, 2014; Kefer, 2013).

Understanding different conceptualizations of time, can assist educators with reconsidering their conditioning and attachments to concepts associated with dominant culture

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time such as: lateness, being on time, being ready, and being prompt. Within a critical storytelling context, flexibility can embrace multiple demonstrations of what showing up *on time* and sharing a story can look like. An educator may ask themselves the following questions to guide their willingness to adopt new orientations to time in their teaching and learning of IDY:

- How can I bend timeframes and deadlines to meet the needs of my students in ways that they can show up authentically and share their important stories?
- What are new ways to structure the school day to make sure there is enough time for all to be included and to feel at ease during storytelling activities?
- How am I making time for grief, loss, and other bodymind conditions not generally considered in classroom and school settings?

Space

Crip spaces are locations of safety and solidarity, specifically “crip solidarity” (Mingus, 2010). Crip solidarity offers a shared “political space” embodied by those self-identifying as crip or disabled (Chen, 2014). Mingus (2010) describes crip solidarity spaces as those where disabled individuals operate outside of the “able-bodied-washed version[s]” of themselves and, instead, nurture the “harder to live disabled-self-loving version[s]” (para 7). There are also crip solidarity spaces led by Black and brown disabled students (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2022). These spaces promote disability justice at the intersections of race and other identity markers of difference. For IDY, these spaces are incredibly important as they “are often the only ones where disabled BIPOC feel safe to uncloset [them]selves and speak [their] vulnerable and raw disabled BIPOC stories” (p. 20). When applied to schools, crip spaces are a radical departure from status quo special education spaces that determine location and placement of disabled youth. Crip spaces

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honor IDY by leaning into their “brilliance within ... divergent bodyminds” (Piepznar-Samarasingha, 2022, p. 18) instead of trying to normalize or treat their differences according to dominant culture standards.

Very similar to crip solidarity spaces, Annamma and colleagues (2022) describe integrating DisCrit Solidarity in classrooms that value an intersectional approach to relationships. Instead of “managing” students’ behaviors so that they conform to normative schooling expectations, educators affirm difference and work actively to establish trusting and safe environments for IDY to share their stories (Annamma & Handy, 2019). In critical storytelling, crip and DisCrit solidarities are foundational in establishing spaces where youth can experience “access intimacy” which “is that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else ‘gets’ your access needs” (Mingus, 2011, para 4). Importantly, the experience of connecting with another in this intimate manner is liberatory, as it “recognizes and understands the relational and human quality of access” (Mingus, 2017, para 17). Access intimacy is the act of accessing new ways to experience and demonstrate one’s humanness, in form, shape, and movement beyond having to fit into “able bodied people’s agendas” (para 16).

Educational spaces that promote crip and DisCrit solidarities for IDY may provide the most appropriate venue for critical storytelling. Accordingly, an educator may ask themselves the following questions to prepare these spaces in their classrooms:

- Am I ready both internally and externally to prepare my classroom space for critical storytelling that will center IDY’s voices?
- How do I feel about creating spaces for IDY groups that do not include non-disabled students?

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- Through the stories IDY share, am I willing to change the learning environment or my instructional practices to make the educational learning space more accessible, welcoming, and inclusive?

People

Critical storytelling offers a medium for IDY to navigate multiple identities within (and beyond) a dominant white, able-bodied culture while feeling valued and respected. It also provides educators with opportunities to recognize youth participating in the sacred act of storying deeply personal narratives, oftentimes tied to familial, ancestral, and community onto-epistemologies. From an Indigenous orientation to story and applied here to include IDY, “living storied lives” (Archibald & Xiiem, 2018, p. 239) and sharing them through critical storytelling is a way for IDY to reclaim fragments of themselves that have been stripped by colonization, racism, ableism and other oppressions. Thus, critical storytelling can be an exercise of recovery whereby forgotten, erased, or buried parts are rediscovered through story (Anzaldúa, 1999; Cruz, 2012).

Because of the potentially sensitive and revelatory nature of stories told through critical storytelling, educators need to consider if there is any cost or burden to IDY in sharing their stories. Because dominant narratives of disability tend to figure disabled youth as “a problem to solve, an obstacle to eliminate, a challenge to meet” (Garland-Thomson, 2002, p. 63), centering these youth’s stories within typical general education settings where they are immersed among non-disabled peers can automatically position them for challenge. Deep care and radical consideration must be taken to ensure the safety of IDY whose storied realities may be vastly different from their white, able-bodied peers (Heidelberg et al., 2022; Sorenson, 2020). For

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reasons of safety and well-being, educational spaces that promote crip and DisCrit solidarities are recommended as part of the structure in applying critical storytelling

Accordingly, the following questions may support educators in critically reflecting upon intentional ways to create classroom environments that center IDY's humanity. Educators should consider their own positionality or their "positioning in relation to how they engage and communicate knowledge about multiply marginalized people" (Boveda & Annamma, 2023, p. 306). Answering these questions with honesty may assist educators to account for ways they may consciously or unconsciously position IDY in educational spaces with their peers, particularly during critical storytelling.

- What are my reasons for integrating critical storytelling into my classroom? If I am part of the dominant culture, how will I account for uneven power dynamics and the safety of marginalized students as they engage in storytelling?
- Have I established a learning environment where IDY are recognized and honored for their perspectives, insights, and contributions? Have white, non-disabled peers been appropriately prepared for critical storytelling spaces?
- As an educator, what will I do if IDY are not respected by their white, non-disabled peers (or by anyone else) before, during, and after the critical storytelling activity?

Content

Content within an educational context refers to the curriculum informed by standards of learning. A curriculum consists of learning goals to achieve the learning standards imparted through lesson plans or units to teach the material, methods to meet the goals, specific materials to access deeper learning, and assessments to evaluate student learning. Annamma, Connor, and

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Ferri (2022) explain that, within the schooling and learning context, there are also “hidden” and “absent” curricula (p. 77). A hidden curriculum refers to unspoken social rules and expectations that, oftentimes, reflect dominant culture values. The term “absent curriculum” is indicative of “concepts and histories not featured in the official course of study” (p. 77) that, in their absence, erase or minimize entire lived histories of POC and other marginalized peoples.

Critical storytelling aims to reveal and share these erased histories through the expression of lived experience linked to past, present, and future realities. For IDY, storying their lives unearths untold histories that run counter to dominant culture ideologies and master narratives. As part of the “absent curriculum” IDK’s stories can disrupt harmful master narratives and, instead, offer a full and holistic representation of their embodied and lived experiences. To capture the complexities of these experiences, critical storytelling can be demonstrated in various forms. In addition to oral or written stories, critical storytelling can be conveyed through dance, song, painting, drama, and other modalities that lend themselves to authentic sharing (Annamma & Handy, 2019; Parent & Kerr, 2020). Though there is not a definitive formula for implementing critical storytelling, educators should take a conscientious approach to prepare curricular, instructional, and environmental elements related to all the categories discussed in this section including time, space, people, context, and form.

For educators who are interested in critical storytelling as a method of student knowledge-sharing, the following questions can be used to guide curricular and instructional decisions:

- What are ways I can integrate critical storytelling as a method for learning as tied to learning standards that honors the spirit of counternarratives without minimizing or co-

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opting intersectional disabled students' lived experiences? What are multiple ways youth can share their stories and still meet these learning standards?

- Instructionally, what parameters or agreements need to exist among and between students in the classroom for critical storytelling to be a tool for reflection, understanding, and shared learning?
- As an educator, what do I see as the hidden curriculum in my own classroom? How can I do better in making what is hidden visible? Likewise, how can I better support my students mentally, emotionally, and psychologically as they engage in storytelling that unearths what has been absent from the general curriculum?

Context

Drawing from Indigenous storywork (Archibald, 2008; Archibald & Xiiem, 2018), context refers to the specific dynamics or circumstances involved in a particular moment in time and space that informs storytelling. From a storywork perspective, not just anyone can share or tell a story. There are important considerations rooted in cultural beliefs and values centered in “codes of conduct” that honor Indigenous’ groups’ “systems of knowledge and worldviews” (Wilson, 2008, p. 8). These “codes” consider both context and form (form is discussed in the next section). These codes highlight Indigenous relational axiologies. Relational axiologies are the understanding and analysis of values as well as the interpretation and expression of humanity’s accountability to all living things. Specifically, “*A relational axiology* [emphasis by author] is built on the concept of relational accountability” (Chilisa, 2020, p. 24) and includes the three Rs: respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (Wilson, 2008). Wilson (2008) explains that respect is demonstrated through behaviors that honor multiple perspectives; reciprocity is the

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mutual benefit received by all those participating; and responsibility is teaching or working with others with integrity.

Attending to the three Rs in critical storytelling means, first and foremost, being *respectful* and having consideration for who should tell the story. To determine who should tell the story, Archibald (n.d.b) explains that stewardship of story is more valued than ownership as the latter reflects more of a colonial mindset than an Indigenous worldview. For example, if a particular story is connected to a family's collective history or experience, then it is the *responsibility* of the community participating in the storytelling to ensure that a member of the family, not an outsider, tells the story. Applied to critical storytelling in the classroom, certain stories are under the stewardship of certain groups (e.g., IDY). It is not only necessary that appropriate representation for telling the story come from insiders of that group; but also, in the act of sharing the story, kinship should be the goal. Kinship, as explained by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) is connected to identity consciousness whereby "peoples" are united by a common culture, language, and history, among other lived experiences. The kinship experienced within groups who listen to their own or others' stories told authentically and with purpose is critical to the group's or community's identity and may be what Mingus (2011) refers to as "access intimacy." Feelings associated with access intimacy "within group" are *reciprocated* between the storyteller and the receiver as both actively participate in their roles. Accordingly, when one's experience is reflected through stories told by another who "gets [their] access needs" (Mingus, 2011, para 4), the result is both powerful and validating.

In an expanded understanding of critical storytelling, another level of reciprocity that can occur is "between groups." Drawing from *testimonio* (Cruz, 2012), IDY who belong to non-dominant, marginalized groups are positioned as storytellers while their peers and/or teachers

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who belong to the dominant culture take the role of bystanders. As described earlier, power dynamics between groups must be conscientiously addressed before between-group sharing can occur to mitigate harm before, during, and after the storytelling. If implemented with authentic care, the “bystander” will be fully present to listen to and witness the storyteller’s lived journey. Though the storytellers and bystanders may not experience “access intimacy” (Mingus, 2011) because of their embodied and lived differences, they may “travel” to each other’s worlds - transported by story - where can they discover shared understandings and connections (Lugones, 1987).

Questions that educators may consider in contextualizing the critical storytelling experience for IDY, related to the 3 Rs include:

- What are ways I can co-create a learning and listening environment where students are honoring and respectful of each other’s multiple perspectives and worldviews?
- How do I ensure that the storytellers are receiving as much as they are giving when sharing their stories? What does reciprocity look and sound like among storytellers and bystanders?
- What am I consciously doing to model my own responsibility and accountability to the critical storytelling process?

Form

As mentioned in the previous section, form, within this expanded understanding of critical storytelling, is rooted in a relational axiology that values *how* the story is told. Where context is concerned more with who can tell the story, form considers both who is telling the story and the way it is being told. Solórzano and Yosso’s (2002) counter-story types offer

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structure for educators to determine the form through which IDY and others can tell, share, and listen to stories. As explained earlier, counter-stories are categorized as personal stories, other people's stories, and composite stories. Similar to the concepts of stewardship, kinship, and access intimacy, each type of counter-story necessitates intentional reflection and action in determining who tells the story, to whom the story is told, for what purpose, at what time, and in what setting. In relation to IDY, each counter-story type is further enriched through DisCrit's tenet #4. Tenet #4 offers opportunities for stories to address disabling and racialized master narratives about disability and other marginalized identities (Connor et al. 2016). In practice, IDY's personal counter-stories are told or expressed in first-person and are autobiographical. Dr. Amanda Miller (2023) provides an excellent example of personal story excerpts from six disabled girls of Color who, through their sharing, uncover exclusionary literacy practices through photovoice and cartography. Importantly, their stories open imaginaries for ways that "textual, spatial, and technological supports and opportunities" (p. 266) can be used to create desired futures for intersectional disabled students that are affirming and innovative.

Applied to critical storytelling methods, when IDY or others engage in telling "other people's stories" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), it is important to consider if the learning space has been adequately prepared for the stories to be told authentically and received compassionately. Accordingly, educators should ensure that permission has been sought and received to share other people's stories and that the source of the story has been appropriately acknowledged (Parent & Kerr, 2020). One example of sharing other people's stories/biographies appropriately is a commentary written by Mondrea (Mondo) Vaden (2022), a deaf, Black, and trans librarian who uses counter-stories as a methodology to uncover three examples of "Black historical 'hidden figures' who shaped life as we know it in the USA" (p. 339). Vaden is well-suited to tell

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these stories using third-person narrative because s/he/they are explicit in not only answering the questions above, but also share similar embodied identities and lived experiences with those s/he/they are honoring.

The last type of counter-story described is composite stories. These narratives, when told within a critical storytelling methodology, “may offer both biographical and autobiographical analyses because the authors create composite characters and place them in social, historical, and political situations to discuss racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 33). Within the context of critical storytelling, IDY or others may decide to use composite stories to shed light on confronting multiple oppressions in schools and in other spaces. Composite stories may be used as “public” or teaching stories that “can be told in any setting” (Archibald, n.d.b). One example of using and writing composite stories that can be applied to classroom pedagogical practice is an article by six authors (three white practitioner-scholars; three activist teachers of Color) (Locke et al., 2022). Within a DisCrit classroom ecology (Annamma & Morrison, 2018), Locke and colleagues (2022) share three composite stories “to explore counternarratives as a tool for critically conscious praxis” (p. 151). The authors demonstrate ways that teachers explore “DisCrit imaginings” (p. 167) that can bring them closer to creating classrooms where IDY, their families, and communities are appreciated for their multiple strengths and contributions.

Educators who are interested in organizing different storytelling forms within critical storytelling to assist IDY and other students share and listen to one another’s lived experiences may consider the questions below:

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- Has necessary preparation been made so that the storyteller and the audience are in right relation to the bodymind space necessary to express and receive the story in its integral, representative, and authentic form?
- Has permission been sought and received to share others' stories?
- Has the source of the story been acknowledged in terms of where it originated and the storyteller's relationship to sharing it?

Conclusion & Implications

When presented with the opportunity to tell stories about their futures, intersectional disabled youth (IDY) can offer imaginings that disrupt and extend beyond 'abled' futures leading to innovative, inclusive, and meaningful realities that benefit our collective society (Shrodes, 2023). This vision of the future includes imagining what is to come through storytelling that moves away from, even rejects a Westernized *curative imaginary* or the "understanding of disability that not only expects and assumes intervention but also cannot imagine or comprehend anything other than intervention" (Kafer, 2013, p. 27). For IDY, one key aspect of critical storytelling is that this form of narrative can be used to move away from a future framed through "curative terms" (p. 28) that positions those with disabilities as inferior or less than. Instead, critical storytelling can open possibilities for a post-White, post-able-bodied horizon (Wright & Derreth, 2023) where intersectional disabled desired futures articulate an imaginary that embraces rather than controls or erases the complexities of human variance.

In this chapter, the aim was to expand upon critical storytelling as a methodology so that educators committed to social and disability justice could apply it in their classrooms to support and honor intersectional disabled youth's (IDY) lived experiences through story. I chose four interrelated critical methodologies – Indigenous storywork, *testimonio*, counter-stories, and

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cripistemologies – to enrich and to make more concrete critical storytelling methods that could be used with IDY, specifically in classroom settings. With critical storytelling as an anchor connecting all four of these methodologies, I synthesized key components from each in consideration of IDY and categorized them as time, space, people, content, context, and form.

These six distinctive but interconnected categories inform emergent understandings of intersectional disability futures in educational settings by presenting specific ways critical storytelling can be implemented to attend to IDY’s current realities and desired futures. Enhanced by these categorical conceptualizations, critical storytelling (Hartlep et al., 2019, 2020, 2021) as a heuristic can disrupt current school practices rooted in Western bodymind normativity. For example, integrating crip time as part of student storytelling challenges dominant culture’s “clock time” which, in many schools, prompts educators to move quickly through lessons rather than taking time to ensure depth and satisfaction of student knowledge-making and learning (Duncheon & Tierney, 2013). By allowing flexibility for all students to complete their storytelling at a pace that is more natural to them, not only may students’ anxiety reduce, but also, they may feel a greater sense of ease and accomplishment in knowing they can tell their stories from beginning to end without being rushed. Crip time also promotes new imaginaries for students whose “rhythms” and ways of thinking and moving through time are different from normative movement or patterns (Muñoz, 2009). These crip imaginaries offer a pathway to embrace “disorder” (McRuer, 2017, p. 64) with a “tenderness” that extends toward embodied others who, in their shared humanity, demonstrate ways that we all experience mental and emotional stress, illness, anxiety, physical pain and other bodymind challenges throughout our lifetimes (Johnson & McRuer, 2024, p. 123).

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Crip and DisCrit solidarity educational spaces within critical storytelling methodology uproot status quo conceptualizations of what learning environments should look like and provide. These solidarity spaces are relational and prioritize an intersectional approach to building and sustaining relationships in the classroom (Annamma & Handy, 2019). Intentionally constructed as spaces of safety for IDY, all youth benefit from compassionate, caring environments where there is as much “solidarity in falling apart” (Johnson & McRuer, 2024, p. 131) as there is in being recognized for one’s strengths or achievements. In these spaces, IDY are “a source of possibility and power” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2022, p. 26) as they have had to learn innovative ways to navigate, overcome, or survive multiple barriers imposed upon their bodyminds. Intersectional disability futures are informed by IDY’s lived and embodied experiences, and through storying their lives (Archibald, 2008; Cruz, 2012), they can envision possibilities for “a ‘peaceful’ future (...) of warmth and relief that contrasts to (...) [a] world wrought with suffering, death, and violence” (Blanks, 2024, p. 147).

Critical storytelling within curricular and instructional classroom activities that center IDY provides an innovative and meaningful pathway for students to meet learning standards. Intersectional disabled youth storytelling offers possibilities for educators to expand upon content that has been suppressed or absent from the general curricula. Critical storytelling also lends itself to multiple forms of student expression as IDY shared lived experiences through dance, song, art, or performance. To share their stories openly and to have them received with respect, IDY and other youth should be exposed to relational axiologies. Though these axiologies are rooted in Indigenous past and present practices, they are crucial for informing interactional student engagement in current and future classrooms. Grounded in foundational relational values of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility, these axiologies are a blueprint for how IDY can be

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validated both within IDY groups and between groups (i.e., with non-disabled and/or white peers). Accordingly, relational axiologies consider how stories are told, by whom and to whom. Stories told by IDY or about IDY, should follow certain protocols that will mitigate the reproduction of harm caused by cultural appropriation, co-option of lived experience, exploitation, or manipulation. Importantly, context and form matter in storying intersectional disability futures that position IDY as critical narrators of possibility and hope.

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Critical Storytelling

(Hartlep & colleagues, 2019, 2020, 2021)

- A methodology, teaching tool, and applied strategy through which marginalized students' stories are shared as counternarratives that challenge systemic injustices while promoting reflective and reflexive practices that amplify and affirm students' lived experiences.
- It offers intersectional disabled youth the opportunity to have their stories drive imagination and transformation toward a more just and caring world (both now and in the future).

Critical Storytelling as an anchor connecting four interrelated critical methodologies that can expand and inform practice for intersectional disabled youth (IDK) and their futures.



Indigenous Storywork

(Archibald, 2008)

- Remembering the past to resist forms of colonization
- Writing back or talking back to dehumanization and to false narratives
- Consideration of context

Testimonio

(Cruz, 2012)

- Person in authority becomes the bystander and acts as a listener and a witness
- Storytelling as an embodiment of trauma, abuse, and other life-changing moments

Counter-stories

(Solorzano & Yosso, 2002)

(DisCrit: Connor et al., 2016)

- Purposefully defy and resist deficit metanarratives of white dominant culture
- Consider context for personal stories, other people's stories, and composite stories
- DisCrit counter-stories consider interlocking, intersectional oppressions around race & disability

Cripistemologies

(Johnson & McRuer, 2014)

- Crip time and Crip space challenge dominant culture social constructions of "clock time" and traditional educational spaces
- Development of crip imaginaries centering disabled people's knowledge

Critical Storytelling Expanded: Considerations for Current & Future Practice

Time

- Consideration of storyteller's pace
- Alternative ways of viewing time

Space

- Crip spaces are created for safety and solidarity
- DisCrit
Solidarity in classrooms

People

- Centering disability culture
- Consideration of ancestors

Content

- Curricular & instructional considerations for IDK
- What are the multiple ways the story can be expressed?

Context

- Who gets to tell the story?
- Steward vs. owner
- Storyteller and bystander
- When should the story be told?

Form

- How is the story told?
- Consideration of counter-story types (personal stories, other people's stories, and composite stories)