

CONSTITUTING DISABILITY IN LANGUAGE

Locating Inclusion in Models of Disability

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What if one's "humanness" is in question, does one still have Rights?

Inclusion is often cast as a Rights Issue



INCLUSION AS A RIGHT; NOT JUST A MORAL IDEAL

(Stainback & Stainback, 1995).

- In principle educators agree with the moral and epistemological ideals espoused by inclusion.
- Practices in schools, e.g., in the US fall far short of this ideal.
- Segregated/separate placement is the experience of many students with developmental disabilities.
- Inclusion has been pursued most ardently when scripted as a rights discourse rather than simply as a moral virtue or epistemological issue

INCLUSION AS A RIGHTS ISSUE

- Within the Rights discourse, inclusion is a legal right of all students with disabilities (Stainback & Stainback, 1995).
- At the international/global level, such rights are enshrined in Universal Declaration of Human Rights and articulated variously in different countries
- E.g., in the US, this right to education is indelibly etched on the Equality Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1868). In the Due Process Clause, all citizens are entitled to equal protection under the law
- The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act ([IDEA] (2004) mandates call for students with disabilities, as much as possible, to be educated in the same settings as their non-disabled peers

INCLUSION AS A “PARADOX OF DIFFERENTIATION AND INTEGRATION” (Sailor & Roger, 2007)

- Inclusion as a “paradox of differentiation and integration” (Sailor & Roger, 2007, p. 7)
 - Results from the desire to foster differentiation at the expense of integration, all the while believing that such differentiation would yield positive outcomes for students with disabilities
 - However, no such positive outcomes were realized (Sailor, 2002). Indeed, studies linked pull-out special education models and separate classroom placement with negative outcomes (Wang, Reynolds, & Wahlberg, 1987) and cited positive outcomes accruing from integrated educational practices (Ryndak & Fisher, 2003).

SEMIOTICS OF DISABILITY: DISABILITY LANGUAGE AS A SIGN, SEMANTIC BANK OR CULTURAL COMPASS?

- Conceptions of disability orient society's behavior based on social meanings of disability.
- Language arranges disabled people in socially and economically convenient ways(Linton ,1998)
- Language codifies one as a victim requiring compensatory individualized intervention, e.g. SPED
- Critiquing the labeling of children with disabilities and their education as “special,” Linton argues that “Special” can be understood only as a linguistic euphemistic formulation, obscuring the reality that neither the children nor the education are considered desirable and that they are not thought to “surpass what is common.” (p. 15) as the word “special” would imply
- Disability is an arbitrary signifier, but it used “to signify something material and concrete, a physical or psychological condition considered to have predominantly medical significance” (Linton ,1998, p.10).
- By failing to see disability as a social construction, Oliver (1990) argues, “dominant definitions of disability pose problems for individual and group identity” (p. 30), thereby undermining collective efforts by disabled people to fight against the oppressions meted against them by an ableist society.

"NOTHING IS A SIGN UNLESS IT IS INTERPRETED AS A SIGN"

(Peirce et al., 1933, vol. 2, p. 172).

- Linguistic representations of “disabilities” are more than just words (Davis, 1995; Erevelles & Mutua, 2004; Linton, 1998; Oliver, 1990).
- In the US, disability language in school:
 - Encrypts interactions and regulates relationships
 - Sets compulsory limits that are temporal-spatial in nature that designate spaces in the schools that such students can occupy (or from which they are barred)
 - Such demarcations of time and space or temporal-spatial governance of disabled students through special education comes with a compulsory surveillance
 - Continuation or increase in the time that such students spend with non-disabled peers is usually contingent upon their ability to meet and/or exceed the heteronormative expectations that such interactions and environments typically demand
- In a similar way, the Swahili language scripts disability:

DISABILITY LEXICON IN SWAHILI LANGUAGE

NOUN CLASS	INDEXICALIZES				
KI-VI - Disability Terms	Inanimate Things	Kilema- Vilemea (impaired)	Kipofu-Vipofu (blind)	Kiziwi-viziwi (deaf)	Kibogoyo- Vibogoyo (One with no teeth)
KI-VI		kiatu-viatu (shoe-shoes)	kitu- vitu (thing-things)	Kiti-Viti (chair-chairs)	
M-Wa	Humans, Animals	Mtu-Watu (person- persons)	Mnyama- Wanyama (Animal- Animals)	Msichana- Wasichana (girl-girls)	mlevi-walevi (drunk- drunks)
M-MI	Living things	mti-miti (tree- trees)	mlima-milima (mountain- mountains)	mto-mito (river-rivers)	

- The language that constitutes disability, whether it is Greek, English or Swahili illustrate that language operates discursively to constitute reality and to assign value.
- In this case, it is in the discursive practice of Swahili lexicon that one comes to understand the cultural inscriptions that mediate the banalities of everyday existence of disabled people in Kenya.
- Language illuminates prejudices, stereotypes and stigma toward disabled people that became accepted as ordinary and natural served as markers that told disabled persons whether they could attend school or not, be included or not, marry or not.
- Simultaneously, those markers enforce normalcy (Davis, 1995) and accord privilege and humanness to able-bodiedness (Linton, 1998).

- Discourses that construct disabled bodies are in a sense a discussion of society's construction of degrees of "fitness" of particular bodies, the disciplinary practices that serve to legitimate society's hierarchical ordering of bodies by degrees of "fitness", and the state apparatuses, to use Althusser's concept, that perpetuate society's ideology of the body.
- As a state apparatus, school practices are caught up in the construction, consumption and the enactment of discourses around which bodies are woven. Those discourses make certain bodies, unwelcome and therefore special spaces (e.g., special classrooms) are created for them to keep them separate from bodies that are deemed fit.

DECONSTRUCTING DISABILITY MODELS AND SPED TEACHERS' ROLE IN INCLUSION

- A teacher must be careful not to be oblivious of the power inherent in the social and political meanings of the labels they use for children in the classrooms and how those labels reify, reinforce and reproduce the hierarchical social arrangements of the larger society, thereby reproducing hegemony.
- The ability to see disability as oppression, to see disability as the missing discourse in the gender, race and class triad (Davis, 1995) is habit of the mind that special educators have to cultivate.
- Though quite often socialized under deficit models of disability where special educators, like medics, are trained to see their role as that of correcting or remediating the effects of student disability on student learning and to see SPED as the best option for disabled students
- As teachers we must reject deficit-model that reproduces special education traditions of ranking, sorting and diagnosing that is incongruous with inclusion that maintains the normal-disabled binary .
- Russell (1997) argues that the primacy accorded normality makes disabled people all too easily disposable "...less than fully human; [makes] it easy to justify continuing inhumane policy towards us, to cut us out of the social contract even to eliminate us at political will. We become all too easily disposable (p.17)"

- Following the diagnose-and-treat procedure of the medical model, it is easy to come to believe that appending a label to students is a necessary first step to providing appropriate services to those students.
- Disability, constructed as an individual deficit, precludes teachers and the school from noticing socially constructed causes and other factors that inform how the student experiences the challenges of disability. The school has been implicated in the construction and production of identities of disability among students in the US (Mutua, 2001) and elsewhere (Slee, 1996). For example, medicalized details about learning disability or a particular developmental disability do not inform thinking about what school might actually be like for the student whose thoughts, feelings, and actions – particularly academic and social engagement—are a reaction to a marginalizing environment rather than a manifestation of disability.



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"How do you know I have a learning disability?
— Maybe you have a *teaching* disability!"

CREATING ENABLING/INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

(Slee, 1996)

- Efforts must address both the disability models that undergirds special education knowledge and practice and also the institute structural changes related to the intricate interplay between identities and social structure.
 - First step is a re-theorization of the disability from a social model standpoint using the range of poststructural theoretical tools that recognize the political primacy of embodied subjectivities and agency in the theorization and understanding of disability.
 - Dismantling “the special education expert” who currently produces and controls the knowledge by resisted the lure of the control of knowledge that is powerfully seductive.
 - Subvert (not reform) the normal-disabled binary that is adhered to in ways that maintain the epistemological divide between special education/general education knowledge, practice and placement as well as maintaining social and political subjugation of the disabled student in the school thereby assuring that schools continue to function in ways that keep intact the hierarchical arrangement of students by degrees of “fitness”.
 - Utilizing universal design that fits all so that students who may be able to learn and show learning through diverse media in non-stigmatizing ways. Such an approach fosters positive attitude and values different types of participation.

- As teachers we must rethink student behavior by dispensing with point/level system and finding ways to subvert it and actually relate with students as human beings without losing one's job (see Danforth, in press).
- Worth looking into are the tools teachers use to shift paradigms such as from surveillance that disempowers both teacher and student to collaborative advocacy and empowerment of both. Such tools might follow in the manner of Allen's (1999) Foucault "toolbox" where an understanding of the concept of surveillance, originally developed for prisons, enables one to understand the predicament of the special education students of living under a microscopic gaze.
- Such tools that teachers may use can arise out of definitions of disability such as one offered by Linton (1993) which focuses on disability utilizing a minority group model; the model neither signifies a denial of the presence of impairments, nor a rejection of the utility of intervention and treatment, but rather disentangles impairments from the negative attributions to which disability has been socially and politically attributed. Thus, while instances of subversion are few and far between, a proposal for marrying medical model and the social model of disability, while an uneasy one, cannot follow a predictable path, but rather, it calls for an elopement, a disruption of well-known and well-adhered to procedures and traditions.

