

Inclusive Education – The Social Model of Disability

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As I digest this reading through the lens of past experiences, what becomes readily apparent is how a small – but nevertheless important – shift in one’s interpretation of disability and impairment can radically impact the nature of this conversation. UPIAS (Shakespeare, 2013) makes clear and necessary distinctions between the two terms throughout, and as a result, I feel more comfortable distinguishing between disability as a combination of imposed social constructs and environmental barriers, and impairment as it pertains to the physical limitations of an individual. One issue of particular interest lies in the seemingly polarized viewpoints of the social and medical models, and whether or not the two can overlap or co-exist in manner that best serves the needs of disabled peoples.

I made a visit to the local Home Depot last week in dire need of the most basic of tools: a single screw driver that up until that point I did not, a: know existed, or b: where to find it. Completely green to home renovations, I wandered the orange-centric aisles hoping to find it on my own as to not bother the short-staffed crew that day. It wasn’t until a young man in a wheelchair approached me asking if I was in need of help, and I couldn’t help but make a mental note of the rarity of this type of exchange. While I might be able to applaud the progressive hiring practices of Home Hardware, the sentiments expressed by Shakespeare makes my usage of the word ‘progressive’ feel particularly inappropriate. While the ideals of UPIAS might read as a political party leaning too far to the edge of its utopian platform, it does not dismiss the argument that disabilities are largely imposed upon those with physical impairments by a general public who struggle to incorporate their voice into discourse related to access and opportunity. Perhaps the root of this issue can be located in our societal value systems.

Our current pandemic has taught us many things and will certainly continue to do so in the coming months. A plague so expansive and unpredictable, many parts of the world have taken extreme measures to slow its pace despite the complex collateral damage it has produced. Why has such action been implemented? Could it be that it is because simply affects everyone, but more specifically, able-bodied people? A dominant group, who for a majority of their lives have never experienced this level of social exclusion and environmental barriers, are now exhausting avenues of research, halting the world's economy and inevitably coming to terms with a 'new normal.' Is it not possible to approach the social barriers impacting those with physical impairments with even the faintest resemblance of our world's current efforts? To be fair, progress (according to my limited understanding of this field) seems to have been made in even the smallest of gestures that often go unnoticed on a daily basis. Recent renovations at my workplace grant those with physical limitations access to these areas, and though I certainly applaud these endeavours, the fact remains that most of campus disables the physically impaired. Unless our value systems are recalibrated, my experiences at Home Hardware may remain an exceptional circumstance and not an opportunity afforded to all constituents of society.

References

Shakespeare, T. (2013). The Social Model of Disability. In L. Davis (Ed.), *The disability studies reader* (pp. 195-203). Routledge.

Inclusive Education – Understanding Privilege Through Ableism

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While it is still early days in this course, the readings assigned thus far have already shed light on both societal and personal dynamics that have, as a result, produced noticeable ripples in what is becoming comparatively still waters. DiAngelo and Sensoy (2017) conceptualize privilege in ways that both enlighten and challenge my preconceived understanding of this social construct, and perhaps also helps to explain the guilt the propels me in my professional and personal endeavours.

I was unaware of my father's success as the only orthodontist in my local community until my early teenage years. Conversely, visits with his side of the family during holidays provided insight into the rural lifestyle he grew up in and the scarcity of opportunities available. The oldest of seven children, his life began somewhat impoverished, and with hard work - and the ability to seize opportunities made available to him - he has been able to provide for his own family in a way not possible for himself. However, the origin story that I have pieced together in my own way no longer seems as valid having read of the ideologies that are often used to support dominant groups in the societal pecking order, namely meritocracy. Though my father's story might support the idea that societal positionality is irrelevant in the pursuit of happiness, this reading does however prompt me to reflect on who during his time may not have been offered similar opportunities due to race, gender or disability. As an adult who benefits from the constructs of privilege, I often find myself on a subconscious level trying to justify the parity I see even within my own community by working harder, working multiple jobs, furthering my education and being frugal with financial decisions. These actions, however, cannot negate the fact that while I have taken advantage of certain opportunities, I am naïve to believe said opportunities are inherently available to all.

Forrest Gump is one of my favourite films, and while I have not seen it in recent days, the story and its characters flooded my thought process as it relates to the internalization of messages of superiority. Those who happen to sit next to Forrest at the bus stop often seem dumbfounded or in disbelief of his accomplishments, experiences or philosophical outlooks on life. The thoughts and ideas Forrest shares are at times devalued due to his undisclosed disability, which is also heartbreakingly articulated later in the story as he expresses his love for Jenny for the first time. DiAngelo and Sensoy (2017) also allude not only to the structures of privilege that people with disabilities must navigate, but more important, they assert that these different approaches are to be celebrated. We see this as Forrest learns to dance to the guitar playing of an Elvis archetype, endeavor to learn entirely new trades (shrimp fishing, ping pong) or engage in a meaningful relationship with one of the only minority characters of the film, Bubba. We watch the storyline of Lieutenant Dan unfold, an able-bodied white male who loses his legs below the kneecap. Internalized messages of superiority led the writers of this script to portray Lieutenant Dan's life post-injury as one with a loosening grip on moral boundaries or hope. Furthermore, there is yet another opportunity to pause and reflect on how Gary Sinese prepared for this role, whether he was capable of portraying the experience of people with disabilities and what their impression of his performance was. This line of questioning could very well be posed to Tom Hanks as well, and though the audience is certainly compelled to love this character, it is unfortunate to see that the Forrest himself is wary of his own son inheriting his traits during the final scenes. The ideologies referenced in this paper (meritocracy, equal opportunity, individualism and human nature) might support the notion that life could very well be like a box of chocolates; however, DiAngelo and Sensoy's perspective on privilege shed light on what is much more predictable outcome for minorities as a result of these constructs. While I'm not sure I'll be able to watch this film with as much naivety, Forrest's story has certainly provided me with

a medium to conceptualize ableism. In closing, what might be most unfortunate is that my quickest and closest point of reference with members of minority communities has come not from personal experience, but from the selectively crafted and biased views of Hollywood, a sentiment that could certainly be shared by many.

References

Sensoy, O., & Diangelo, R. (2017). *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education. Second Edition. Multicultural Education Series* (pp. 1–288). <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2013525432/>