

Reading Response: Disability and Privilege

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Who decides what is normal? This question is addressed in the readings by Tom Shakespeare, and Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo. In their articles, the authors address the overarching theme of privilege and the definitions of disability and impairment. While reading these chapters, several questions arose on how to address disability, specifically in the classroom and society in general. As Shakespeare (2017) noted, a major shift must happen to change the perception of the dominant social group, not of the person with a disability.

Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) define privilege as “the rights, advantages, and protections enjoyed by some at the expense of and beyond the rights, advantages, and protections available to others” (p. 81). While they address several forms of privilege, the main one considered is privilege through ableism, which is an unearned privilege that is based on what is considered normal and “those defined as normal...gain unearned benefits” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 84). Because of this, they posit that “...many aspects of our privilege are intertwined into our very identities and personalities” (p. 100). The authors of both chapters discuss the way in which people interact with those with impairments or disabilities from a position of superiority. It is this idea that has made me stop and question the ways in which I interact with my students with disabilities. Do I approach them with a recognition of what they have to offer as people, or do I limit them because of their differing cognitive abilities? Shakespeare challenges the reader that “the real priority is to accept the impairment and to remove the disability” (p. 197). As I think on this, it is a pointed reminder to not place limitations on my students with disabilities, but to instead encourage growth from their current state and to celebrate their successes as one would with any “normal” student. I believe this is especially

important in the music classroom where exploration for any student should be encouraged and development can happen no matter their musical background.

Several other questions also arose from the information presented in both chapters. Initially, I questioned how one finds a balance between enabling, patronizing, helping, and empowering. Shakespeare writes that “practicality and resource constraints make it unfeasible to overcome every barrier...Barrier-free enclaves are possible, but not a barrier-free world” (p. 201). Periodically I find that in creating adaptations, I spend so much time focusing on one student’s needs that the others in the class are left to fend for themselves. In one’s effort to create adaptations, how do we remove merit, equal opportunity, individualism, and human nature out of the equation? These ideologies, as presented by Sensoy and DiAngelo, come from an ableist mindset that anyone, no matter their status, can find ways to be successful on their own.

In any classroom, the expectation is that the teacher will accommodate the multiple learning styles present by the students. We adapt for students who are visual or auditory learners, tactile, or thinkers. In working to maintain these adaptations for mainstream students, I sometimes feel overwhelmed in trying to also balance the needs of the students in inclusive education. This is not the fault of the student, but the expectation of the system and leaves me contemplating how to accommodate for the majority versus the minority in a classroom and still somehow teach to the students strengths for those who are “normal”, “gifted”, or “special”.

References

Davis, L. (2017). *The disability studies reader / Lennard J. Davis [electronic resource]* (Fifth edition.). Routledge.

Sensoy, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal? : An introduction to key concepts in social justice education*. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca>