

Reading Response: Stereotypes and Perspective

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This week, I find myself caught between the intellectual and the emotional. As I grapple with several issues, this response will acknowledge them, wonder on solutions, and recognize my current limitations in my own thought process. This begins by understanding stereotypes, questioning the perception of the “able-bodied” towards those with disabilities, as well as recognizing the need for greater depth of courage in confronting opinions and beliefs through conscious dialogue.

The power of a stereotype to inform one’s thinking is strong. As noted by Treweek et al (2019), “Stereotypes develop as part of social and cognitive development, where the environment is instrumental in shaping the development of beliefs about others, especially in relation to how people identify others and categorise them into groups” (p. 1). While this article is specifically focusing on people with autism, the principle applies to any form of differing ability. The students with whom I work have varying cognitive impairments, none of which are autism. They are often identified by their disability and clumped together as one group of disabled students. The Functional Integrated Program (FIP) is excellent in so many ways, specifically in forming relationships between the FIP and mainstream students, but the stereotype of their contribution to the classroom is narrowminded. Having spent time focusing in on the integration, as a teacher I feel ill-equipped to adapt for each student as an individual and to give them autonomy over their learning as I do the mainstream students in my music class. As such, my action project for the return to school is to ask for more specific direction from our FIP teacher and to partner with the educational assistant in finding ways to teach to the FIP students’ interests and strengths, while recognizing their growth as individuals.

In recognizing the stereotypes I have placed on my FIP students, my thoughts have shifted to not only how I perceive them, but also a wonderment of how they perceive themselves. In the article by Watson (2010) that Xiao shared with the class, people of differing abilities do not have a shared perception of themselves (p.525). For example, they are not the same race, social class, religion, or sexual orientation (p.525). Whether that impairment is physical or cognitive, in my own ponderings this week, I recognize that my perception is that anyone with a disability identifies as disabled and subconsciously, I project pity on them because they lack a certain “normal” function. It is this ableist mindset that I impose on my FIP students. While they may not be able to articulate as clearly as the participants from Watson’s study, they have a voice, which is important to acknowledge and hear. My action plan for this realization is to give opportunity for these students to use their voice. I tend to be very linear and goal oriented and I realize that this will require me to exercise patience and grace.

As an internal processor, I find spontaneous dialogue difficult. I prefer to have time to think through my position, contemplate the contrary, and formulate my understanding, before engaging in a discussion of depth. Through our class discussions on dialogue, I am discovering that finding courage to have these conversations and to ask for a moment to think will challenge my presentation, my perception, and my reactions.

References

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