

A Critical Exploration of Dominant Perspectives Regarding Inclusion and Disability: Shifts Toward Meaningful Approaches

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Abstract : This study critically explores how disability and disability are presently and problematically configured within education. As such, pedagogies, discourses, and practices that shape this configuration are examined to forward a reconceptualization of disability as it relates to education and the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream classroom contexts. The study examines how the dominant medical/deficit model of disability positions students with special needs and advocates for a shift towards a social/critical model of disability as applied to education and classrooms. This is demonstrated through a critical look at how language, processes, and 'interventions' name and address deficits people who have a disability are presumed to have and, as such, conceptualize these deficits as inherent flaws that are in need of 'fixing.' The study will demonstrate the necessary shifts in thinking, language and practice required to forward a critical/social model of disability. The ultimate aim of this research is to offer a much-needed reconceptualization of inclusion that recognizes disability as epistemology, identity, and diversity through a critical exploration of dominant discourses that impact language, policy, instruction and ultimately, the experiences students with disabilities have within mainstream classrooms. The presentation seeks to explore disability as neurodiversity and therefore elucidate how people with disabilities can demonstrate these ways of knowing within inclusive education that avoids superficial approaches that are not responsive to their needs. This research is, therefore, of interest and use to educators teaching at the elementary, secondary, and in-service levels as well as graduate students and scholars working in the areas of inclusion, special education, and literacy. Ultimately the presentation attempts to foster a social justice and human rights-focused approach to inclusion that is responsive to students with disabilities and, as such ensures a reconceptualization of present language, understandings and practices that continue to configure disability in problematic ways.

Keywords : inclusion, disability, critical approach, social justice

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