

Learning And Teaching Conditions For Students With Special Needs: Asset-Oriented Perspectives And Approaches

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Abstract : This research critically explores the current educational landscape with respect to special education and dominant deficit/medical model discourses that continue to forward unresponsive problematic approaches to teaching students with disabilities. Asset-oriented perspectives and social/critical models of disability are defined and explicated in order to offer alternatives to these dominant discourses. To that end, a framework that draws on Brian Camborne's conditions of learning and applications of his work in relation to instruction conceptualize learning conditions and their significance to students with special needs. Methodologically, the research is designed as Critical Narrative Inquiry (CNI). Critical incidents, interviews, documents, artefacts etc. are drawn on and narratively constructed to explore how disability is presently configured in language, discourses, pedagogies and interactions with students deemed disabled. This data was collected using ethnographic methods and as such, through participant-observer field work that occurred directly in classrooms. This narrative approach aims to make sense of complex classroom interactions and ways of reconceptualizing approaches to students with special needs. CNI is situated in the critical paradigm and primarily concerned with culture, language and participation as issues of power in need of critique with the intent of change in the direction of social justice. Research findings highlight the ways in which Cambourne's learning conditions, such as demonstration, approximation, engagement, responsibility, immersion, expectation, employment (transfer, use), provide a clear understanding of what is central to and constitutes a responsive and inclusive this instructional frame. Examples of what each of these conditions look like in practice are therefore offered in order to concretely demonstrate the ways in which various pedagogical choices and questions can enable classroom spaces to be responsive to the assets and challenges students with special needs have and experience. These particular approaches are also illustrated through an exploration of multiliteracies theory and pedagogy and what this research and approach allows educators to draw on, facilitate and foster in terms of the ways in which students with special needs can make sense of and demonstrate their understanding of skills, content and knowledge. The contextual information, theory, research and instructional frame focused on throughout this inquiry ultimately demonstrate what inclusive classroom spaces and practice can look like. These perspectives and conceptualizations are in stark contrast to dominant deficit driven approaches that ensure current pedagogically impoverished teaching focused on narrow, limited and limiting understandings of special needs learners and their ways of knowing and acquiring/demonstrating knowledge.

Keywords : asset-oriented approach, social/critical model of disability, conditions for learning and teaching, students with special needs

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