



RECOGNIZING AND ADDRESSING ABLEISM IN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Our society in common puts pressure on disabled people to be "good," meaning that they should not ask for any special provisions, function in society as per its expectations. Ableism is a set of beliefs or practices that undervalue and single out against people with physical, cognitive, or psychiatric disabilities and often rests on the notion that disabled people need to be 'fixed' in one form or the other. Institutionalized ableism tries to make disabled child afraid of learning and getting educational experiences. Berry (2011) argues that, "inclusionary education implemented by teachers, result in benefits such as academic achievement, increased peer acceptance and richer friendship networks, higher self-esteem, avoidance of stigma attached to pull-out programs and possible lifetime benefits after leaving school". Teachers have the inimitable position to influence young minds and impact the perceptions of entire generations. This potent responsibility often turns them into backers for the underrepresented as they push themselves and their classrooms to higher standards of inclusivity and understanding. Administrators and teachers can take up measures to address ableism. The present paper is a small attempt to discuss an anathema called ableism in our society and what teachers can do address the same in school setting.

KEYWORDS: Society, Diversity, Disability, Teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The topic of diversity is gaining more awareness throughout society. Ableism is a form of prejudice that is common in society and educational settings like schools, colleges etc. which is often not recognized or overlooked. Our society in common puts pressure on disabled people to be "good," meaning that they should not ask for any special provisions, function in society

as per its expectations. Society in most cases appears to more than happy to let disabled person to withdraw from it by any means possible. The social model of disability says that disability is caused by the way society is organized, rather than by a person's impairment or difference. It looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people. When barriers are removed, disabled people can be

independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives. People with disabilities want to be recognized for their abilities, not their disabilities.

MEANING

Ableism is a set of beliefs or practices that undervalue and single out against people with physical, cognitive, or psychiatric disabilities and often rests on the notion that disabled

Stop ableism website defines ableism as "the practices and dominant attitudes in society that devalue and limit the potential of persons with disabilities. It is a system by which mainstream society denigrates, devalues and thus oppresses those with disabilities, while privileging those without

disabilities. This could be anything from overt prejudice to misunderstanding-based discriminations that create barriers for people with disability.”

Ableism is the mistreatment of individuals who have different abilities that do not fit the normalized standards prescribed by society. Succinctly put, ableism is “discrimination in favour of the able-bodied and able-minded” (Gabel, 2005).

In schools, ableism is defined as, devalues...disability resulting in societal attitudes that uncritically assert that it is better for a child to walk than roll, speak than sign, read print than read Braille, spell independently than use a spell-check, and hang out with nondisabled kids as opposed to other disabled kids...In short, in the eyes of many educators and society, it is preferable for disabled students to do things in the same manner as nondisabled kids. (Hehir, 2002)

NATURE OF ABLEISM

The following aspects outline the nature of ableism:

- Ableism is a set of stereotypes associated with various disabilities among human beings. It involves showing bias and social narrow-mindedness against people who are with disabilities.
- Disability Studies is an academic discipline that is also beneficial to explore to gain a better understanding of ableism.
- Ableism portrays persons with disabilities as inferior to the people who are normal or non-disabled. Accordingly, people are assigned or denied certain apparent abilities, skills, or character orientations.
- Ableism provides for a justification for discriminatory practices and reinforces discriminatory attitudes and behaviors toward people who are disabled.
- Ableism can be harsh, noticeable and even violent in nature.
- Some people excessively show pity which is very disturbing and irritating for people with disability. Many nondisabled people are taught to be ‘extra’ nice to people with disabilities: open the door for them, run to press the elevator button for them, ask if they need any help as they are crossing the street etc. In most cases, it comes with assumption and belief that people disabilities couldn’t do any of these things on their own and are completely helpless. This assumption itself is the root of the problem.
- Some people tend to label people with disability which can limit their aspirations their identity.

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Institutionalized ableism tries to make disabled child afraid of learning and getting educational experiences. Kang (2009) explains that, there are teachers who do not implement an inclusive learning environment within the classroom, which results in negative stigmas and experiences to the exceptional pupils. He underlines the importance of implementing practices which challenge ableism within the classroom in order to benefit all students.

Theorists have produced findings of the inclusive classroom which challenge ableism. Berry (2011) argues that, “inclusionary education implemented by teachers, result in benefits such as academic achievement, increased peer acceptance and richer friendship networks, higher self-esteem, avoidance of stigma attached to pull-out programs and possible lifetime benefits after leaving school”. These findings represent the beneficial outcomes when integrating inclusivity within schools. In the inclusive classroom, the needs of all students are met, and may simultaneously work to combat ableist beliefs.

Teachers have the inimitable position to influence young minds and impact the perceptions of entire generations. This potent responsibility often turns them into backers for the underrepresented as they push themselves and their classrooms to higher standards of inclusivity and understanding. Administrators and teachers can take up measures to address ableism. Some of the measures are detailed below:

Use Inclusive Language

Teachers can use inclusive language in classroom. They can emphasize that people in society tend to have different abilities. Everyone can do something.

Develop Awareness about Abilities

Teachers should organize activities and give tasks which can help the children with disabilities to know and strengthen their abilities. But even when a situation seems abnormal, educators shouldn't assume a child is incapable of learning.

Disability Content in Curriculum

The schools should have the disability content in their curriculum. The curriculum among the other topics can also cover topics on various cultures, works about people with disabilities. This can go a long way in bringing understanding and coherence among children with different abilities.

School Activities and Programmes

Teachers can organize curricular and co-curricular activities and motivate children with different abilities to participate. Teachers can focus on activities that tend to develop life skills in children with disabilities to develop confidence to succeed in life.

Hire Teachers with Disabilities

Schools can hire teachers with disabilities, as this can remove all bias; develop positive attitude and mutual respect among not only children with different abilities but also among teachers.

Invite Role Models

Teacher can invite role models with disabilities from different fields who can share their struggles and success stories. This can inspire the children with disabilities to develop positive attitude and confidence for the successful life. Further children with no disabilities can understand and value the importance of every individual for the society irrespective their different abilities.

CONCLUSION

As teachers are unique role in addressing the children with disabilities, it is important that they can seek further education and acquaint with disability literature to gain solid knowledge about the nature of disabilities and developmental delays in childhood and how that impacts education as a child grows. This can make big impact on the attitude and actions of teachers. Teachers have to de-root ableism in schools by means of spreading of awareness of what ableism is and increase understanding among non-disabled children toward children with differing abilities. These measures also can help children with disabilities come out with flying colors in both academics and personal life.

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