

I was particularly struck by the way that both selections addressed the idea of ‘fault’ or ‘blame’. The common-sense, non-academic interpretation of these well-known words would suggest that if someone is participatory to a negative outcome, they must bear a portion of the blame or fault. Criminal and civil justice proceedings reinforce this idea, separating out fault into degrees and portions to be assigned to everyone complicit in the commission of an offense. This runs contrary to best practice in disability (and more broadly, inclusive) education. In the context of disability studies, the ideas of “people with impairments feel that they are at fault” (Shakespeare 2016, p. 198) is equally as problematic as “many of us actively deny having any benefits beyond those equally available to others” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 88). In both cases, the mindset is of a zero-sum game, whereby others prosper at ‘my’ expense, and ‘my’ limitations are seen as personal failure.

Real change must come not from blame or the courtroom, but from the sum total of a populace enacting ideological, cultural, and systemic change at a broad level. As a middle-class Canadian in Alberta, I cannot be held ‘at fault’ for the incredible hardship and poverty faced by a First Nations community in Labrador, but I *am* required to acknowledge the benefits I receive from the system that perpetuates that oppression. Only by acknowledging how I benefit and others do not is there the ability to make progress. Due to my status as an educator, I have a role in shaping the beliefs and motivations of a new generation. If I do not live by example, change never comes.

Looking at the social model of disability explained by Shakespeare (2016), two details are apparent: the ease with which the model transfers the responsibility of overcoming barriers from disabled person to the society in which that person lives, and the way in which it (like many other social ideologies) glosses over its own shortcomings. Seeing disability as social oppression is a counter-intuitive response to the challenges faced by disabled persons, but it throws into sharp relief elements of everyday life we take for granted and how far there is to go. It also leaves little room for those disabled persons who have the opportunity to want to address their impairment: “Rather than simply opposing medicalisation, it can be interpreted as rejecting medical prevention, rehabilitation, or cure of impairment” (Shakespeare, 2016, p. 199).

In regards to the textbook excerpt about ableism, many examples are given of how humans disregard the experience of the other in favour of preserving their personal status quo. The text asks readers to “Apply the dynamics discussed here to your experience as a member of that group” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 97), referencing the experience of categorizing one’s privileged status. Completing that task is a first step along the path that the social model envisions, whereby the social forces of a group acting together to effect change begins to deconstruct the barriers towards full and equal participation by disabled persons in society.

In order to confront these issues and deal with the questions posed in these articles, one truth has to be acknowledged: people change. What I was in years past is not what I am today, and is not what I will be in five, ten, twenty years. As I am capable of change, so too must the others I engage with, not exclusive of any disabled person. They are all capable of change. That change is necessary in order that the society we live in be improved for the most people possible.

References

Sensoy, O. & DiAngelo, R. (2017). Understanding privilege through ableism. In J.A. Banks (Ed.), *Is everyone really equal?: An introduction to key concepts in social justice education* (2nd ed., pp. 80-101). Teachers College Press.

Shakespeare, T. (2016). The Social Model of Disability. In J.D. Lennard (Ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader* (5th ed., pp. 195-203). Taylor and Francis Group..