Teaching About Disability and Ableism Through Reflective Practice

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AGENDA

- Introduction
- Research Topic
- Background
- Methodology
- Findings
- Contributions

RESEARCH TOPIC

- Reflective practice can be used as a transformative tool when teaching adult learners about ableism and disability and as a means of engaging students in exploring biases and privileges (see McLean, 2008).

- Educational Support students often struggle to use language that is respectful and valuing when talking about disability. Language reflects attitudes, biases, and assumptions.

THE PROBLEM

- Some students in the ES program struggle with using disability positive language consistently

- Students use terms such as "the disabled," and state that "the student is *suffering* from a disability," "the person is *confined* to a wheelchair," or "the person is wheelchair *bound*"" (Cameron, 2017).

- Phrases and expressions like these elicit negative images of disability and reinforce ableist assumptions of living with disability.

LANGUAGE/ ATTITUDES/ BIASES

- Language reflects our attitudes, beliefs, and values, and therefore these must be explored when considering the language we use.

- Attitudes, beliefs, and values also shaped by our experiences, our environment, our social position, our upbringing, the media, among other factors.

- The use of disability language cannot be isolated and addressed without exploring the multiple ways in which our perceptions and attitudes are formed, and considering how this might help to shape the language we use.

BACKGROUND

- No consensus among researchers around defining and the practice of reflective practice among educators (Tannebaum, Hall, & Deaton, 2013)

- Reflective practice was used by educators as a means of improving their own teaching practice, but little research focused on using reflective practice as a transformative tool in learning about ableism and disability

- Much of the research focuses on teachers and not educational assistants (EAs) or Educational Resource Facilitators (ERFs)

METHODOLOGY

- Diary study over one term (four months)

- An online shared diary for student reflections developed using Padlet. Collective reflective practice helps expand learning about individual practice and various perspectives of others (York-Barr et al., 2006).

- Provided reflection guides to students. Guidance through reflective practice helps expand learning (York-Barrm et al., 2006). Reflections provide a first-hand insight about the experiences of the participant (Lupton, 2020).

- Diaries/journals valuable way to replace observation in research
(Torrentira, 2020)

FINDINGS

- Clear progression of students' understanding of various perspectives of disability and language.

- In week 1 most students described disability using medical model terminology. Terms like "limitations" used often often. Most students described disability in terms of physical or mental conditions that limit participation.

- Ex: "It is a person who might have physical, social, emotional and intellectual disabilities." Another notes that disability is "…a condition that restricts you…"

FINDINGS CONTINUED

- Week 2 students introduced to the social model of disability. Students encouraged to read an article about social model and watch video highlighting the social model and some of the impacts of societal attitudes.

- "How can we spread the message that people with disabilities are much more than their diagnosis?"

- "…we as a society need to change how we view people with disabilities because we are comparing our lives to theirs and saying it could be worse…"

- "it's society that needs to change our attitude, not the person with a disability."

- The word **change** came up repeatedly, bringing attention to **students awareness of a need to change societal attitudes regarding disability**.

FINDINGS CONTINUED

- A common theme urgency and **feeling of responsibility to educate others**.

- One student writes "we should try to educate others that a person with a disability have equal rights too…"

- another states "it makes me wish there was more awareness."

- Finally "ES students and others …, those who know that a person's worth is not a reflection of how able-bodied they are, have a responsibility to continue to move us all forward along the path to full accessibility and equity by educating with compassion and patience…we all have more work to do and more education to be shared in order to fully change the mindset of those around us."

- Reflections show a **fuller understanding of the importance of perceptions and attitudes about disability and the role they might play in creating positive change.**

FINDINGS CONTINUED

- "…I believe it to be true that society truly does disable people."

- Another reflects on her personal experience with terminology and how this has changed: "…back when my brother was born they originally used the term "mental retardation" and they [my parents] hated that so when the term "special needs" came up they jumped over to using that instead. When I first started this course I didn't see anything wrong with the term special needs. Starting this program and learning about person first language has really shaped my vocabulary and I catch myself now and then and always correct myself…"

- Reflecting on personal experience with language, disability, ableism, and barriers was common amongst student reflections.

- **Students make connections between course content and discussions with their personal lives, perspectives, and the language they use.**

FINDINGS CONTINUED

- A month into the course students were asked to reflect on the social model of disability. One student writes "The social model tells us that a person's inability to participate results from society's barriers, and is not due to her body's inability to function "normally."

- Another states "…excluding individuals with disabilities is due to society because its society that chooses to disable people and consequently, the community in which they live in becomes a barrier."

- And finally, "The social model emphasizes that it is the environment that limits the person. It is the communities that are designed to limit different people."

BENEFITS

"...we all have the power to make [a] difference in society, our attitude, language and the way we understand others impacts a lot in creating an outlook of the society where we live and work. To respect the rights of every person we need to make our actions positive to bring positive change in society."

"...we need to get more informed. We also have to stand up and speak up for what we believe and what we know...try to educate..."

- Students use reflective practice to create meaning from their experiences. Through reflective teaching practice, participants were able to examine their own bias, critique media representations, think more critically, and gain new perspectives of disability.

- provides opportunity for students to make personal connections and think critically through perspectives and concepts discussed in class.

- Reflecting on personal challenges and seeking learning opportunities that connect to classroom experiences is beneficial to educators' professional development (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

- Reflective practice can promote critical thinking among educators Marzano (2012)

- Incited interest in advocacy

CONTRIBUTIONS

- Reflections provide a first-hand insight about the experiences of the participant (Lupton, 2020)

- Unique student/educator perspective

- Reflective practice helps individuals to build upon prior knowledge, seek appropriate resources, and develop new strategies

SUMMARY

- Reflective practice can be used as a pedagogical teaching tool in learning about disability and ableism

- Reflective practice elicits critical analysis

- Diaries are a useful method in data collection

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