Inclusive education and critical pedagogy at the intersections of disability, race, gender and class

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Abstract

The paper aims to use insights from critical pedagogy to forge and exemplify links with the movement of educational inclusion. The struggles for change, theorised in terms of the emancipatory and liberating potential of schooling, set out the conceptual and analytical backdrop against which issues of exclusion and marginalisation are discussed and reflected upon. The emancipatory and transformative roles of schools, as sites of power interplays at the interstices of disability, race, socioeconomic background and gender, are placed at the core of the analytical framework, with a view to highlighting the contextual and political ways against which notions of "need" and "disadvantage" are constructed, reified and perpetuated in dominant conceptualisations of schooling and pedagogy. It is suggested that the emancipatory potential of schooling entails transcending traditional constructions and arbitrations of the "ideal student", embodied in Western-centric and neoliberal constructions of pedagogical discourse. The notion of intersectionality, as perceived and exemplified in relation to insights from critical pedagogy and critical disability studies, is presented as an emancipatory theoretical and analytical tool in interrogating and deconstructing educational discourses of individual and social pathology that evoke and legitimize the constitution of the "non-ideal student" in current schooling.

Key words: Inclusion, Critical Pedagogy, disability, justice, equality, power.

Introduction

Currently, educational inclusion constitutes an international policy imperative that promotes the rights of disabled children to be educated alongside their peers in mainstream classrooms (Armstrong and Barton 2007;Kenworthy and Whittaker 2000; Rioux 2002). Even though inclusive education is a relatively recent policy phenomenon, it embodies ideas and arguments that have long been discussed and debated. Inclusive education reflects values and principles and is concerned with challenging the ways in which educational systems reproduce and perpetuate social inequalities with regard to marginalised and excluded groups of students across a range of abilities, characteristics, developmental trajectories, and socioeconomic circumstances. Hence, inclusion is inexorably linked with the principles of equality and social justice in both educational and social domains (Ainscow 1999; Artiles et al 2006; Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Sapon-Shevin, M. 2003). As Armstrong and Barton (2007:6) write:

> For us inclusive education is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. It is about contributing to the realisation of an inclusive society with a demand for a rights approach as a central component of policy-making. Thus the question is fundamentally about issues of human rights, equity, social justice and the struggle for a non-discriminatory society. These principles are at the heart of inclusive educational policy and practice.

While there is agreement on the centrality of a social justice discourse in bringing about inclusive education reforms, the notion of social justice is ambiguous and contested (Artiles et al 2006; Hattam et al 2009; Johnson 2008). The lack of definitional consensus has implications for the ways in which social justice can "be realised and implemented in and through schools" (Johnson 2008: 310). Hence, notwithstanding the indisputable moral and ethical standing of an inclusive education reform agenda, there are contradictory views on what constitutes justice and equality of opportunity for disabled students. As a result, segregated placements are occasionally presented as being part of an "inclusion" agenda in terms of learning and participation (Dyson 2005; Warnock 2010) thereby ignoring the cultural politics of disability and special educational needs (Armstrong 2005). Inclusion is this respect, is reduced to a special education artefact that creates and consolidates fixed and essentialist understandings of students' "disabled identities" (Thomas 1999) without taking into consideration the ways in which these "identities" are created and sustained within current schooling (Graham 2006).

A social justice discourse in inclusive education policy and practice necessitates "changing systems that perpetuate racism, power, and exclusion" (Mullen and Jones 2008:331);and it involves questioning the ways in which schools valorize certain student-identities while devaluing others (Harwood & Humphy 2008; Graham, 2005; Youdell, 2006). This perspective, concentrates on transcending deficit oriented and blame-the-victim approaches that "define educational bodies, relationships and structures" (Johnson 2004:151), and ostracize certain students to the margins of social and educational domains.

Theoretical pleas for ending the oppression and marginalisation of certain groups of students have been prominently echoed in scholarly work on critical pedagogy (Giroux 1992; McLaren 1998), which has sought to examine the ways in which "an issue relates to 'deeper' explanations — deeper in the sense that they refer to the basic functioning of power on institutional and societal levels" (Burbules and Berk 1999:11). The article uses insights from critical pedagogy to exemplify and forge links with a radical human rights approach to inclusive education (Barton and Armstrong 2007) and explore issues of educational equality. A radical human rights approach to inclusive education policy concentrates on redressing inequalities of power and discriminatory practices on the basis of disability, as well as other forms of social disadvantage, and contribute to wider social and political reforms for a socially just and non-discriminatory world (Barton 2003).

Despite the fact that the notion of disability has not been explicitly touched upon in critical pedagogy (Gabel 2002; Goodley 2007; Erevelles 2000), insights from critical pedagogy can provide a theoretical platform against which the notion of disability can be problematised, deconstructed and repositioned to probe and exemplify links amongst

disability, race, class, culture, socioeconomic status and power. Towards this end, the notion of intersectionality is presented as a means to explore the ways in which disability rests upon, is intertwined with, and emanates from, other sources of social disadvantage.

Disabled individuals experience what we might call "intersectional subordination", a term that was first recognised by American feminist analysts in the late 1980s and in the beginning of 1990, to denote the multiple forms of discrimination experienced by African American women and not experienced by African American men or white women in general (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2007; Makkonen 2002). Within disability studies, feminist analyses of disability pointed to the multiple forms of oppression experienced by disabled women, and especially women from ethnic minorities who might experience simultaneous discrimination (Barnes and Mercer 2010; Thomas 1999). In terms of the subjectifying role of legislation, feminist legal scholars have used the term "social injury" to reconfigure "once privatized injuries into collectivist raced, sexed, and disabilized domains" (Campbell 2005:114).

Hence, current debates on inclusive education should draw on the notion of intersectionality whereby the notion of disability is conceptualised in conjunction with issues of race, socioeconomic background and gender thereby providing alternative analytical lenses to challenge reductionist and neoliberal discourses of inclusive education, and discuss the extent to which educational structures and institutions create/perpetuate inequality. Understanding the intersections of systems of oppression and challenging the multiplicity of factors that disable certain groups of students entail critiquing dominant ideologies, educational policies and institutional arrangements that maintain and perpetuate social and educational injustice.

The following sections use insights from critical pedagogy and critical disability studies to problematise and challenge current versions of inclusion that pathologise educational failure. Whilst in the past, analyses of disability were concerned with identifying individual pathology, analysts within critical disability studies have been increasingly concerned with identifying the ways in which social contexts and schools function as sites of justice or injustice (Lingard and Mills 2007). In particular, these analyses have probed the necessity to proceed to a thorough evaluation of both material and socio-cultural conditions that give rise to and exacerbate disabling barriers (Oliver 1990; Shakespeare and Watson 2001) with a view to empowering disabled individuals to "create spaces for new knowledge and forms of action to emerge…" (Barton 2001: 5). In a similar vain, critical pedagogy has been extensively concerned with the interweaving nature of multiple forms of oppression (Barbules and Berk 1999; Freire 1998; McLaren 1998) and concentrated on raising questions about issues of inequality with a view to empowering oppressed groups of students to pursue justice and emancipation. While acknowledging the ways in which the wider societal context can undermine school and community efforts to redress gross inequalities (Bringhouse 2010; Giroux 2011), schools can play a major role in alleviating social inequalities and minimizing the achievement gap between privileged and disadvantaged groups of students on the basis of their ethnic, racial, linguistic, social class and so forth characteristics (Bass and Gerstl-Pepin 2011; DCSF, 2009).

Exclusionary inclusion

Notwithstanding laudable international policy rhetoric around inclusive education, disabled children are still significantly excluded, marginalised and stigmatised in ostensibly more inclusive schools. Dominant versions of educational inclusion are occasionally reduced to special educational subsystems that hastily and uncritically close down "to a separatist resolution" (Norwich 2010: 74) by providing compensary and remedial models of support. The focus is on enabling disabled students to "overcome" barriers to learning and participation by devising "specialist" educational measures and interventions allegedly intended to respond to students' right to education, rather than addressing the barriers to learning and participation endemic to the curriculum, the assessment regimes and institutional conditions of current schooling (Lloyd 2008; Wedell 2008). The processes of "assessment" and "identification" of students' needs deflect attention from wider systemic and social factors that preserve existing social relations (Tomlinson 1982) and undermine attempts to challenge power inequities and interlacing forms of social disadvantage (Slee 2001).

The gaze is squarely placed on students' presumed "deficits" and common practice is to silence the ways in which disability is, to a significant extent, an ideologically and socially mediated phenomenon that emanates from and rests upon wider sociopolitical and cultural contextual factors. Disability is regarded as being a fixed and transcendental human attribute, a "negative ontology" (Campbell 2005:109) gauged against normative assumptions of normality. As a result disabled students' subjectivities are unproblematically presented as being "deficient" and "abnormal" with far-reaching implications for educational policy and practice. Such a myopic approach, places the responsibility of reducing the "achievement gap" between privileged and disadvantaged groups of students, on individual students who are entangled in the web of poverty, racism or disability. An alternative approach, couched in an intersectional analysis of multiple forms of disadvantage, places the responsibility on policy-makers and the state as a whole, and focuses on problematising a host of "social and cultural contextual factors that have an impact on achievement" (Bass and Gerstl-Pepin 2011: 909).

Reductionist versions of inclusion pathologise students' attributes that "deviate" from what is perceived to be an ideal physiological, emotional, intellectual and cultural functioning. These processes render a "school a site for disciplinary power via the 'ab-normalisation'" (Graham 2006:2) of those who are perceived as being "non-ideal" students (Harwood and Humphrey 2008:371). The process of ab-normalisation has exerted a pervasive ideological role in shaping dominant thinking with regard to the notion of "otherness" on the basis of ability. It is no wonder that there has been a rather belated interest in questioning normative and essentialist assumptions that constructed disability as a pathological and innate human attribute. Thus, whilst issues of social inequality in relation to ethnicity and gender had already been significantly explored, similar sociological analyses of disability emerged much later (Barton and Oliver 1992). Similarly, in terms of critical pedagogy, Erevelles (2000), Gabel (2002) and Goodley (2007) point to the fact that diversity on the basis of ability has been significantly absent from scholarly work on critical pedagogy due to an individual pathology perspective that

held sway over the notion of disability. As Erevelles (2000:5) writes with regard to the dismissal of disability from the theoretical agenda of critical pedagogy:

> This could be because, unlike the other social categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality, where it has been possible to demonstrate that the deviance associated with their difference is actually a social construction, a similar argument has been very difficult to support when applied to students with multiple to severe disabilities.

Gabel (2002) suggests that disability might differ from other attributes of marginalised and oppressed groups of individuals, whom critical pedagogy addresses. This is because the notion of disability necessitates transformative institutional and curricula arrangements to accommodate disabled learners' needs. Nevertheless, whilst the concern over students' needs should be at the core of inclusive educational debates (Norwich 2009), issues of power, domination and oppression should be prioritised (Johnson 2004; Knoll 2009) and disabled children's needs should be seen not only against their personal ability attributes and the institutional accommodations these might entail, but also in terms of other sources of disadvantage that might collude towards the emergence and proliferation of these "needs". Critical pedagogy's concern with issues of oppression and marginalisation on the basis of socioeconomic background for instance, has much to offer in reconceptualising disability as a multifaceted form of social oppression that transcends arbitrations of innate ability. That said, practical interventions for meeting disabled children's needs should not be constricted to the pedagogical discourse of schools and classrooms, but they should be directed to the wider social and economic context within which schools are embedded (Dyson 2001a; Mittler 1999).

This is particularly true for non-normative categories of disability (Tomlinson 1982), which are contingent on subjective evaluations of students and educational and community contextual factors rather than on biological attributes.

The construction of "non-ideal" identities ascribed to certain groups of students have little relation to their attributes that can clearly and unequivocally be identified and categorised and are much more contingent on contextual factors and social relations (Heath and McLaughlin 1993). Dyson and Kozleski (2008) discuss the ways in which the identification of non-normative categories of disability is contingent on professional judgement which is occasionally skewed by prejudice and discrimination. In a similar way, Goldstein (1995:463) refers to the creation of a "learned learning disability" that is the result of inappropriate teaching methods that are "devoid of political content" (ibid:464), thereby denoting the necessity to view teaching as a political act, which is profoundly concerned with the ways in which social and cultural dynamics interact with students and construct their identities. Giroux (2003:11) understands pedagogy as "a moral and political practice crucial to the production of capacities and skills necessary for students to both shape and participate in social life". These pedagogies should transcend insular and unitary dichotomies of "normality" and "abnormality" that ostracise and disable certain groups of students, and necessitate that educators "….contend with the ethics of their encounter with the other" (Allan 2004:425) and problematise the ways in which their own attitudes and perspectives give rise to disabling pedagogies (Goodley 2007).

It is empirically documented that students' special educational needs are inexorably linked with multiple and intersecting sources of disadvantage like ethnicity, social class, gender and poverty (Dyson and Kolezski 2008; Elwan 1999; Garcia and Cuellar 2006; Keil et al 2006; Lindsay et al 2006; MacMillan and Rechly 1998 Van Kampen et al 2008). The intricate and interlacing relationship amongst cultural diversity, disability and poverty is characterised by Van Kampen et al (2008:19) as a "vicious circle", whilst Baca (1990) uses the term "triple threat students" to describe students who are entangled in a complex web of educational and social disadvantage that results from students' behaviour and/or learning difficulties, limited English language proficiency and poverty.

Whilst analysing issues of over-representation of certain groups of students in special education, within a United Kingdom (UK) context, Dyson and Kozlesky (2008) and MacMillan and Reschly (1998) suggest that students from ethnic minority groups are over-represented in non-normative disability categories, like moderate learning disabilities (MLD) and emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). Similarly, Rhodes (1995:460) suggests that the vast majority of students assigned to "controversial categories of pathology….come from populations and cultures we have 'Othered' on the basis of colour and socioeconomic status".

The issue of over-representation of certain groups of children in special education categories has also been studied twice by the National Research Academy of Sciences, in 1982 and 2002. Both studies document the interaction between ethnicity and poverty and attribute the creation of special educational needs to factors related to non-existent learning opportunities in high-poverty schools, where teachers are inadequately prepared and hold low expectations for students in overcrowded and under-resourced classrooms (cited in Dyson and Kozleski 2008:174). Similarly, the United States Bureau of the Census identified that factors such as age, education, income, race and ethnicity, living arrangements, and gender have the strongest association with disability (Elwan 1999). More recently, a UK policy report (DCSF 2009) points to the complex nature of various sources of disadvantage. There is, for instance, substantial empirical evidence suggesting that the "social class gap in attainment opens up by 22 months" whilst "an FSM child has around 3 times worse odds of achieving good school outcomes than a non-FSM child at every critical point in their education after age 5" (DCSF 2009:15).

Even in cases of normative categories of disability, it has long been recognised that there is a very close and reciprocal relationship between poverty and disability because people living in poverty are more likely to become disabled (Elwan 1999; Gerstl-Pepin 2006; Mittler1999; Turnbul 2009). Mittler (1999:4) points to the fact that "children from families living in poverty are highly vulnerable to ill health as well as to educational failure". Hence an effective healthcare system that is accessible by people across different socioeconomic backgrounds can potentially minimise disability and dependency (Turnbull 2009). As Elwan (1999:5) writes:

> not only does disability add to the risk of poverty, but conditions of poverty add
> to the risk of disability. Poor households do not have adequate food, basic
> sanitation, and access to preventive health care. They live in lower quality
> housing, and work in more dangerous occupations. Malnutrition can cause

disability as well as increase susceptibility to other disabling diseases. Malnourished mothers have low-birth weight babies, who are more at risk of debilitating diseases than healthy babies. Lack of adequate and timely health care can exacerbate disease outcomes, and a remedial impairment can become a permanent disability.

Critical pedagogy's focus on issues of marginalisation, power, justice and social transformation can mobilise new theorisations with regard to the complex nature of disability and the ways in which disabled students are socially and educationally positioned. Rather than concentrating on issues of students' individual and family pathology, the emphasis is placed on questioning whose values and interests shape dominant educational discourses that oppress and marginalise certain groups of students (McLaren 1998). Moreover, due to its emphasis on the relationship between power and culture (Freire 1985), as well as its interest in examining the discursive ways in which student identities are constructed by the "disciplining discourses of current schooling" (Erevelles 2000:1), critical pedagogy can mobilise the development of an "ecological framework" (Baca 1990:11) with a view to exploring and challenging the ways in which students' "abnormal" educational identities are culturally and socially mediated constructs that have little to do with students' innate or pathological attributes. Rhodes (1995:458) points to the necessity of using a liberatory thought and pedagogy to relinquish "a strictly deficit model" that gives rise to the otherness image attributed to students with disabilities. As Giroux (2003:13) writes:

> Interrogating how power works through dominant discourses and social relations, particularly as they affect young people who are marginalized economically, racially, and politically, provides opportunities for progressives to challenge dominant ideologies and regressive social policies that undermine the opportunities for connecting the struggles over education to the broader crisis of radical democracy and social and economic justice.

Neoliberal policies and the constitution of the "non-ideal" student

The aims of current schooling are in alignment with the demands of the global economy that necessitates increased concerns for effectiveness, value for money and competitiveness. The ideologies of the market have given rise to contemporary versions of "ideal students" who are regarded as "human resources" rather than "resourcefully human" (Bottery 2000:59). The constitution of the "ideal student" engenders the "non-ideal" student (Harwood and Humphrey 2008:373), who has a subordinated and deficient positioning (Youddel 2006). The attributes that epitomise the ideal student, are used as a normative device against which the "non-ideal student" is positioned and identified. Francis (2006:197) whilst exploring issues of gender, deprived socioeconomic background and educational failure points to the necessity of pursuing "a critical analysis and deconstruction in order to make visible the discursive 'sharp blades' of delineation and pathologization at work in neo-liberal education policy….[and] also identifying and illuminating the ways in which neo-liberal policy demonises vulnerable groups".

The ascendancy of neoliberal policy imperatives have created, according to Ball (2008;187), "local economies of student worth" whereby schools compete to "recruit 'value adding' students" and exclude, "those students who add 'negative value', those with special needs, those for whom English is a second language, or those with social or emotional difficulties are avoided where possible in this economy". Barton and Armstrong (2007:7) reflect upon current policy initiatives in the UK allegedly intended to enhance educational "choice and personalization", which exclude and marginalise certain pupils and subordinate concerns for "an open, equitable and democratic system of education". Similarly, Roulstone and Prideaux (2008) suggest that what occasionally underpins current inclusive educational policies is the idea that disabled students can be included insofar as this is compatible with school efficiency. In this way the notion of social justice is reconceptualised and redefined in terms of a mediocre perspective. As Rizvi and Lingard (1996:15) write, "social justice is no longer 'seen as linked to past group oppression and disadvantage' judged historically, but represented simply as a matter of guaranteeing individual choice under the conditions of a 'free market'" (cited in Artiles et al 2006:263).

The presence of disabled students in mainstream schools is regarded as being a counterforce to attempts to achieve excellent results in high stakes testing regimes and subsequent league table rankings and is regarded "as eternally lacking (desiring subjects consuming the things they lack)" (Goodley 2007:321).

> Too often, when we think of involving students in educational practices, we assume students to be able, productive, skilled, accountable individuals who are ready and willing to lead developments within the classroom. They fit the quintessential construction of the modernist, unitary, humanistic subject (Chinn, 2006). In short, our students are 'able'. Such a construction of the learner is hugely problematic for students with disabilities and or special educational needs who require the support of others (Goodley 2007:321).

As a result of this kind of thinking, the notion of inclusion is subsumed within wider neoliberal concerns over increased productivity, effectiveness value for money and entrepreneurial capacity. "Inclusivity" in this respect is not equated with the notion of belonging and meaningful participation in mainstream neighbourhood schools. Rather, it is understood as the ability of educational systems to re-engage hitherto marginalised and disaffected groups of students in the learning process (Dyson 2005, 2001b), with a view to achieving educational excellence, which is exclusively measured against examination results and league table rankings (Ainscow 2010; Ball 2003; Barton and Armstrong 2007).

Current schooling acts as a political site, reproducing social hierarchies and legitimizing the existing relations of power in a way which is attuned to the corporate modes of production. The values of the market-place are enshrined in educational institutions, which are called upon to produce "human resources" in order to fulfil the demands of the global capitalism. Disabled students' subjectivities are tainted by the bigoted culture of corporate rationality that has generated a new ontological category of 'normality', incarnated in 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1977:138) deemed 'fit' and 'capable' enough to

contribute to labour market. In this sense, an "inclusive society" according to Masschelein and Simons (2005: 127) "is not a society of equals in a principled way, but a society in which everyone has the qualities to meet her needs in an entrepreneurial way".

These new forms of neoliberal constructions of inclusion consolidate and perpetuate the notion of "special educational needs" and the paraphernalia of deficit-oriented approaches of cure and remedy associated with it, while failing to acknowledge the ways in which "personal troubles" are intertwined, rest upon and emanate from "public issues" (Mills 1970). Giroux (2003:8) points to the fact that under the siege of neoliberal discourse

> issues regarding schooling and social justice, persistent poverty, inadequate healthcare, racial apartheid in the inner cities, and the growing inequalities between the rich and the poor have been either removed from the inventory of public discourse and public policy or factored into talk show spectacles that highlight private woes bearing little relationship either to public life or to potential remedies that demand collective action (Giroux 2003:8).

Conclusions

Under the regime of neoliberal ideologies education is meant to be subservient to capitalist modes of production against which the hierarchical division of labor is replicated and reproduced in current schooling. The latter becomes "a site in which bodies are compared, differentiated, hierarchized, diagnosed; in which judgements of normality and abnormality are made" (Sullivan 2005: 29). The construction of "non-ideal students" becomes a transcendental and unitary ontological narrative and as a result, students "become tied to a certain identity" (Yates 2005:65).

This essentialist understanding of people's identity can be challenged through revolutionary forms of critical pedagogy which concentrate on identifying "the historical determinations of domination and oppression as part of the struggle to develop concrete practices of counterrepresentation" (MacLaren and Farahmandpur 2001:145). Practices of counterrepresentation can be developed through *situational* and *intersectional* understandings of the self (Makkonen 2002:18), which give credence to the fact that "success in a capitalist society is not the result of individual capacities but rather is constrained and enabled by asymmetrical relations of power linked to race, class, gender, and sexual economies of privilege" (MacLaren and Farahmandpur 2001: 146). The intersectionality of the self (ibid), not only points to the necessity of understanding the ways in which different subjectivities intersect but also, of exploring the ways in which these subjectivities are created and established.

Intersectional analyses of "disabled identities" (Thomas 1999) highlight the necessity of transcending neoliberal and reductionist discourses of inclusion. This entails questioning normative assumptions of normality (Graham and Slee 2008) and acquiring a "global theoretical perspective" on schools and inclusion (Theoharis and Couston-Theoharis 2008:236), in order to address the ways in which capitalist relations of production are regenerated and reified in current schooling. The two axes of analysis, drawn from

critical disability studies and critical pedagogy, can exert a complementary and synergetic role in interrogating notions of normality, embodied in Western-centric versions of the "ideal student", whereby conceptual constructs of the latter are used as a heuristic framework to identify the "non-ideal" ones. These approaches point to the necessity of exploring the ways in which social and educational institutions create and perpetuate social and educational inequalities, and entail shifting the focus from the perceived pathology of those who are designated as being "non-ideal" students to issues of social justice and equity, whereby schools are regarded as sites of disciplinary power in reproducing and perpetuating wider social injustices (Dyson 2001a; Mittler 1999).

Educational equality for marginalised groups of students necessitates transcending individual pathology perspectives and adopting a systemic approach to integrating school reform with concerns for addressing gross injustices and other sources of social disadvantage. However, such an approach might not be feasible in the short term, and consequently the role of schools as sites for ameliorating social inequality should be urgently acclaimed and materialised through relevant education policy and practice (Bringhouse 2010; Lingard and Mills 2007). Certain policy initiatives in the UK (DCSF 2009; DfES 2004), related practices (e.g. extended schools, Sure Start, Every Child a Talker) as well as funding formulae of special education (Bringhouse 2010) and professional development issues (Jean-Marie et al 2009; NCSL 2010), recognise the complex nature of students' underachievement, which cannot be uncritically and unproblematically presented as a matter of individual pathology (Bass and Gerstl-Pepin 2011).

Inclusive education involves fostering new and reconfiguring existing accountability regimes to make schools and teachers redistribute and focus resources on groups of students who are entangled in a complex web of social and educational disadvantage (Artiles et al 2006; Bringhouse 2010). In this way, schools will become mediating institutions in redressing wider social inequalities and fostering more democratic and socially just ways of thinking and acting. It is crucial that such initiatives be ushered in by attempts to mobilise "cultural" and "symbolic" changes in current schooling (Artiles et al 2006:264), with a view to questioning and deconstructing disabling pedagogies (Goodley 2007), which disempower certain groups of students and perpetuate inequalities of power and oppressive institutional and ideological regimes. Deficit-oriented approaches to deal with disability and special educational needs obscure the multiplicity of dynamics and contextual factors that impact upon students' identities, and subordinate the compensatory role that schools can play in minimising social and educational disadvantage. An awareness of the emancipatory potentials of critical forms of thinking and acting with regard to disadvantaged groups of individuals can facilitate transformative change both at the ideological and institutional level.

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