RESHAPING RHETORICS OF DISABILITY: The Ethics of Inclusiveness In Teaching “Other People’s Children”

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Introduction to Module: In-class discussion

1. What are “rhetorics of disability” and why might we, as educators of English/Language Arts, want to reshape such rhetorics?

2. What do you imagine Lisa Delpit is referring to in the title of her seminal text on teaching *Other People’s Children*?

3. Children in K-12 classrooms are often segregated by their native language, by test scores, by local and state assessments, and by diagnoses of disability. Thinking back to your K-12 experiences, how and where were students with disabilities taught? How were they talked about, if at all?

4. What does segregating or excluding certain groups of students tell their peers about their “worth”? What does it tell those students who are excluded?
DISCURSIVE “CURB CUTS”

Exclusion/isolation → Mainstreaming → Inclusion → Inclusive Excellence
Discuss the following two Delpit quotes. How might these issues be considered within the context of the “ethics of teaching English/Language Arts”?

• "One of the most difficult task we face as human beings is trying to communicate across our individual differences, trying to make sure that what we say to someone is interpreted the way we intend. This becomes even more difficult when we attempt to communicate across social differences, gender, race or class lines, or any situation of unequal power." (Delpit 135)

• "When teachers do not understand the potential of the students they teach, they will under-teach them no matter what the methodology." (Delpit 175)

What does “The Rhetoric of Disability” have to do with the ethics of teaching English?

• For contemporary scholars of rhetoric, reexamining Greek sophist notion of nomos (cultural conventions) is useful as we “transform discourse about disability from philosophizing to rhetorical action.”

• Consider the passage above in light of the picture to the right. How might we, in our English/Language Arts classrooms emphasize the ethical responsibilities of transforming discourse about disability?
RHETORICIANS KNOW THAT WORDS MATTER: PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE

• People with disabilities are – first and foremost – people who have individual abilities, interests and needs;

• People with disabilities constitute our nation’s largest minority group, which is simultaneously the most inclusive and the most diverse.

• Historically, people with disabilities have been regarded as individuals to be pitied, feared or ignored. They have been portrayed as helpless victims, repulsive adversaries, heroic individuals overcoming tragedy, and charity cases who must depend on others for their well being and care. Media coverage frequently focused on heartwarming features and inspirational stories that reinforced stereotypes, patronized and underestimated individuals' capabilities. These stereotypes have often been perpetuated in classrooms.
# People-First Language: Emphasize The Person Not The Disability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People First</th>
<th>Disability First</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children/Adults with Disabilities</td>
<td>Handicapped, disabled, special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has a cognitive/developmental disability.</td>
<td>He’s mentally retarded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She is a young woman with Williams syndrome.</td>
<td>She’s a Williams kid/adult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She uses a wheelchair.</td>
<td>She’s crippled; confined to a wheelchair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People without disabilities.</td>
<td>Normal, healthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congenital Disability/Brain Injury</td>
<td>Birth defect; brain damaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People First Language reflects accurate and ethical use of language.</td>
<td>Disability first language highlights the disability, thus minimizing the individual.</td>
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</tbody>
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In small group discussion, consider the following common concerns and questions that many teachers pose. What responses can your group provide based on our readings?

Won’t providing accommodations on examinations – like extra time - give an unfair advantage to a student with a disability?

I have heard students on my campus using derogatory language to describe students with cognitive disabilities. What can I do in the classroom to address this?

What if I suspect that a student has a disability? Do I tell his/her parents?

How can I best support students in my classes who have disabilities?

What if a student in my class who has a learning disability doesn’t request accommodations until late in the semester?
To create ethical inclusiveness and meaningful social change:

• Teachers and teacher-educators must do the following:
  • Make sure our own classes, websites, and other course materials are accessible for all students and take advantage of all ways of knowing/learning.
  • Ask students with disabilities what they need to succeed in our classes while maintaining confidentiality. Meet their needs without questioning them.
  • In your courses, include readings on disabilities, wherever appropriate.
  • Work to reconstruct our students' problematic understandings of disabilities and the ethics of responsible rhetoric.
  • Model ethical behavior in all our interactions with students -- both those with and without disabilities.
Listen to rather than talk about…

Nothing about Us Without Us

(click to start video)
CSULB CAMPUS RESOURCES

Disabled Student Services Office

- Location: Brotman Hall 270
- Website: [http://web.csulb.edu/divisions/students/dss/](http://web.csulb.edu/divisions/students/dss/)
- Email: dss@csulb.edu

- Created in 1971 as “Handicap Student Association”
  - student driven, physical barriers
- Over 1,500 students served each semester
- Over 9,000 graduates to date
  - 367 this year, largest ever
ADDITIONAL ON CAMPUS RESOURCES

- Support Services and Advising Program
- Autism Services
  - LIFE Project
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Support Services
- Stephen Benson Learning Disability Program
- Alternative Instructional Materials (AIM) Center
  - For students, faculty, and staff
- Workability IV Program
- Service and Emotional Support Animals
- ASI Student Government
  - Secretary for Disability Affairs
- Project OCEAN, Active Minds