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Virginia Inclusive Practices Center

3Cs: Changing Disability Culture in Schools

This document provides school administrators, coaches, and central office personnel some introductory ideas to help promote a positive shift in school culture regarding disability. Each activity is a mini-lesson in disability awareness used to create dialogue and address negative perceptions, stereotypes, and actions.

Activity: Identifying Ableism

Share the following definition: Ableism describes discrimination, prejudice, and negative images directed toward people with disabilities

Ask the participants to brainstorm examples of how ableism manifests itself within

- (1) ideas and assumptions; (2) perceptions and stereotypes; (3) attitudes and practices; and (4) environmental barriers

Share out the examples and brainstorm potential solutions to address ableism in school. Remember, ableism is often unintentional and individuals are unaware of its existence

Activity: Perception of Disability

Watch the following video clip (I Define Me) to activate thinking:

https://youtu.be/opgUMJTXTYY

Ask: How is disability "seen" in our school? By educators? By staff? By students? By families? How might we address negative perceptions and stereotypes?

Activity: How do we "disable" students in our schools?

Have participants examine core school practices and ask how those practices might enable students to succeed or create barriers to success. Participants might want to look at lesson plans, classroom structures, and extracurricular activities during this activity.

Activity: Youth Credo

Watch the following video clip (I'm Determined Youth Credo) to activate thinking:

https://youtu.be/wrNy_2ljVdo

Ask: What do these youth expect of us as educators? How could we use this video to educate others? Students? Families? Community Members?

Activity: Inspiration Porn

Stella Young coined the term, "inspiration porn" to describe the phenomenon where we praise and admire people with disabilities for "overcoming" their challenges and "inspiring others" with their achievements. These stories make us feel good, but they do little to normalize disability in society. Do these experiences deserve an extra level of attention? If so, why should they get that attention? How do we reframe these stories to demonstrate that people with disabilities contribute to the life experience?

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Activity: Models of Disability Chart

Examine the following table and discuss how the school environment "views" disability. Is it more medicalized or sociocultural? How can a school move toward a more sociocultural view?

Table Medicalized View versus Sociocultural View

Medicalized View of Disability	Sociocultural View of Disability
Person has a medically diagnosed disability that is preventable, curable, or improved with rehabilitation.	The person's disability is a complex condition affected by context and largely a consequence of prejudice and marginalization.
Focus on diagnosis, labeling, impairment, and remediation of deficits first. When a person struggles or fails, the disability is seen as the primary cause.	Focus on the person first with an emphasis on strengths, needs, and ways to address challenges. When a person struggles or fails, it is more directly related to the environment, not the disability.
Emphasis on educational environment that fixes the impairment, which may mean alternative services and settings instead of inclusive settings.	Emphasis on the inclusive educational environment first with consideration of alternative settings only after exhausting inclusive options.
Learning is best achieved in an individual or small group situation where instruction is very teacher directed.	Learning is a social activity requiring active involvement with other students and where the teacher guides instruction with scaffolds that provide for a gradual release of control. Instruction is both teacher and student directed.
Society sees disability as not the norm and sees people with disabilities as needing to adapt and fit in.	Society evolves to question the definition of normal and how society can change to better include people with disabilities.
Society questions the competence of individuals and the ability to live a full life because of perceptions about disability.	Society presumes competence in every person and supports the concept of an enviable life for every person, regardless of disability label.

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Activity: Language of Disability

After examining this chart, discuss the language used in your school when talking about disability. How can language impact perceptions and student outcomes?

Examples of People First Language and Disability Euphemisms

Say:	Instead of:
People with disabilities.	The handicapped or disabled people.
He has an intellectual disability or is a person with an intellectual disability.	He is mentally retarded or a mentally retarded person.
He has Down's Syndrome.	He's Down's; a mongoloid.
She has a learning disability.	She's learning disabled.
She's of short stature/she's a little person.	She's a dwarf/midget.
He uses a wheelchair/mobility chair.	He's confined to or is wheelchair bound.
She receives special education services.	She's in special education.
My students with IEPs.	My IEP students.
Children without disabilities.	Normal, healthy, or typical kids.
He has a brain injury.	He's brain damaged.
Accessible parking or hotel room.	Handicapped parking or hotel room.
Student receiving special education services	IEP students or SPED students
Classrooms	Inclusion classrooms
Co-taught Classrooms	Collaborative classrooms (Collab)
Teachers	Gen Ed teachers or SPED teachers
Co-teachers	Collab teachers
Enrichment, Enhancement, Lab	Pull out, Self-contained, Remediation

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Adapted from Kathie Snow, "People First Language Chart," *Disability is Natural*. 2009, http://www.disabilityisnatural.com/images/PDF/pfl09.pdf.

Note: Although it's okay to begin with a person-first approach to how we speak and write about students with disabilities, there is a significant movement toward Identity-First language, placing the disability first. This occurs frequently within Deaf culture and among people with Autism among others. As a result, there is a call for a more Person-Centered approach to

language, asking the person to share the language he or she prefers when the topic of disability is discussed.

Resources:

The I'm Determined project, a state-directed project funded by the Virginia Department of Education, focuses on providing direct instruction, models, and opportunities to practice skills associated with self-determined behavior. This project facilitates youth, especially those with disabilities to undertake a measure of control in their lives, helping to set and steer the course rather than remaining the silent passenger. There are some excellent videos and resources that your school can use to address disability culture.
www.imdetermined.org

The Inclusive Schools Network (ISN) is a web-based educational resource for families, schools and communities that promotes inclusive educational practices. This resource has grown out of Inclusive Schools Week™, an internationally-recognized annual event created by Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) and now sponsored by Stetson & Associates, Inc. ISN's mission is "to encourage, embolden and empower people to design and implement effective inclusive schools by sharing insights and best practices and by providing opportunities for connection."
https://inclusiveschools.org/

October is **Disability History and Awareness Month in Virginia**. Take advantage of this month to educate your school about disability!
https://centerontransition.org/transition/disAware.html

A good way to begin the month is to share the following quote and then select events to highlight throughout the month of October. Have students create a museum for the month!
"If you believe people have no history worth mentioning, it's easy to believe they have no humanity worth defending." --William Loren Katz

Disability History Museum
The Disability History Museum's mission is to foster a deeper understanding about how changing cultural values, notions of identity, laws and policies have shaped and influenced the experience of people with disabilities, their families and their communities over time.
https://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/index.html

National Museum of American History: Disability History
Because the history of disability is the history of people, it is layered with objects, innovation, struggle, emotion, drama, and surprise. The group "People with Disabilities" has always been the largest "minority" group in America. This reality raises one of the most ignored questions in history is: Why is disability seldom a part of the story? This hub gathers together various aspects of the museum that place people who are different, atypical, non-normative, or diverse --and consequently tagged as disabled or impaired --in the story of America, where everyone belongs.

https://americanhistory.si.edu/topics/disability-history