

Forum Introduction

Dismantling Ableism: The Moral Imperative for School Leaders

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Although leadership for social justice and Disability Studies in Education (DSE) have rich and growing bases in literature, bringing the two together is relatively under-theorized and rarely explored. Social justice frameworks for educational leadership recognize institutional and historic structures that bar marginalized and minoritized students from success (Theoharis, 2007). Furthermore, the emerging area of DisCrit theory (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2016) enlarges our understanding of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) (Gabel, 2005) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Likewise, we have a rich literature in inclusive school leadership with respect to disability (Capper, Frattura, & Keyes, 2008; Frattura & Capper, 2007) and in anti-racist culturally responsive leadership (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). However, we have identified a gap in considering how leaders should effectively address the intertwined and mutually reinforced effects of ableism and racism that are deeply ingrained in schools as institutions, and in schooling practices. This volume is an attempt to begin that discussion.

The four articles herein constitute an illuminating conversation. They speak to the empowering possibilities in leadership preparation, the ramifications for students, parents/guardians and teachers when leaders either confront or fail to confront ableism and racism, and a powerful reconsideration of DisCrit and DSE in a framework that emphasizes context and relationship. Bornstein and Manaseri discuss the necessity of adequate DSE and DisCrit preparation for aspiring k-12 leaders, a critical perspective that would allow them to disrupt simple tropes of ableism and racism and recognize the mutually reinforced ways these forces operate that lead to students' experiences of oppression. Franklin offers a case study of how badly inclusive schooling can go awry in the absence of such leadership. Insofar as Franklin demonstrates how oppressive discourses suffuse all educators in the negative, Rood echoes that analysis and highlights how influential DSE-minded leadership can be in creating space for educators to enact case-by-case, systemic changes to disrupt ableism. Finally, Mackey takes this discussion a significant step further by building from DSE and DisCrit with an Indigenous perspective that destabilizes ableism and racism, requires leaders to look beyond the institutional geography and organization of place and services, and situates relationships at the center of how we understand either restorative, holistic practices and discourses or destructive, marginalizing ones.

The editors are grateful to these authors for answering the call to continue this vital conversation. We are most excited about the possibilities of taking DSE, DisCrit, and similar thinking into forums in which they have not yet been included. We invite readers to respond to, to grapple with, and to join with this emerging area of work that aims to build schools and communities with, and for, the children whom they serve. This is the collective moral imperative to which we aspire.

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