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Neurodiversity and the Deep Structure of Schools

Peter Smagorinsky

Mission Statement
Adams Elementary School, a diverse community, will strive to meet individual differences and abilities in a positive learning environment to prepare students for a future of lifelong learning.

Diversity Statement
Adams [Elementary School] values the diverse ethnic heritage of the students that we serve and believes [that] to be prepared for today's global society and workforce, students must be able to understand, appreciate, work with and learn from people with cultures and backgrounds different from their own.

This set of mission and diversity statements from Davenport, Iowa , is typical of how schools declare their dedication to inclusion and diversity. I have read such statements from schools and universities for many years now, and consider theirs to be representative of how schools position themselves as welcoming, caring, and inclusive. Most schools claim that all students will be honored for their individual and cultural heritages, and will in turn honor those of others. School, they say, will be a place in which intolerance will not be tolerated, and from which generations of compassionate, accommodating people will populate the world.

Diversity statements are fine and noble. However, they often rest upon a social structure and bureaucratic infrastructure that prevent the realization of their lofty goals. In 2020, the monochromatic fabric of U.S. social structure has been exposed as deadly to Black people. Race is presently the most visible form of oppression in U.S. life. I recognize that fact, while remaining aware that other regimes stifle the possibilities of other sorts of people in school and society. In *Ought*, our attention is on autism and the factors that do and do not enable healthy, productive autistic lives. This essay is concerned with neurodiversity, which is typically listed as including autism,

Attention Disorder Hyperactivity Disorder, dyscalculia, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and Tourette's Syndrome (National Symposium on Neurodiversity at Syracuse University, 2011). My special concern is autism, although my points at times generalize to other areas of human difference.

Before addressing neurodiversity in schools, I will review the history of mass education in the United States, which has always emphasized assimilation and conformity, in spite of more recent claims, grounded in multiculturalism, to embracing human social, cultural, and biological diversity. I will then consider neurodiversity as among the many areas of human difference that, in spite of appeals to valuing diverse populations, are typically treated as deficits in schools and society. This conception has taken hold because schools have a deep structure (Smagorinsky, 2020) that provides a powerful, systemic center of gravity toward the cultural reproduction of the values of the dominant culture: the historically regnant able-bodied and minded, White, heterosexual, middle-upper class society. Normate policies established through their power have governed who is considered acceptable in the school setting, and who is deemed disordered.

I next review how schools came to serve as the nation's norming mechanism, dating to the founding of mass public schooling in the mid-1800s; and how neurodiversity, like other areas of difference in relation to the status quo, is treated as a deficit in need of interventions to produce assimilation and conformity, often through punitive means.

The Assimilative Origins of Mass Education in the United States

"*Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is a great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance wheel of the social machinery.*"
—Horace Mann, 1848

Horace Mann is generally credited with being the visionary behind the formation of mass education in the U.S. His plan promoted the assimilation of diverse people into a national identity (Smagorinsky, in press). He sought to take a collection of people—or, at least, White males—from widely disparate origins and use school as a vehicle for molding them into a national culture. In the mid-1800s, the nation of the United States was in a growth spurt that

followed from Western expansion via conquest (of original people and of other European invaders), acquisition (the Louisiana Purchase, itself from conquered lands, a deal that granted the legal right to take possession of large, as-yet unconquered lands occupied by original people), and seizure (from Mexico, of lands originally held by original people who were subjugated by Conquistadors in the early 1500s).

Mann worked in the tradition of conceiving of the U.S. as a "melting pot" that took diverse people and blended them into one, ideally one quite like himself. Standing outside the melting pot of schools and society were Black people, who were still enslaved in the nascent Confederacy and segregated in the Union; original people, who were confined largely to reservations and whose children were sent to boarding schools designed to efface their language and culture and hammer them into a European mold; Brown people from the expansive lands seized as a spoil of the Mexican War of 1846-1848; Asian immigrants, who primarily labored in mines and constructed railroad lines; and women, who might get to teach in schools but were largely excluded from learning in them.

Within the melting pot were the highly differentiated masses that Mann hoped to assimilate. These diverse people included new arrivals from European nations who produced many waves of immigration in the 1800s: Irish potato famine refugees, Scandinavian socialists, Italian stonemasons, Jewish refugees persecuted in their homelands, and many others. Mann believed that through a process of normalization and socialization, schools could help the children of these families view themselves as Americans who spoke one language, recognized one flag and constitution, had the same religion infused throughout their curriculum, and learned the same history from the same Anglocentric perspective. With all herded through the same cultural chute, the emerging generations would be Americanized as one people, at least those who were included in the endeavor. Those deemed mentally ill were sealed off in asylums and institutions, where they were treated more like caged animals than human beings with potential, both in the U.S. (Holtzman, 2012) and around the globe (Burtinshaw & Burt, 2017), although families in wealth provided far better care for their kin than the public provided for people of lesser advantage.

To the modern-day critic from postcolonial perspectives, this assimilative effort has a patronizing, colonizing effect of imposing one imperialistic culture and notion of proper social conduct on all. Mann could be accused of using his power to subordinate people to comply with a social order that reflected his own upbringing. The modern-day multiculturalist might scoff at his lack of respect for diverse cultures. His response might be that at the time, the most urgent task of a rapidly expanding nation populated by diverse people was to create a sense of unity and national identity, using the vehicle of school. This goal, he believed, could only be achieved if the people in school had some shared experience, language, customs, and other forms of social adhesion. He might view latter-day critiques as exhibiting presentism, the application of one era's moral judgments to the conduct of previous generations (Fisher, 1970).

No matter what perspective the 21st century offers on the origins of mass U.S. schooling, the intent at the time was to assimilate the multifarious residents of the United States into a single identity and sense of national affiliation. This belief in the need for cultural assimilation for national unity is not exclusive to the U.S. or even Anglonormative societies (see McKinney, 2017, who developed the term *Anglonormative* for the South African context). Mexican education was founded on a similar principal. Porfirio Díaz—the Mexican military and political leader who served 7 terms as president from 1884-1911, culminating with the Mexican Revolution that exiled him to Spain after his presidency became dictatorial—voiced a similar hope for education. When asked, "[W]hich do you regard as the greatest force for peace, the army or the schoolhouse?" he responded in the manner of a Mexican cultural literacy advocate in the spirit of E. D. Hirsch (1987), or like a Common Core State Standards sponsor of the 21st century:

> The schoolhouse. There can be no doubt of that. I want to see education throughout the Republic carried on by the national Government. I hope to see it before I die. It is important that all citizens of a republic should receive the same training, so that their ideals and methods may be harmonized and the national unity intensified. When men read alike and think alike, they are more likely to act alike. (quoted in Creelman, p. 290)

Porfirio considered such homogeneity to be a positive development in a nation that, well over a century later, recognizes 68 national languages and around 350 dialects. These figures likely reflect the attrition of languages spoken by original inhabitants since Porfirio's proclamation, suggesting that Mexicans of the Porfiriato represented tremendous diversity in cultural, linguistic, and behavioral traditions. Schools, this historical evidence suggests, have often been used as instruments as socialization to the norms of the dominant culture, regardless of which nation is served by the effort.

Assimilative Factors in Producing the Deep Structure of Schools

This project of assimilation has been sustained by other programs operating from the assumption that national order is best served by socialization efforts. I next review how the original mission to normalize students has been sustained by other programs, interventions, and institutions.

Pre-school Socialization

If school is viewed as a socializing mechanism, what should schools do with students whose socialization at home produces a different sort of child from the one approved of in classrooms and hallways? The Head Start program intervenes early, teaching positive parenting, modeled on the values of relatively affluent White families, to parents whose families' lives are affected by poverty. The program assumes that these families will benefit from learning a specific sort of childrearing designed to help their children start school on an even footing with their more affluent, often White peers (Schanzenbach & Bauer, 2016). This effort is aimed at least as much at socialization to behavioral expectations as to readiness in academic areas. This re-socialization is assumed to be optimal even if it causes the same sense of loss that Hobbs (2014) has found accompanies any other sort of racial "passing." Diversity initiatives might support a rainbow of skin colors, but prefers for their inhabitants to act as much as possible like the people that schools were originally designed to serve (see Smagorinsky, 2017).

Schanzenbach and Bauer (2016) conclude that Head Start has had a number of positive effects: "participants graduate from high school, attend college, and receive a post-secondary degree, license, or certification"; Head Start

“causes social, emotional, and behavioral development that becomes evident in adulthood measures of self-control, self-esteem, and positive parenting practices”; and Head Start “increased positive parenting practices for each ethnic group and for participants whose mothers did not have a high school degree” (n. p.). Skeptics question the validity of these claims (e.g., Coulson, 2010), suggesting disagreement over what exactly follows from a Head Start intervention. No matter what the outcome, the program is designed to promote assimilation to the historical ways of schooling, for good or ill; and as I argue in this paper, a monoculture in schools advantages those who are enculturated at home and in communities to the expectations of the system. From a neurodiversity perspective, when the people who lack the anticipated disposition or socialization are forced to do all of the adjusting, they face additional barriers to feeling accepted and thriving within the institution (cf. Lee, 2008).

Teacher Education

In addition to schools, teacher education itself was founded on the notion of assimilation. The name of “Normal Schools” for teacher training was deliberate. They were established to instill norms in teachers, students, schools, curriculum, and instruction to serve the end of social stability. Normal schools responded to diversity the same way that Mann did: by trying to make everyone the same. They were established first in the 1600s in France, and then were adapted in the U.S. in the early 1800s to help homogenize the industrialized workforce, which was composed of immigrants and others enculturated to behaviors that required socialization to preferred norms. Normal schools provided a singular culture within which teachers could structure student’s growth toward national citizenship. The students of these teachers could then be molded to take on dominant values, ways of speaking and interacting, thinking, and entering public life. This value reflected other ways of normalizing people in an expanding nation that included what was then a varied collection of immigrants, native people, ethnic groups, political perspectives, and other divergent types.

Although modern-day teacher education programs typically espouse a commitment to diversity, their relationships with schools often undermine that effort (Smagorinsky, 2010, 2020). Traditional student teaching places teacher candidates under the wing of mentors who are agents of the school,

which is an instrument of homogenization. Schools tend to hire those who provide the best fit, not those who might be disruptive. Mission statements might tout diversity, but schools adhere to norms that often view difference as disabling, disordering, deficient, threatening: as something to be socialized out of those who don't fit the structure of the institution.

Universal Notions of Character

Character education programs, a recurring aspect of U.S. schooling (Smagorinsky & Taxel, 2005), are designed to produce conformity to institutional norms. Purpel (1997) associates the values taught in the formative years of U. S. schooling with Puritan traditions of obedience, hierarchy, and hard work. These values in turn produce a compliant and industrious workforce of the sort that Normal schools were designed to help promote (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). These values, hoped educators, could be adopted by the increasing numbers of immigrants who came to the U. S. in the late 19th century, those whose diversity produced Mann's imperative on conformity. Schools, in the character education movement of the era, were grounded in "pan-Protestantism" (Leming, 2001, p. 66), a secularized version of Christian morality that aspired to make schools into "museums of virtue" (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 7), right down to punctuation: The Illinois State Board of Education, for instance, asserted in 1874 that "Laxness in such matters as spelling betrayed a weakness in [students'] character or a moral lapse" (cited in Lindblom & Dunn, 2003, p. 168).

These programs persist to the present, often claiming to provide a universal, culture-free set of values (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 1992) that critics have argued, in contrast, represent the socialization and ideology of the advocates themselves (Smagorinsky & Taxel, 2005). Positioning them as universal and acultural grants them a status that is beyond question, even as other perspectives are easily available (see Jacobs & Jacobs-Spencer, 2001, for an indigenous perspective on character and character education).

The modern character education movement shares the historical emphasis of moral education on assimilation to dominant culture norms, and is behaviorist in implementation: The success of a program is often measured by changes in disciplinary referrals and similar indicators of conformity and docility. This behaviorist foundation has implications for neurodiversity,

in that the actions of students presumably indicate high or low character, and justify the rejection and punishment of those whose behavior is out of alignment with the orderly conduct of schools. The assumption that these values are universal and have transcended culture make violations something akin to evil, and positions violators as fundamentally in need of repair, banishment, punishment, exclusion, and disdain.

With rare exceptions (e.g., Sackett, 1997; Smagorinsky & Taxel, 2005), mental health is not mentioned in character education programs, documents, and scholarship as the cause of disruptive or socially undesirable behavior. Rather, all problems are attributed to flaws in students' character. Students are judged by their actions—the focus of behaviorism—and not the mental or neurological makeup that produces actions that defy conventional behavioral norms. Conduct associated with the autism spectrum includes unusual behavior, anger management breakdowns, and the presentation of unusual and at times conflictual social skills. Students who act out, even if the source is a neuro-atypical makeup, are treated as low-character people needing to assimilate their conduct to norms that allow for the efficient machinery of schooling.

The Deep Structure of Schools

These foundational assumptions and manifestations, along with many others, have produced a persistent deep structure that organizes school to reward those who best fit established norms, and socializes students from nondominant backgrounds to the values of White professional-class people. I have described the deep structure of school as being comprised of the institutionalized curriculum and assessment, dress codes, codes of conduct, approved speech genres and social languages, conventions for interaction, composition of administration and faculty, physical arrangement of schools, hidden curriculum, and other structural factors that organize the educational process according to a specific value system (Smagorinsky, 2020). Given who had access to schooling originally—able-bodied and neurotypical people, almost exclusively male and White—schools have been, from their founding, designed to validate the conduct of those who have been socialized to preferred deportments at home. The others must be forced to accede to their ways.

Neurodiversity in Relation to Assimilation in School and Society

Problems following from assimilation and conformity in schools to the values of White, able-bodied, heterosexual males have gotten considerable attention in relation to race (Love, 2019), women's rights (American Association of University Women, 1995), LGBTQ experiences (Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrone, Clark, & Truong, 2017), bodily atypicality (Slee, Corcoran, & Best, 2019), and other cultural and demographic factors. Forcing the square peg of autism into the round hole of schooling has also produced difficulties for people exhibiting neurodiversity.

The rhetoric of mission and diversity statements suggests that the differences that are celebrated tend to be individual and ethnic, rather than neurological (see, e.g., the Davenport, Iowa mission statements that open this article). Neurodiversity can produce an unusual set of behaviors that are out of synch with the reward and punishment codes of schools. However, if conditions such as autism are not considered as matters of diversity and thus worth honoring, autistic students become constructed as problems that get in the way of education.

The influence of behaviorism is often at work in how autistic people's differences are constructed and addressed. The widely-practiced Lovaas Applied Behavioral Analysis, for instance, emerged from B. F. Skinner's behaviorist tradition. The goal of the program is to help autistic children "gain communication abilities and skills in education and activities of daily living. The intervention consists of breaking skills down into the simplest components and rewarding children positively and then 'generalizing' the skills into a natural environment" so they may blend in to the point where they are "undistinguishable from their peers socially" (Applied Behavior Analysis, n. d., n. p.). Although this program is offered through the Lovaas facilities rather than in schools, it is designed in part to promote acceptable, nondisruptive behavior in schools. The following abstract from a journal article published in 1977 demonstrates the behaviorism behind autism interventions:

> This study investigated the feasibility of using behavioral techniques to integrate an autistic child into a normal public school class with

> one teacher and 20 to 30 normal children. The results showed: (1) that during treatment by a therapist in the classroom, the child's appropriate verbal and social behaviors increased, and autistic mannerisms decreased; and (2) training teachers in behavioral techniques was apparently sufficient to maintain the child's appropriate school behaviors throughout kindergarten and the first grade. (Russo & Koegel, 1977, p. 579)

Although this study is from 1977, it sounds very much like the 21st century discourse and ideology of Applied Behavior Analysis. As is typical, the burden of change is on the people with the least wherewithal to modify their behavior; and the rest needn't concern themselves about creating a more humane, accepting, supportive environment for neuro-atypical people (see Smagorinsky, 2016). Rather, the deep structure of school is designed to maintain things as they are. Deviations from the norm must be modified to fit the established, enduring patterns of school. The school might have a noble and earnest mission statement extolling its value on diversity, but the underlying structure of the institution is not built for difference, and indeed is designed to stamp it out.

Causes and Consequences for Autism's Interpretation as Disruptive

Politicians view mental health largely in terms of preventing school shootings (Alonso-Zaldivar & Danilova, 2019). The Covid-19 crisis has reduced funding for mental health programs nationally even lower than previous inadequate rates (Ress, 2020), even as mental health problems have increased as a consequence of the stress and confinement it has caused (Turabian, 2020). These developments can only further marginalize autistic students in school, where they are typically held to neurotypical standards for conduct, and punished when they act in accordance with their makeups. Again, the school itself is not considered a vehicle for change. Rather, neuro-atypical students are expected to do all the work of fitting in socially, and tend to be disciplined if they don't.

The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities (2018) presented the problem as follows:

> State regulations (New Jersey Administrative Code Title 6A, Chapter 16 (NJAC 6A:16) Programs to Support Student Development) requires school districts to "develop, adopt, disseminate and implement a code of student conduct that establishes standards, policies and procedures for positive student development and student behavioral expectations" that apply to all students.
>
> ***"Parents may be concerned that their child may be unfairly subjected to disciplinary measures or perceived as a problematic child due to their behavior."***
>
> What about students whose disability includes behavioral challenges? Some children with autism spectrum disorder have behavior that can interfere with their learning. Parents may be concerned that their child may be unfairly subjected to disciplinary measures or perceived as a problematic child due to their behavior. They may worry that their child with autism will be suspended from school or even expelled. (n. p.; emphasis in original)

These worries are well founded. In Hamilton County, Tennessee, a 5-year old boy named Nathan was punished for giving a classmate a hug and another a kiss (Kirk, 2019). The boy's autism, according to his parents, was responsible for his misunderstanding of social cues: "If you don't understand how autism works, you'll think he's acting out or being difficult. But, that's not the situation." His teacher, according to his parents, accused him of sexual activities after his display of affection. His grandmother posted a message expressing her perplexity over the school's actions:

> What do you do when a 5 year child is being labeled a sexual predator and accused of sexual harassment by the school system? It was disclosed that it will go in his record for the rest of his life that he is a sex offender. This child is autistic, he comprehends and functions very different than your typical 5 year. What do you do? Who do you turn to for help when the school will not even listen to the child's doctor when he explains the child's difficulties in his comprehension of simple things such as boundaries. . . . He shouldn't be treated like this. The kid doesn't even understand what sex is.

Nathan's case is illustrative rather than singular. The American Civil Liberties Union (2009), for instance, found that

> students with autism, especially very young students, were physically punished for exhibiting behaviors commonly manifested by children on the autism spectrum. Students with autism often have difficulty with "normal" school behavior or socialization, as "[t]he regression, or failure to progress, affects language, play, and social interaction and occasionally other skills." Common behaviors stemming from the condition may include physical and verbal aggression, repetitive talking on a favorite theme, stubborn resistance, and the constant asking of the same questions. (n. p.)

As a result of this punitive stance, one that maintains the behavioral status quo, autistic students miss school due to suspensions, a problem not confined to the U.S. (Brede, Remington, Kenny, Warren, & Pellicano, 2017; Gleeson, 2016). From there, they often enough end up in prison (Patty, 2012; Rogers, 2019). Schools have been very slow to assume responsibility, instead allowing cases to go to court to defend their actions and maintain their established ways of being. One judge in England ruled that, as reported by Adams (2018),

> Children with special needs who have been excluded from schools for aggressive behavior linked to their condition are being discriminated against, a judge has ruled.
>
> Judge Alison Rowley . . . said it was "repugnant" to consider such behavior as "criminal or antisocial" when it was a direct result of a child's condition and "not a choice". The tribunal in London upheld an appeal involving a 13-year-old boy with special educational needs who had been excluded from school because of aggressive behavior that was linked to his autism.

Courts have often been the agents of change, from school racial desegregation, to LGBTQ+ rights, to physical disability access, and more. They can help force institutions to provide equitable conditions. But the fact that their intervention is required speaks to the entrenched nature of

the deep structure of schools, and how resistant it is to reform unless it is imposed on them.

Problems of Funding

If schools were to institutionalize attention to and care for neuro-atypical students, they would need to invest in an infrastructure that has never existed before. The situation in Florida in 2020 is perhaps representative of the nation's unwillingness to invest funds in creating better conditions for mental health in general:

> Florida lawmakers are set to boost funding for school-based mental health services for the third year in row, an effort to stem a rising youth suicide rate and identify potentially violent students. The money has helped South Florida schools hire more school counselors, psychologists and therapists. Despite the investment, districts have a long way to go until they meet the recommended staffing ratios. (Swisher, 2020)

This statement reflects a common pattern: Support for mental health is not only poorly funded, it has mainly been recommended to lessen school violence, especially that committed by shooters (Loftis, 2015). There has been little concern for the vast majority of affected students, those who are nonviolent, who must cope with a world that is not built to accommodate them. Nor has there been a movement to change the school institution itself to create a more humane space for them.

President Obama appealed for violence-stemming mental health programs during his presidency, during which 41 mass shootings occurred, and during which there were 123 shootings in schools that produced 69 deaths and 110 injuries (CNN, 2019). Shortly after the Newtown school shooting of December 14, 2012, which took place just after Obama's re-election to the presidency, The White House (2013) released a pamphlet outlining why "Now Is The Time" to address mental health:

> to better protect our children and our communities from tragic mass shootings like those in Newtown, Aurora, Oak Creek, and Tucson, there are four common-sense steps we can take right now. The President's

> plan includes: 1. Closing background check loopholes to keep guns out of dangerous hands; 2. Banning military-style assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, and taking other common-sense steps to reduce gun violence; 3. Making schools safer; and 4. Increasing access to mental health services. . . . As President Obama said, "We are going to need to work on making access to mental health care as easy as access to a gun." Today, less than half of children and adults with diagnosable mental health problems receive the treatment they need. While the vast majority of Americans with a mental illness are not violent, several recent mass shootings have highlighted how some cases of mental illness can develop into crisis situations if individuals do not receive proper treatment. We need to do more than just keep guns out of the hands of people with serious mental illness; we need to identify mental health issues early and help individuals get the treatment they need before these dangerous situations develop.

President Obama did note that most people considered mentally ill are nonviolent. But the funding imperative only came after people with severe impairments shot up schools. School shooters, rather than nonviolent people struggling to get through the day, were the targets of attention and intervention.

Like many who are considered threatening in society, as revealed through the Black Lives Matter movement and police assaults on Black people doing nonthreatening, everyday things, the autistic population is often interpreted in ways very different from what they intend or might do. Even to a leader like Obama, who is generally considered to be empathic and understanding, atypical people are among the threats to school safety that need to be addressed. But the emphasis, and thus the stereotype, are on those most out of control, those who become violent and dangerous. Meanwhile, the many students experiencing stress from atypical mental health or neurological makeups get little attention beyond the Individualized Education Program that provides some allowances but does little to change the school institution to make it more accepting and caring.

Funding for mental health is thus focused on violent offenders. Mainstream schools are badly under-resourced and have had a rocky history of implementing mental health programs (Sedlak, 1997). Schools in poor areas

predictably have struggled even more to meet the mental health needs of their students (Askarinam & National Journal, 2016). These problems have persisted over time (Mordock (1990) and are exacerbated by predictable intersections with race and other demographic variables that are associated with bigotry (Alegría, Green, McLaughlin, & Loder, 2015). These efforts in turn mesh uncomfortably with the fact that, as reported by Whitaker et al. (2019), police officers greatly outnumber nurses, social workers, psychologists and nurses in schools. One million, seven hundred thousand students in the U.S. attend schools with police officers but no counselors, and three million more attend schools with police but no nurses.

Schools, then, are ill-prepared for helping neurodivergent students, and those from other atypical makeups, function as accepted members of social streams of activity. These students tend to be treated as threats who are more likely to meet a police officer than a counselor in school, especially when they act out of accordance with rules that reify ableist means of social engagement. The institution serves, protects, and enforces the interests of the status quo, leaving the neuro-atypical population viewed as sick, threatening, and objects of exclusion and punishment.

Acts of Individual Teachers

Within the deep structure of schools, when not tied to teaching scripts of the sort that often frustrate creative teachers (Smagorinsky, Lakly, & Johnson, 2002), some individual teachers may attempt to reconfigure their classrooms to both provide neuro-atypical students with a supportive environment, and help their classmates get educated about neurodiversity, a key element of a supportive environment. In his work in Soviet special education, Vygotsky (1993) argued that, in the case of blind children, "the task is not so much the education of blind children as it is the reeducation of the sighted. The latter must change their attitude toward blindness and toward the blind. The reeducation of the sighted poses a social pedagogical task of enormous importance" (p. 86). The same rule applies to the education of neuro-atypical students and the reeducation of their teachers and classmates.

This reconfiguration requires reflective practice and a willingness to reconceive of teaching. It also depends on a teacher's willingness to acknowledge when a change isn't working and try again with a newly-

informed plan. Bass (2019a, 2019b), for instance, provides honest, unsparing critiques of both his teaching prior to attempting to providing a more humane environment for neurodiversity, and his early, problematic efforts to change the culture and process of his classroom. He illustrates how a committed individual, in a school that grants teachers agency, can create a curriculum, instruction, and environment that teaches neurotypical students about neurodiversity and provides a more sensitive environment for students on the autism spectrum.

Bass (2019a, 2019b) provides teaching narratives that show the challenges faced by any teacher who hopes to create a niche within an institution that otherwise has not recognized the need to change its operation. Teachers in general who try innovative methods or publish about their teaching are often looked at with disdain by their colleagues, who consider their breaks from tradition to be breaches of responsibility or efforts to stand out from the crowd, and respond with envy or resentment (White, 2011). Standing apart from a faculty, especially when colleagues view achievement as a way of standing above a faculty, may invite risks of ostracization from a faculty community, in the manner of crabs in a bucket pulling back those who try to climb out.

Schools thus have many ways of disciplining teachers to conform to established practices and mind their place. The curriculum may limit possibilities for new thinking. Colleagues may police one another's ambitions and initiatives. Plans may fail and produce discouragement that prevents further experimentation. The odds against individuals developing safe spaces in their classroom are great; and the possibility of generating institutional changes based on individual practice is slim. Accommodating neurodiversity in classrooms, then, is difficult to achieve given the depths to which schools are organized to produce compliance and to sustain their historical practices, often kept in line by larger policies that provide the incentives and disincentives that guide practice (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006). Individual efforts tend to take place in larger school settings that remain structured for conformity, creating temporary safe spaces and educational niches that are rarely sustained across the broader experiences of students in school.

How Might Schools Shift their Deep Structure to Meet their Diversity Aspirations?

The most difficult challenge of exploring these issues is arriving at a sound, workable conclusion. I am not a school administrator, or administrator of any type. I've always played more the role that Bass played in his school, working at creating a space without being part of the operational management or governance structure of the institution.

Others, however, have studied this problem from a structural standpoint. Mackenzie and Watts (2011) argue that, based on their work in the UK, some approaches are viable in creating better environments for making neurodiversity a priority in schools. They conclude their review of interventions that may

> support our proposal for acceptance of NDS [neurodiverse spectrum] as a valid and important group of conditions that deserve dedicated services and further development of expertise. We can envisage NDS clinics with multi-disciplinary and multiagency staffing, allowing for developmental assessments, psychiatric and psychological (both educational and clinical) formulations, and input from speech therapists, occupational therapists and educational experts. Such a clinic could be "virtual", allowing staff time to be seconded from other services, and we see no reason for exclusion of staff from the third sector. These "one-stop shops" for NDS would alleviate some of the demand on other services, such as community paediatrics, child and adolescent mental health services, speech therapy clinics and GP surgeries, and free some staff time that could be more usefully integrated into services with all the correct skills that could be used in a more efficient manner. It may seem aspirational to suggest the setting up of new services at this time of financial restraint, but our view is that existing services are already struggling to meet the demand of conditions on the NDS, and regional NDS clinics could be set up within existing resources. Maybe what is needed is a pilot clinic, where data can be collected and productivity evaluated. In fact, with the proposed changes afoot with commissioning, perhaps such a scenario is possible. (p. 36)

These provisions would be very expensive. As they note, in a "time of financial restraint" such investments might seem wishful; and the global economy's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic will undoubtedly strain school budgets even more than when they made this claim in 2011 (Griffith, 2020). Even if these recommendations were fully funded, Mackenzie and Watts's (2011) recommendations would serve neuro-atypical students well on an individual basis, and would create a moderate shift in how schools operate on the margins of the mainstream. They would not, however, provide the wholesale re-education of neurotypical people about their neuro-atypical classmates and students, or promote the conditions that might follow from this new paradigm of acceptance.

Enduring questions would remain even if such programs were implemented. In our introduction to our volume in a *Disability Studies in Education* series (Smagorinsky, Tobin, & Lee, 2019), for instance, we express ambivalence about the question of whether atypical students should be included in the mainstream, or given their own exclusive, less judgmental environment in which to get special, condition-related attention. Similar questions have been raised about the effects of separate schools for girls and women, and institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities that segregate by race. In both cases, the separation is designed to provide a setting in which people historically treated as inferior in mainstream institutions are instead freed of comparative judgments and have the opportunity to serve in leadership roles from which they have traditionally been excluded. Exclusion in this sense is deliberate and designed to promote agency and confidence among traditionally disenfranchised people.

Boldt and Valente (2014) argue that programs created to serve neuro-atypical children in separate settings sometimes can be more hospitable than mainstreaming, even as mainstreaming is widely practiced. Exclusion is potentially problematic too, however. Although Vygotsky (1993) was instrumental in developing special schools of "defectology," he also cautioned against creating a "school for fools" populated by learners needing what is known today as special education.

Such segregation can bring on derision and undermine efforts to create positive feelings among students in need of emotional support and encouragement. How to create separate schools that are not demeaning to

students' feelings of social status is difficult not only for students, but for teachers who might feel like second-class citizens in their exclusion from the mainstream.

The feelings of inferiority produced through exclusion might indeed be the cause of the sort of acting out that leads to the impression that neurodiversity is a violent way of being, a problem that could emerge in either inclusive or exclusive educational arrangements. I remain uncertain about which approach is advisable, and can only come to the preliminary conclusion that neither will work if it has the effect of demoralizing neuro-atypical students and having them develop what Vygotsky (1993) called the "secondary disability" of internalized feelings of inferiority, which he views as far more debilitating than the source (blindness, deafness, and cognitive impairment to him; neuro-atypicality in this conversation) of difference.

Where we were less ambivalent was in our concern for the ethical and educational dilemmas that follow from the question of who decides what is best for others, and whose interests are served by these decisions. If educators take seriously the imperative, "Nothing about us without us" (Charlton, 2000), then having decisions made by administrators with other priorities will likely lead to problems of disenfranchisement and low self-esteem, no matter which approach is adopted. When these decisions are made to sustain schools designed to suit the socialization patterns and bodily makeup of a mainstream population to the exclusion of others, assigning students to segregated environments as a way to preserve a particular set of norms in hallways and classrooms is likely. When the deep structure of schools is impervious to change due to the protection of norms and rejection of difference, all the mission statements in the world won't yield the equitable society that schools claim to seek to produce.

Discussion

This essay has explored the challenges of addressing neurodiversity in a deep, systemic way in schools that have a deep structure that sustains established norms, values, goals, and practices. This entrenched glacier sits beneath the hortatory tip of mission statements proclaiming dedication to diversity. Meeting the noble intentions of diversity statements without

an accompanying reconstitution of how school functions simply will never happen.

Rewarding teacher-research of the sort undertaken by Bass (2019a, 2019b) would be one restructuring method. Merit pay often rewards teachers whose students score high on standardized tests (Pham, Nguyen, & Springer, 2017)—among the most punitively effective means of enforcing status quo education—rather than encouraging their inquiry into providing a more compassionate and supportive setting for young people. The beneficiaries of supporting teacher inquiry would include those on various neurodiversity spectra, and those who surround them: those (including students and adults) who would benefit from a reeducation about neuro-atypical people and how they think and act, as a way of fostering understanding within classrooms via strategies, instructional materials, and explicit supports (Rozema, 2018). Shifting rewards from teaching that bows to the standardized mechanisms of the testing apparatus to teaching that is responsive to the students in teachers' classes would produce a different sort of school. In such schools staffroom conversations might lean toward discussing methods of inquiry, ways of teaching responsively, challenges presented by different sorts of students and possibilities for developing their potential, and other topics related to making schools the sort of caring environments envisioned by Noddings (1984) and others.

This shift would not exclusively produce attention to neurodiversity. It would address any concerns that a school's teachers have about the wellbeing of their students. Undoubtedly neurodiversity would emerge as an issue of interest. In 2020, the racial environment would surely be another, as would health and safety in relation to Covid-19, the heating of the natural environment, and other urgent matters that would benefit from inquiries in school. A restructuring of this sort could change a school culture away from its current hierarchical organization and center people as the impetus for change.

Doing so would suggest the need to eliminate teaching scripts, standardized examinations, and other rigid handcuffs that inhibit teachers' ability to develop relationships and take charge of their own teaching. Such a shift might change the longstanding dynamic in which teachers and students burn each other out through mutual exhaustion, inadequate rewards, feelings of

isolation and alienation, lack of agency or authority, the replication of social hierarchies in school structures, and other feelings related to their lack of appreciation or respect in how the school is run (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991)

From the standpoint of neurodiversity, this shift would make policing students' differences less of an emphasis. Instead, teachers might inquire into their differences and, like Bass (2019a, 2019b), help neuro-atypical students' classmates learn to appreciate their possible contributions and authentically include them in a cultural stream of activity of the sort envisioned by Vygotsky (1993). This measure would produce higher levels of self-esteem among neuro-atypical students and greater social awareness and caring for their classmates. That sort of validation, however, could only follow from a different educational environment than most current approaches to schooling provide.

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