Disrupting Ableism

Innovate. Include. Impact.

What is Ableism?

In an ableist society, it's assumed that the "normal" way to live is as a non-disabled person. It is ableist to believe that non-disabled people are more valuable to society than disabled people.
Source: https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/life-stages/ableism-and-disablism/

"At its heart, ableism is rooted in the assumption that disabled people require 'fixing' and defines people by their disability. Like racism and sexism, ableism classifies entire groups of people as 'less than,' and includes harmful stereotypes, misconceptions, and generalizations of people with disabilities."
Source: https://www.accessliving.org/newsroom/blog/ableism-101/

Examples of Ableism

- Assuming a student needs less challenging work because of a disability
- Designing events or activities without considering accessibility for all
- Mocking or joking about disability
- Speaking for a disabled person (often when they are present)
- Lack of compliance with disability rights laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Segregating students with disabilities into separate classrooms/placements/schools unnecessarily
- Using non-affirming, deficit-based language
- Assuming people with disabilities need to be 'fixed'
- Lack of disability representation
- Assuming someone is not disabled because you cannot see their disability

How to Disrupt Ableism

Reflect & Disrupt

- Ask yourself:
  - Am I making assumptions about someone's capabilities based on their disability?
  - Am I perpetuating stereotypes through my language, expectations, or curriculum?

- Pause, clarify & correct: interrupt ableist comments, jokes, or practices
  - "I'm curious. What was your intention when you said that?"
  - "It sounds like you're making some assumptions that we need to unpack a bit."
  - "I think your intention was positive, but what you said felt_____ to me. Can we talk about it more?"

Build Inclusive Practices

- Provide multiple ways to access and express learning
- Ensure physical spaces, events, and materials are accessible
- Value strengths and identity, not just perceived deficits

For more information, please visit: sipimpact.org

- Always presume competence; people with disabilities can and do learn; they may just need a different format or timeline to show it
- Build an environment that is rooted in belonging and that is foundational to inclusive mindsets

Language Matters

Words shape perceptions. Language preferences vary and may change over time. Use asset-based, respectful, person-first, or identity-affirming language. **If unsure what to say, ask the person.**

Instead of…	Say…
"wheelchair-bound"	"uses a wheelchair"
"suffers from autism"	"autistic person" or "person with autism"
"crazy" or "insane"	Use specific descriptors ("unfair," "challenging")
"IEP student"	"Student with a disability"

Celebrate Disability as Diversity and as an Identity
- Disability is a natural part of human diversity
- Include the voices of people with disabilities in decision-making, lessons, and events

Educate Yourself About Disability Issues
- Understand language usage from an asset-based perspective, recognizing implicit bias associated with deficit-based language
- Learn about the medical model vs. the social model of disabilities
- Listen to and learn from people with lived experience of disability
- Follow, learn from, and support disability organizations:

  - American Association of People with Disabilities
  - Disability Rights and Education and Defense Fund
  - CA State Council on Developmental Disabilities
  - Easterseals Disabilities Services
  - Open Future Learning

  - Disability Justice
  - The Othering and Belonging Institute
  - National Center for Learning Disabilities
  - Disability Scoop

Why Disrupting Ableism Matters?
- Impacts a person's sense of belonging and self-worth
- Creates systemic barriers to learning and opportunities
- Ableism undermines human dignity by assigning less worth to people with disabilities
- Reinforces harmful stereotypes and exclusion
- Disability is one of the largest minority groups (approx. 10% of the world's population)
  Source: https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/toolaction/pwdfs.pdf

For more information, please visit: **sipimpact.org**

SIP

Supporting Innovative Practices

Resources
For more information and resources, visit: https://www.padlet.com/SIPimpact/Ableism

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