


Chapter 12

Could There Be an AutCrit?

Reframing Delivery of Autism Inclusion Curriculum for Equity

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ABSTRACT

DisCrit, critical race theory, disability rights, deficit thinking, and critical PR all lend themselves to a strong argument for autism inclusion in general education settings. In this chapter, an inclusion framework based upon multidisciplinary scholarship is offered for use across not only teacher preparation, but also industry sectors, higher education, K12 districts, and school sites. Theoretically, the multidisciplinary scholarship leading to this curriculum was detailed with a new proposed AutCrit scholarship examined and considered. The tools of a future with a possible AutCrit scholarship would use new tools and new ways of thinking built on the critical scholarship and rejecting tools of historic oppression that led to the challenges that both individuals with autism and the practices of inclusion face in parallel today.

BACKGROUND

Unspeakable violence or unthinkable tragedy affect individuals with autism with disparity as they attempt to peacefully lead their lives: Kenneth French, Elijah McClain, Paul Lee, Eyad Hallaq, and Feda and Mu Almaliti are but a few examples. Inclusion, indeed, is a matter of life and death (Nerren, 2021), yet inclusion is broken as it is practiced today. To say *inclusion is broken* comes from the critical scholarly literature (Annamma, & Handy, 2021; Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Annama et al., 2018; Annamma, et al., 2013; Connor, et al., 2016; Cizek, 2017, 2020; Sólorzano et al., 2005). Without critical scholarship, this could not be said. Rather, something technical, or complicated or watered-down might be substituted in its place. It is because of critical scholarship that the problems affecting inclusion can be stated, and therefore, subsequently addressed. Scholars can and should do better to separate the relics of a past filled with separation and segregation as it pertains to inclusion. In this chapter, critical scholar-

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ship across multiple disciplines will be discussed and a critical inclusion scholarship will be proposed under the newly proposed idea of an *AutCrit* thread of scholarship.

Proposing new scholarship and new approaches is essential to the success of inclusion. To this day much of inclusion is framed in the context of oppressive scholarship of the past. This practice will continue to be problematic unless it is replaced. In a precursor to Kaufman's (2017) work, Lazarsfeld and Merton (2000) asked important questions about what they called "propaganda as a social objective" (p.27). Their questions highlight the need for ethical use of framing, with a deep acknowledgement that framing issues can be deeply problematic or deeply beneficial, and that both are possible using the same tools (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 2000).

One example of tools that can be constructive or problematic, is the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale. The current Vineland test helps to identify and diagnose autism. Yet, the modern-day Vineland comes from the Vineland Social Maturity Scale of the 1930's (Saulnier, 2018). The original Vineland came from a research facility that put eugenics ideas to practice including atrocities of segregation and sterilization (Ilyes, 2020). These practices led to the state hospitals that were later largely disbanded in the 1970's due to civil rights violations of individuals with differences who have the right to live free lives. Through it all, Vineland persists. Vineland tracks directly back to hurt and harm, and also, today, helps parents and families access services for assistance and support.

In another example, in an overlap of communication and education, the scholar Yerkes (1908) developed arousal theory. This older theory describes a process where the right level of arousal for the task created a significant increase in response (Yerkes, 1908). In the classroom, this theory states that the right amount of stimuli can increase performance in learning. However, the creator of this theory was similarly a head mastermind of eugenics being institutionalized into society as a whole and into the institution of higher education specifically (Selden, 1999). When this theory gets used or build upon it supports a framework of racism, white supremacy, and hateful ideology. There needs to be new theories and new practices that may not be steeped in such a dark part of our history.

Surely, under a critical framework, which will be explicated in the following sections, we can do better. Under a proposed AutCrit framework, we can consider alternatives to useful tools that come from pain and segregation. As Lazarsfeld & Merton (2000) stated, framing can be deeply problematic or deeply beneficial, and that both are possible using the same tools. It is up to the user to stay deeply connected to the ethical obligations of this tool, especially when using it with the historically oppressed or marginalized, to strongly consider and act upon the ethics involved.

CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES

Nepantla

Nepantla is a type of "inbetween-ness" (Anzaldúa et al., 2012; Scott & Tuana, 2017). It is the space between opposing ideas, identities, or expectations (Anzaldúa et al., 2012; Scott & Tuana, 2017). Nepantla makes space for changing and transformation even when they conflict (Anzaldúa et al., 2012; Scott & Tuana, 2017). Nepantla centers history and lived experience, even when that history or lived experience may be on the edge or in conflict with itself (Anzaldúa et al., 2012; Lizárraga & Gutiérrez, 2018). The autism community scholarship and lived experience clearly connects to nepantla without using the term, stating that the up-down connects nuance and conflict while denying deficit thinking

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