

Democratic exclusion of disabled persons

Education in society is meant to be used as a means of transforming individuals into contributing citizens in the society by transmitting the values and beliefs of the dominant culture within the society onto the students who will become the next generation of leaders for that society. The education system thus is based around the creation of a uniform experience for all students in order to protect the values of the majority, and in doing so attempts to erase the differences between individuals and minority groups that make up the society as a whole. This is especially true when considering the elimination of views and achievements of minority groups in society; in history this is caused by the focus on the 'grand narrative' which almost exclusively focuses on the achievements of the great men in society. The current view of education in society is built around liberal ideological assumptions about the role of citizenship and what constitutes a citizen, which is in turn built around the humanist principles of the Enlightenment period. These principles are focused around the need to establish and demonstrate competencies in rational thought creation, autonomous survival in society and democratic involvement. While these principles are easy to establish for most minority groups, they are more difficult for disabled citizens to accomplish, particularly the principles of autonomous survival and democratic involvement. Many criticisms of liberal thought continue to accept the underlying humanist principles that underpin the liberal consensus on what constitutes a full citizen.

One of the major problems behind the dominant liberal ideology is the need to medicalize disabled persons as a justification for segregating disabled people as not entirely worthy of citizenship in society. By making the claim that it is the medical malady that is at fault instead of a problem with accessibility at a structural level, humanists are able to claim that the societal structure is already able to cater to all people and that those with disabilities are simply limited by their differentiated development, relieving society from having to re-evaluate itself and adjust to address the concerns of disabled persons. Critics of liberal citizenship theory note that with facilitated communication programs, even individuals with severe cognitive disabilities and disorders are able to demonstrate an understanding of knowledge being taught to their fellow classmates, which indicates the ability to have rational thoughts within their minds, even if it becomes difficult to express those thoughts to the rest of society. This spawned the idea of the 'cyborg citizen', which is a hybrid of machines and the person, where the machines serve as a means of facilitating and expressing the beliefs of the person and expanding the definition of the self to exist beyond the flesh and into the supports of the individual. In this way advocates of disabled persons and critics of liberal humanist thought are able to prove that disabled persons are able to demonstrate the humanist principles.

Within the context of democratic citizenship, we see that the societal structure is based around a standard constructed on the needs of the majority in society, and minorities are forced to make adaptations to fit those systems. It promotes a hegemony that on its face promises democratic voice and the ability to interact with the system as equals, but in reality ensures that those who are born as minorities in society are systemically discriminated against and have a reduced ability to have their democratic voice heard in society.