De-centering the Myth of Normalcy in Education: A Critique of Inclusionary Policies in Education through Disability Studies

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Abstract

The intention of this paper is to inhabit a mode of exploration that foregrounds the hopeful possibility that teaching and learning might be otherwise than the continued perpetuation of hierarchies of exclusion. In focusing on this hopeful possibility, this paper focuses on two related questions. First, how does the story of normalcy continue to maintain and sustain its grip on education through inclusionary policies and practices? Second, what are the effects of this domineering narrative upon the lives of children with disabilities in our public schools? Numerous scholars in the field of disability studies with a wide array of backgrounds and research interests have offered considerable insight into how education works very hard to represent itself as a smooth road of progress and success. In part, this paper will offer a review of the literature within disability studies. The work of scholars such as Baker (2002, 2015), Nirmala Erevelles (2000, 2011, 2013) and Roger Slee (2008, 2013), who offer insights into the systemic pervasiveness of exclusionary practices in schools, will be examined as a method of exploring the tactics of the hegemonic narrative of normalcy. This paper will also offer a literature review of the work of disability studies scholars such as Annamma (2014), Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2013) and Connor (2009), who offer insights into the harm that maintaining normalcy continues to perpetuate through narratives from the perspective of disabled youth and children. In examining how hierarchies of exclusion manage to be continually reformed from the varying perspectives of these scholars, my hope is to discuss how, despite appearances to the contrary, possibilities remain for undoing the grip of normal by considering the ways in which disability studies contributes to our understanding of teaching and learning with and through differences.

Keywords: inclusion, normalcy, disability, narrative, education

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Décentrer le mythe de la normalité dans l'éducation: Une critique des politiques d'inclusion dans l'éducation à travers les études sur le handicap

Résumé

L'intention de cet article est d'habiter un mode d'exploration qui met en avant la possibilité d'espoir que l'enseignement et l'apprentissage pourraient être autrement que la perpétuation des hiérarchies d'exclusion. En mettant l'accent sur cette possibilité d'espoir, ce document se concentre sur deux questions connexes. Premièrement, comment l'histoire de la normalité continue-t-elle à maintenir et à soutenir son emprise sur l'éducation à travers des politiques et des pratiques d'inclusion? Deuxièmement, quels sont les effets de ce récit dominateur sur la vie des enfants handicapés dans nos écoles publiques. De nombreux chercheurs dans le domaine des études sur le handicap avec un large éventail des milieux et d'intérêts de recherche ont offert un aperçu considérable de la façon dont le travail de chercheurs comme Baker (2002, 2015), Nirmala Erevelles (2000, 2011, 2013) et Roger Slee (2008, 2013), qui offre un aperçu de l'omniprésence systémique des pratiques d'exclusion dans les écoles, sera examiné comme une méthode d'explorer la tactique du récit hégémonique de la normalité. Cet article offrira également une revue de la littérature sur le travail des spécialistes des études sur le handicap comme Annamma (2014), Hodge et Runswick-Cole (2013) et Connor (2009), qui donnent un aperçu du mal que le maintien de la normalité continue de perpétuer du point de vue des enfants et des jeunes handicapés. En examinant comment les hiérarchies de l'exclusion peuvent être continuellement réformées à partir des perspectives variées de ces chercheurs, mon espoir est de discuter comment, malgré les apparences du contraire, des possibilités demeurent pour défaire l'emprise du normal en considérant comment les études sur le handicap contribuent à notre compréhension de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage avec et à travers les différences.

Mots clefs

Inclusion; normalité; handicap; récit; éducation

> At the core of 'cosmic fear' lies, let us note, the nonentity of the frightened, wan and mortal being compared to the enormity of the everlasting universe; the sheer weakness, incapacity to resist, vulnerability of the frail and soft human body that the sight of the 'starry heavens' or 'the material mass of the mountains' reveals; but also the realization that it is not in human power to grasp, comprehend, mentally assimilate that awesome might which manifests itself in the sheer grandiosity of the universe. That universe escapes all understanding. Its intentions are unknown, its next steps are unpredictable… And so cosmic fear' is also the horror of the unknown: the terror of uncertainty. (Bauman, 2004, p. 46)

I cannot resist being captured by Zigmunt Bauman's description of human vulnerability within the context of the awe-inspiring universe. I feel humbled by the vastness of the unknown and unreachable that is beyond the knowing of my "frail and soft human body" (Bauman, 2004, p. 46). Laced within Bauman's description of the vulnerability of human life is the "cosmic fear", which he links to the human desire to escape into certainty (Bauman, 2004, pp. 46-47). To escape the fear of the unknown, Bauman (2004) indicates that humans have deployed, in a variety of forms, a notion of "us" versus "them". At different points in history and in different contexts, the "us" is depicted as being on the side of God, on the side of the Law, and on the side of Science (Bauman, 2004). "Them" are the abject Others "who are the true planetary 'parasites', 'scroungers' and 'spongers'" (Bauman, 2004, p. 44). "Cosmic fear" of the vastness of the universe slips very quickly into an (un)reasonable fear of "them". Fear as embedded in experience of the universe and in experiences of "us" versus "them" feels "natural" and "normal" (Bauman, 2004). Yet, within Bauman (2004), there is a recognition that this belief is a social construct whose capture we must strive to resist so as to avoid being enclosed in a "circle of certainty" from which escape may not be possible (Freire, 2000, p. 38). Similarly, beyond the fear depicted in Bauman's description of the universe, his words also seem to point to the beauty that lies within this uncertain and vulnerable space through which we experience the awe and wonder of the unknown “of the starry heavens” (Bauman, 2004, p. 44).

Inspired by Bauman’s evocation of both fear and wonder amidst our social relations, this paper considers the hopeful possibility that teaching and learning might be otherwise than the continued perpetuation of hierarchies of exclusion. In focusing on this hopeful possibility, this paper will primarily explore two related questions. First, how does the story of normalcy continue to maintain its grip on education through inclusionary policies and practices? Second, what are the effects of this domineering narrative upon the lives of children with disabilities in our public schools? Numerous scholars in the field of disability studies with a wide array of backgrounds and research interests have offered considerable insight into how education works very hard to represent itself as committed to progress and success. It would not be feasible or possible to include a thorough literature review of these contributions here.[1] However, this paper attempts to focus on two intermeshed components of this scholarship as a way to both consider the pernicious effects of maintaining normalcy, as well as the ongoing resistance to “normal”. The terms normal or normalcy in this paper are understood to refer to the male, middle class, Eurocentric, heteronormative figure that sustains its hegemony as the standard other versions of humanity are measured against. One component to be considered in this section resides within the work of disability studies scholars such as Baker (2002, 2015), Erevelles (2000, 2011, 2013) and Slee (2008, 2013). These scholars offer insights into the systemic pervasiveness of exclusionary practices in schools that continue to sustain their adherence to “normal” despite or perhaps because of attempts to reform policies and practices. The second component to be considered resides within the work of disabilities studies scholars such as Annamma (2014) and Connor (2009) who share narratives from youth to convey the harm that maintaining normalcy continues to perpetuate. In foregrounding the work of disability studies scholars, I consider how narrative remains a critical tool in the continued efforts to undo the grip normalcy sustains upon teaching and learning practices. Through this analysis, I contend that Bauman's evocation of both wonder and cosmic fear is a call to embrace one another amidst our partialities and vulnerabilities as we reimagine how we might teach and learn with and through disability.

The Story of Normalcy: Tactics of Reforming the Processes of Hegemony and Marginalization through the Rhetoric of Inclusion

Coming to know what constitutes the "normal" human remains a pervasive and ubiquitous focus of educational policies and practices. According to Tanya Titchkosky and Rod Michalko: "normalcy matters because it is understood as the legitimate way of being in the world and the only version of the good life" (2009, p. 5). To adhere to a belief that attaining and maintaining normalcy is the most valued human aspiration has resulted in multiple professional institutions, including special education, to remain devoted to curing and rehabilitating disability (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009). For example, *Education for All (2005)*, a policy document guiding teaching practices in Ontario, describes the present context for students with disabilities in schools.

> According to school board statistics, most students with special needs spend at least 50 per cent of their instructional day in a regular classroom…It is imperative …that teachers assist every student to prepare for the highest degree of independence possible. (p. 2)

This statement is asserted without question, and thus within the first two pages of this policy document, the story we are told about students with disabilities begins to take shape as one of partial, if any, presence within the regular classroom. Not all students are part of the regular classroom all the time. We are also told that attaining “the highest degree of independence possible” is not only the most valued aim of education, but it is also a goal that values a version of selfhood that refuses to acknowledge its inescapable dependencies and vulnerabilities. The insistence in educational policy documents that some humans are valued more than others are, perpetuates a belief in normalcy that places disability in the category of unwanted “other”. The notion of academic goods and progress, so highly monitored and revered within schools, can ultimately be seen as rooted in a fiction based on a perpetuation of the status quo that ensures the group defined as “us” maintains their access to power and privilege, while the group defined as “them” is perpetually deemed surplus and expendable (Bauman, 2004; Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009).

Questioning the ways in which educational policy and practices adhere to sustaining the hegemony of normalcy, which offers conditional inclusion by degrees, requires exploring how subjectivity continues to be embedded in a Western regime of power/knowledge that values some ways of being human while fearing others. Focusing on how mechanisms of power/knowledge perpetuate hierarchies of exclusion by recirculating the story of normal, Baker (2002) succinctly states:

> The mutually constituting effects of power/knowledge and their subjectivity and internalization effects inhere in the well-intended evaluation efforts and classificatory practices of major social institutions of schools and universities and in the very efforts to rethink and reshape them. (p. 696)

Along with the keen influence of Foucault in her analysis, what is expressed in this quotation, are the ways in which much of Baker's work has questioned how the narrative of normal has managed to reform and sustain itself, despite the enormous cost to those who find themselves at the intersections of race, gender, class, disability, religion, and/ or sexual orientation. One of Baker's (2002, 2015) key contributions is in demonstrating the acute and undeniable linkages between the striving for superiority in mind, body, and social behaviour with the eugenics movement and the subsequent presence of these logics in public schooling. One of her strategies in interrogating the hegemony of normal is tracing a timeline going back to the 19th century and the eugenics movement of Sir Francis Galton (Baker, 2002). While following the reshaping of this movement from the negative associations of its past (e.g. sterilization programs), to its taken for granted presence as necessary "quality control of the nation's population" through which public education plays a key role (Baker, 2002, p. 664), she convincingly argues that the eugenics movement of the nineteenth century remains active in current public-school policies and practices. She also points to what she terms "the cultural biases inherent in perfecting technologies for helping to develop appropriate skills and values" as sustaining the special education model in public schools through a rhetoric of care that in actuality relies on the racist hierarchies of eugenicists from the 19th century up until our own time (Baker, 2002, p. 683). As part of tracing this seemingly never-ending, reforming line of normalcy, Baker (2002) applies Foucauldian concepts such as "superiority effects", "dividing practices", and "governmentality" to both interrogate and critique what she terms "the hunt for disability" that schools remain engaged in as part of their "segregationist function" (pp. 669-681).

Baker (2002) interrogates the “power/knowledge nexus” to ask, “after the diversionary function of the exam and the normalizing function of schooling is exposed…is it…ever okay to think of some humans as normal and some humans as not?” (p. 697).

Baker’s question is not new. Yet, despite the fact that numerous people both past and present have contemplated what it means to be human, the question remains in need of continual renewal due to the pernicious ways both the field of education and society as a whole engage in the ongoing reproduction of normalcy that generates the conditions of exclusion and marginalization of disability. The domineering nature of this narrow/slim path of success, has paradoxically dispersed and enforced itself upon virtually every corner of the globe. Mitchell and Snyder (2003), offer a distinct yet linked contribution to Baker’s (2002, 2015) analysis of exclusionary school policies and practices. To the extent that Mitchell and Snyder (2003) and Baker (2002) respectively have contributed to the understanding in disability studies of the historically rooted intersections between categories of disability and race, their work can be seen as allegiant to the cause of attempting to loosen the grip normalcy has on schooling and society. However, Baker (2002, 2015) is rooted in the fields of educational history and Foucauldian analysis to support her contributions to disability studies in ways that Mitchell and Snyder are not. Mitchell and Snyder tend to favour the scholarly fields of cultural studies in their research and analyses. For example, their piece entitled, “The eugenic Atlantic: Race, disability, and the making of an international eugenic science, 1800-1945”, applies the work from sociologist and cultural studies scholar, Gilroy to emphasize the domineering logics of oppression and exclusion that found/finds routes of dispersal and continue to have devastating effects for disabled and black bodies on both sides of the Atlantic (Mitchell & Snyder, 2003). While broaching the ramifications of eugenics by drawing upon different fields of study from that of Baker (2002), Mitchell and Snyder (2003) also work to demonstrate the devastating linkages between the field of eugenics, the medical community, and scientific discourses around the “ideal” human. According to Mitchell and Snyder (2003), cross-border connections amongst the medical community and scientists promoting eugenics persisted throughout wartime. “Even among countries who were engaged military enemies at the time, scientific and cultural agreement about the menace of ‘defectiveness’ transcended battlefields and diplomatic impasses as an ideological formation” (Mitchell & Snyder, 2003, p. 846). Mitchell’s and Snyder’s (2003) insights regarding the evident acceptance and dispersal of a domineering logic intent upon marginalizing and or erasing from view anyone who was placed in the category of disability or racial inferiority both before and during World War II, remains relevant today due to the undeniable educational push in both policy and practice to value some humans more than others in ways that continue to negatively impact the lives of disabled peoples. The racist, eugenicist logics of the 19th and early 20th century that foregrounded a fear of the “other” remain sustained through educational practices and policies that only include disability by conditional degrees and that serve to safeguard normalcy. Normalcy as able-bodied, heteronormative, middle class, white, and male, remains the measure of conditional inclusion for other versions of being and becoming human.

In offering his analysis of social exclusion, Slee (2013) notes that “… it is everywhere and it has been there for a very long time. In this way, the fact of exclusion has come to be seen as natural; it is a part of the order of things” (p. 897). Slee’s insight about how exclusion is taken for granted as “natural” might help to explain the way in which independence makes an appearance in the regular classroom as a “natural” criteria for certain inclusions. Similarly, Erevelles (2011) also points out the ways that the rhetoric of inclusion is actually used to perpetuate continued practices of segregating students with disabilities. Erevelles (2011) states, “Inclusion presupposes what the “regular” student is like, against which the Other student is measured and found wanting… [and] serve[s] to unwittingly construct certain student subjectivities as deviant, … thereby justifying their exclusion” (pp. 2157-2158). Through his own analysis of the “paradigmatic rhetoric of inclusion” within the lens of the expressed desire of the fields of rehabilitation and special education to fix and cure disability, like Erevelles (2011) and Slee (2013), Michalko (2009) also questions the taken-for-granted notions of what appears to be “natural”, “normal”, and “regular”. According to Michalko (2009), “despite the commitment to inclusion, the very idea of “special education” is built upon a sense of exclusion. Ironically, disabled students are excluded from their non-disabled peers by invoking the paradigmatic ideology of ‘inclusion’” (p. 71). Though they analyze the dilemma of conditional inclusion of disability in schools from distinct contexts and circumstances, when read in conjunction with one another, Slee (2013), Erevelles (2011), and Michalko (2009), foreground how the narrative of normalcy is deeply implicated in the ongoing efforts to exclude to disability.

Public schools, it seems, are always in need of (re)form. Yet oddly enough, Baker (2002, 2015), Slee (2008, 2013), and Erevelles (2011, 2013), among others, contend that efforts at reforming schools to include children with disabilities have led to little if any substantive improvements in their experiences of schooling. Titchkosky

(2011) asks, “How might we deal with the paradoxical fact that bureaucratic changes regarding access and disability policy can actually be a time of no change within some structures?” (p. 93). Titchkosky (2011) considers this question within the context of her analysis of institutional policies and procedures at the post-secondary level of education. However, it also appears relevant to the work of disability studies scholars who focus on elementary schooling. This is especially relevant as it relates to current popular terms and policies in the areas of inclusion and brain-based learning. The work of Slee (2008, 2013), Erevelles (2011, 2013) and Baker (2002, 2015) are offered here as representative examples of the critique of inclusionary school policies that perpetuate rather than diminish the dominating cultural belief in normalcy by demonstrating that criteria for inclusion into the mainstream system has not changed. Assessment and evaluation policies continue to compare children based on abilities deemed as normal for a particular age and gender of a child, while somehow disproportionately placing black students as well as students from lower socioeconomic classes into special education with more frequency (Baker 2002, 2015; Erevelles, 2011, 2013; Slee 2008, 2013). Alongside the seemingly warm and welcoming use of the word “inclusion” in school policies, another popular term circulating in schools is “brain-based learning”. Baker (2015) demonstrates how the rhetoric around building and improving on brain capacity is directly linked to the history of the eugenics movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. She states, “[C]hildren labeled as having ‘severe cognitive impairment’ as well as children coded as ‘the indigenous child’ and the ‘urban child’…become stereotypes, figures and fantasies within the body politic, subtly presumed to be ‘holding the nation back’” (Baker, 2015, p. 188). It seems that both the terms inclusion and brain-based learning are masks intended to maintain the privileging of normal while marginalizing any “other” deemed outside this narrow band of attributes that comprises normalcy.

Thus far, this paper has outlined the work of some disability studies scholars who have demonstrated the ways in which current educational policies and practices continue to adhere to and reform an educational structure that perpetuates hierarchies of exclusion. A great deal of effort is required to sustain and continually reform the hegemonic placement of normalcy. However, one of the reasons the story of normal must constantly seek to assert its hegemony is because, ultimately, this story remains a partial and inadequate frame through which to know and be in the world. Normalcy’s hegemony is justifiably questioned and precarious due to its inescapable partiality that insists on masking itself as an objective standard of measure for humanity. “It is the mission of stories to select, and it is their nature to include through exclusion and to illuminate through casting shadows…. Without selection, there would be no story” (Bauman, 2004, p. 17). This insight from Bauman (2004), serves as a reminder that the conundrum of a story, a policy document, and/or an educational structure is that it requires exclusion through selection. The conundrum becomes a blatant injustice when one version of being human (e.g., Western Man) imposes a belief in its own superiority, while diminishing the multiple ways of being in the world that are embodied as lived realities among those who find themselves at the intersections of race, gender, class, disability, religion and/or sexual orientation. This is evident in the work of Chimamanda Adichie (2009), among others[2], who criticizes the hegemony of Western stories that have colonized the globe both in the realm of theory and in the daily practice of living. A critique of the hegemony of Western Man is also evident in the work of Critical Race scholars, such as Richard Delgado (1989), who have long seen the power within the inherent partiality of stories to both oppress and emancipate humans. “Counter stories, which challenge received wisdom…can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414). Through the de-centring of the story of normalcy as epitomized in the depiction of Western Man as the objective measure of what it might mean to be human, Delgado (1989) and Adichie (2009) invite us to reimagine our relations amidst one another through a plurality of stories.

Many Stories: The Role of Disability Studies in De-Centring Normalcy

The work of disability studies scholar Annamma (2014) exemplifies the ways in which narratives from marginalized groups continue to erode the import of normalcy and contribute to the plurality of stories that insist upon the de-centring of Western Man as the measure of humanity. In her narrative and intersectional analysis of young women of colour with disabilities, Annamma (2014) offers a significant critique of the role of normalcy within the lives of her research participants.

> Erykah thought the special education label was a mechanism for exclusion and increased surveillance. She believed it allowed her teachers to watch her closely and send her away whenever they did not want her present. Whether or not her perceptions were accurate, when girls are already being surveilled because they are of color and incarcerated, a disability label allows the lens of surveillance to focus on them, increasing the risk of discipline. (p.6)

Annamma (2014) insightfully suggests that the principles responsible for segregation in education are intended to foreground as normative a version of the human—that not only persists in marginalizing difference(s), but also implicates education as a mode of discipline and surveillance. Elsewhere, Annamma (2014) foregrounds the necessity of educators to learn with and from the narratives of disabled youth so as to refuse the hegemony of normalcy. According to the Annamma's (2014) findings: "If a teacher took a relational approach to discipline, one characterized by care and attention to student's needs, there was less student defiance" (p. 2). Annamma here considers the possibility that being human with each other might entail finding ways to converse through difference with the desire for difference. Her analysis prompts me to wonder: what if the child identified and labelled with a Developmental Delay, Mild Intellectual Delay, Learning Disability, Autism Spectrum Disorder, etc., was viewed not as a child in need of reform or rehabilitation, but as a human becoming human with other humans? What if we could (re)imagine teaching and learning as multidirectional rather than as a unidirectional flow from adult to child, abled to disabled, rich to poor, West to the rest? What if, as Michalko (2009) poignantly articulates, we "engage with the disabled body as an occasion to theorize and to re-move 'normalcy' to the place to 'think with' rather than a thing to 'thoughtlessly be'" (p. 73)?

The unfortunate reality for many children and adults who live with disability, is that the fields of education, medicine, science, and the law keep renewing their commitment to a version of normalcy based on unjust frameworks of exclusion. Within the last three decades or so, disability studies has continued to use the tool of narrative to question the certainty that comprises the discourse of normalcy as a way of resisting institutional and systemic (re)formations of "normal".[3] In addition to the work of Annamma (2014) outlined here, examples of some of the uses of narrative can be found in the work of Connor (2009), as well as in that of Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2013). Connor's (2009) piece applies the narrative tool of portraiture, along with insights from scholars in the field of Black Feminist Thought, to centre the stories of eight students labelled learning disabled at the secondary level. Connor (2009) shares "Michael's" story, whereby Michael offers the following description of his experience with special education: "I say…it's like prison, once you learn your lesson, you should be released. When I was in there, I really wanted to kill myself, because that's the most embarrassing thing to a kid" (p. 456). As Connor (2009) demonstrates, Michael's story of disappointment and marginalization is one of countless others who remind us of the consequences of exclusionary schooling practices. Within the context of the experiences of elementary age children, Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2013) share narratives of families and their disabled children and the limited opportunities for recreational play. This work serves as a reminder of the ways community recreational programs intended for public use are implicated along with schools in excluding disability. What I hope these short narratives from disability studies represent is the ever-present possibility of undoing the domineering presence of normalcy even while normalcy continues to (re)form itself. The power of multiple narratives to de-centre the hegemony of normalcy remains a profound tool of resistance both despite and because of its foregrounding of the exclusive partialities that narratives depend upon to function. The fact that the hegemony of normalcy has to work so hard at remaking itself is an indicator of its fragility even as it attempts to mask itself as impenetrably strong.

Concluding Thoughts

In order to outline some of the key methods used by the narrative of normal to replicate and reform itself, this paper has focused on a literature review of some of the work within disability studies. In large part, the institutional/structural perspectives offered by Baker (2002, 2015), Slee (2008, 2013) Erevelles (2000, 2011, 2013) and Mitchell and Snyder (2003) were intended to offer a glimpse into the ways in which regimes of power/knowledge that comprise normalcy use a variety of tactics to continue to keep retelling its story. An enormous amount of work goes into sustaining the narrative of normal. But it seems that one of the reasons the story of normal works so hard is due to the efforts to resist its grasp. There are numerous counter-narratives, as evidenced in the work of disability studies scholars such as Annamma (2014) and Connor (2009) that demonstrate how the regime of normalcy impacts disability across many intersecting vectors of oppression such as race and class. Delgado (1989) states,

> Reality is not fixed, not a given. Rather, we construct it through conversations, through our lives together. Racial and class-based isolation prevents the hearing of diverse stories and counter stories. It diminishes the conversation through which we create reality, construct our communal lives. (p. 2437)

Despite the apparent sense of hopelessness that characterizes the lived reality of many humans and in particular, humans labelled with disabilities who find themselves conditionally included and/or marginalized, Delgado’s (1989) words here outline a hopeful belief in the power of narrative in all its partialities. The possibilities of the next moment or series of moments amidst one another are simultaneously infused with both the hope and fear of uncertainty. How might we engage in teaching and learning with one another in ways that thrive through and in our differences? How might educational structures, policies, and practices be reconfigured to avoid unidirectional impositions of knowledge while cultivating multiple intersecting vectors of living and being in the world? How might we ensure that our social structures are accessible to varying embodiments in ways that foreground our mutual responsibility to one another? Inevitably, disability scholars, among other scholars such as Delgado (1989), Adichie (2009), and Bauman (2004), invite us to engage in the realm of the social, where building community amidst partialities requires engagements with differences as an integral and desirable component in thriving and sustaining one another.

To conclude, the insistence of reforming hegemonic structures of normalcy that continue to oppress, marginalize, and exclude within educational policies and practices allows for a single story and the dangers of its domination (Adichie, 2009) to be lived far too often as harsh realities for disabled peoples. In his work, *Wasted Lives* (2004), Bauman offers a poignant analysis of the “cosmic fear” referred to at the start of this essay. He notes the ways “cosmic fear” has driven the project of modernity to value some humans more than others while rationalizing (as if that is possible) the dehumanization and expendability of other humans who find themselves excluded from the “us” category. The vastness of the “starry heavens”, Bauman (2004) contends, has led to an awe and wonder of the unknown and to an awareness of “vulnerability and uncertainty” that human beings have sought to and continue to seek to escape. He relates this escape to a desire to build structure and quotes from an allegory written by Franz Kafka: “[T]he building that one generation after another constructs is sinister because this structure is to guarantee a security that men cannot attain…” (as cited in Bauman, 2004, p. 50). In many ways, the maintenance of the status quo in school structures can be seen as an attempt to find security in the fiction of normal that cannot be attained. As Erevelles (2000) states, “that these assumptions of ‘normalcy’ or ‘wholeness’ are themselves illusions becomes vividly apparent when one examines how constructions of the normative self are in fact predicated on the existence of the disabled Other” (p. 35). What if instead of seeking escape into a false sense of security in which some (but not all) are included, we began to live and breathe in the awe and wonder of our vulnerability and uncertainty within ourselves and each other? It seems that to live up to its claims, calls of inclusionary policies that express their intent to provide an education for all need to reconsider the hardness and supposed certainties of perpetuating the hegemony of normalcy. Perhaps our educational policy and practice might begin to accept its own “frail and soft human body” among the multitude of other bodies (Bauman, 2004, p. 46) in ways that foreground our inescapable partialities, as well as the uncertainties embedded in the next moments of learning with one another.

Notes

[1] There are several scholars within the field of disability studies who are applying the work of post-structuralism to reconsider the notion of what it means to be a “subject”’ or what it means to have an “‘identity” predicated on a Eurocentric version of the “human”. The scholarship in this area questions what is meant by “human” and how we might seek to reimagine the “human” beyond binary, fear-based, exclusionary practices of rejecting “others” due to disability, race, class, gender identifiers. See: Mollow, A. (2004). Identity politics and disability studies: A critique of recent theory. Michigan Quarterly Review, 43(2), p.269-296, Goodley, D. (2007). Towards socially just pedagogies: Deleuzoguattarian critical disability studies. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 11*(3), 317-334., Goodley, D., & Roets, G. (2008). The (be)comings and goings of “developmental disabilities”: The cultural politics of “impairment”. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 29*(2), 239-255., Goodley, D., & Roets, G. (2008). Disability, citizenship and uncivilized society: The smooth and nomadic qualities of self-advocacy*. Disability Studies Quarterly*, *28*s94), 1-21.
[2] Adichie’s (2009) and Delgado’s (1989) provocation to infuse the world with a plurality of stories that embody a range of lived experiences as a call to de-centre the hegemony of “Western Man”’ has been evoked by numerous scholars. For a few representative examples of further reading see, King, T. (2003). *The truth about stories: A native*

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[3] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011) states “embodied life has a narrative storied quality; the shifting of our shapes knits one moment to the next and one place to another” (p. 595). Similarly, Garland-Thomson (2011) credits Caroline Walker Bynum for the phrase: “Shape carries story” (p. 595). Garland-Thomson’s work with disability through a methodological framework of embodiment and feminist materialism offers an important contribution to de-centring the narrative of normal. For a feminist-materialist perspective on narrative see Garland-Thomson, R. (2011). Misfits: A feminist materialist disability concept. *Hypatia, 26*(3), 591-609.

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