***A Class by Themselves? The Origins of Special Education in Toronto and Beyond*. By Jason Ellis. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019, 364 pp. ISBN 978-1-4426-2871-7**

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In *A Class by Themselves? The Origins of Special Education in Toronto and Beyond,* Jason Ellis offers a history of how Toronto's school system sought to address the needs of disabled children and adolescents during the first half of the twentieth century (1900- 1945). His study depends significantly upon primary source materials that include archival records from what was known at the time as the Toronto Board of Education (TBE). These primary source documents are situated within a historical context that explores the tensions and alignments in the ways disability was read as a problem that needed management.

The book is comprised of six chapters as well as an introduction and conclusion. The introduction and conclusion orient the reader towards the broader implications of historical research into how educational experts nearly a century ago debated the merits of implementing segregated and/or inclusive classroom models. Each of the six chapters considers how readings of disability as hereditary and/or environmental in their 'origins' established the now-ingrained practices of managing embodied differences that continue to be both contested and sustained within public schools.

Residents of Toronto will immediately recognize the names of some of the elementary and secondary schools that remain open as public schools within the current Toronto District School Board (TDSB). However, as suggested by the inclusion of the word "beyond" in the title of this work, Ellis' nuanced account of the factors and

variables that shaped what has come to be known as special education will likely resonate with readers who have an interest in the history of disability within the public education system. For example, the author notes that “Toronto was not unique in adopting…separate special classes…At approximately the same time…other urban school systems in places such as Atlanta, Vancouver, New York City, Chicago, Cleveland, Boston and St. Louis also implemented auxiliary classes” (p. 51). There are numerous instances throughout the book where the author emphasizes the mutual sharing of ideas between Toronto, other cities in North America, as well as Great Britain. These exchanges are indicative of the broader significance of the history he details as it relates to the development of the auxiliary classes that predated the current system of special education used across district school boards in North America. Therefore, even as this work represents the local disability history of public education in the city of Toronto, it is intended to be read as a representative example of common management practices in public education across North America.

The introduction and conclusion orient the reader towards the ways in which special education’s relationship to inclusionary policies and practices has a long historical legacy that remains mired in preserving the hegemony of normalcy. The author draws striking parallels between past and present debates while at the same time avoiding simplistic comparisons that might render current practices as ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than those found in previous iterations of school policies and practices. One such parallel between past and present rhetoric as it relates to public education is the impression that strategies must be implemented to contain the potential crisis that is ever-present in education and more specifically in the education of disabled children

and adolescents. Ellis (p. 14), notes that policy experts in education viewed schools as "haphazardly organized and inefficient" in ways that subsequently generated debates about the kinds of management strategies that might "transform these disorderly city school systems into sleek bureaucracies."

According to Ellis, developing the bureaucracy that modern readers would come to know as public education involved three key objectives: "centralization of educational decision-making authority; standardization of educational practices, curricula and administrative routines; and… implementation of differentiated instructional settings to more efficiently meet the diverse needs of increasingly large and heterogeneous urban school populations" (p. 14). Ellis' numerous accounts of debates between inspectors, trustees and superintendents nearly a century ago about the efficient management of the embodied disabled, class, racial and gendered differences of students remain a recurring and persistent concern in this contemporary moment. With the ongoing inclination in public education to manage differences and specifically disabled differences as problems in need of solutions in the form of rehabilitation and/or cure, there also remains the maintenance of the hegemony of normalcy.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 emphasize how varying conceptions of disability as a hereditary condition shaped readings of disabled students and in particular, shaped the mechanisms of diagnosis, assessment, evaluation as well as teaching and learning in public education. Two of the major influences in support of auxiliary classes (i.e. separate/segregated classes) were eugenics and the advent of intelligence testing or IQ testing. According to Ellis' research, eugenicists of the early twentieth century were proponents of maximizing the possibility of 'passing on' what were valued as positive

human traits (e.g. able-bodied, white, intelligent) while working to minimize the 'passing on' of undesirable traits (e.g. mental and/or physical disabilities as well as the genes of Black, Asian and Indigenous peoples). The undeniably ableist and racist thinking of eugenicists was one of the main influences that shaped the auxiliary classes of that era. One of the aims of eugenicists who influenced school policies and practices was to contain and/or minimize contact between able-bodied students and those who were labeled at the time as "feebleminded" (Ellis, p. 19). Intelligence testing, which remains a common practice in education, took shape through the work of psychologists such as Stanford who remains well-known for the Stanford-Binet intelligence test. Early and widespread adoption of intelligence tests, according to Ellis, transformed the auxiliary classes of that period so that they would adhere to the outcomes and placement recommendations of psychologists who administered intelligence tests to students. While Ellis offers readings of eugenics and IQ testing that demonstrate how they shaped the formation of auxiliary classes in distinctly different ways, these two influences are linked insofar as they read disability as fixed, unchanging and in need of management.

Reading disabled people as problems that require management by school policies and practices remains an evident orientation towards disability and other embodied differences that persisted even as disability began to be read by some educational and medical experts as an obstacle that could be overcome through exposure to 'expert' training and curriculum. Chapter 4, 5 and 6, outline some of the management mechanisms through which educational experts shift their focus from reading disability as an insurmountable obstacle to a reading of disability as

surmountable within a context oriented towards rehabilitation and/or cure. Chapter 4 outlines strategies such as “pure oralism” (Ellis, p. 128) where teachers in auxiliary classes did not teach sign language to D/deaf or hard of hearing students but, focused exclusively on lip reading. According to Ellis (p. 126): “schools expected them to adapt their bodies and senses in order to achieve normalcy.” Chapter 5 describes the advent of more targeted assessment regiments that purported to more accurately measure, label and identify specific types of disability. Through these mechanisms of diagnoses, the ableist and racist conceptions of the normative mind and body remained the measure for labelling more specific disabilities. In chapter 6, Ellis (p. 201) attends to how psychological theories of mental hygiene shaped auxiliary classes for disabled children by foregrounding beliefs that the mind “was moulded by external factors that could be controlled.” The concern among educators with managing differences through assessments, evaluations, placements and training (vocational, academic, rehabilitative) remains prevalent throughout these three chapters as a component part of preparing disabled students to be productive and employable.

Ellis shows how educational experts who represented themselves as holding oppositional points of view were often oriented towards a common goal of managing disabled, racialized, classed and embodied differences. To this point, Ellis quotes Angus McLaren, one of the leading figures at the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene (CNCMH): “It is important not to exaggerate the gap that separated the eugenicists and the environmentalists. Although their methods differed, their goals of efficient social management were similar” (p. 185). While Ellis accounts for several nuanced distinctions between educational experts of this period and their readings of

disability, his contribution to disability history also demonstrates how seemingly opposing beliefs where aligned through the ableist and racist predispositions of the colonial western logics and epistemologies that shaped the policy positions of educational experts. His accounting of these tensions and alignments subsequently offer readers opportunities to confront the ways these debates in public education persist and the extent to which these debates remain mired in the long historical legacies of privileging white-male able-bodied heteronormativity as the normative measure of what it means to be human

. In addition to focusing on the varying management practices that influenced the formation of what we now refer to as special education, Ellis brings to the fore traces in the archives of acts of resistance that demonstrate the ways practices of managing embodied differences have been questioned, troubled and resisted. For example, in chapter 2 he relays incidences of defiance and refusal both overt and subtle, where students either entirely refused to cooperate with entire sections of intelligence testing and/or engaged with assessment materials in such a way that no accurate reading of intelligence by the psychologist could be ascertained. Elsewhere in chapter 4, Ellis notes that some disabled children and their families, found value in auxiliary classes as they provided some respite from expressions of pity and/or the objectification of disabled children as sources of “desirable character training opportunities” for able-bodied children (p. 148). Following the work of Longmore, Goldberger and Altenbaugh, Ellis states: “special education classes and hospital wards created unique opportunities for young people to form peer groups... [and] this permitted them to avoid ridicule and cloying sympathy” (p. 149). Thus, through a focus on the ways disabled children and

their families questioned, resisted and inhabited auxiliary classes, Ellis' work also demonstrates the evident paradox in endeavouring to manage embodied differences that invariably also provoked strategies of refusal and resistance in a manner that continues to sustain disabled communities in this contemporary moment.

In summary, Ellis' work *A Class by Themselves? The Origins of Special Education in Toronto and Beyond,* offers a history of readings of disability and disabled peoples that foregrounds orientations in public education that deploy strategies to manage rather than to learn with and amidst embodied differences. This historical monograph will be of interest to disability studies scholars as well as to educators who remain mired in contemporary debates as they relate to policies of segregation and/or conditional inclusion. This work subsequently exposes the long and sustained reach of the conception of normalcy and how that conception disproportionally impacted and continues to impact children and adolescents in public schools who identify with racial, classed, gendered and/or disabled differences. While terms such as 'feebleminded' or 'moron', commonly used in the early twentieth century, are now considered unacceptable, Ellis renders the history of this time period in such a way as to provoke questions as they relate to ongoing practices that sustain normalcy through various iterations in policies and practices that ultimately have not transformed human relationships amidst embodied differences. Following Ellis' work, this reader is left wondering how to refuse and resist the normative demands of schooling while also reimagining teaching and learning encounters amidst disabled differences.