



Making Your Mark!

Embracing Disability, Challenging Ableism, and Cultivating Impact

Provided by Brittanie Hernandez-Wilson, The Arc Minnesota



Centering Access

This is an invitation to show up **as you are** and to use the space you are in as you **need or prefer**.

Feel free to sit in chairs or on the floor, pace, lay down, rock, flap, spin..

(Modified from [The Peoples Hub](#))

Agenda

1. Introduction
2. The Power of Belief
3. Understanding Ableism
4. Disability Justice
5. Making Your Mark
6. Closing
7. Q&A

Introduction

About The Arc Minnesota

Mission

The Arc Minnesota promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), actively supporting them and their families in a lifetime of full inclusion and participation in their communities.

About Me

Journey

- Born with a disability, low expectations by medical team
- Mom and Grandma were foundational in encouraging me to dream
- Family being forced to poverty so that I could get benefits and services



About Me, continued

Learnings

- Understanding ableism at a young age even without knowing the language
- Not seeing people around me who looked like me
- We all have needs that need to be met. No one's needs are more 'special' than the other, but often that's not how it goes



About Me, continued 2

Successes

- Teachers and social workers changed my life
- Being the representation I needed
- Being successfully employed for over a decade
- The future is disabled!



Ableism

Defining Ableism

“Ableism is a system that places value on people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas” that “leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy”

- [Talila “TL” Lewis](#)

“At its heart, ableism is rooted in the assumption that disabled people require ‘fixing’ and defines people by their disability”

- [Access Living](#)

Ableism Shows up in Many Ways..

Structural > Physical and design barriers

Cultural > Lack of media representation, invisibility in culture and community, forced segregation

Medical > Medical Industrial Complex, institutionalization, forced sterilization, cure-focused treatment

Financial > Sub-minimum wage, high unemployment rates, forced poverty, Marriage inequality, carceral system, denial of due process

*This is not an exhaustive list



Ableism in Education

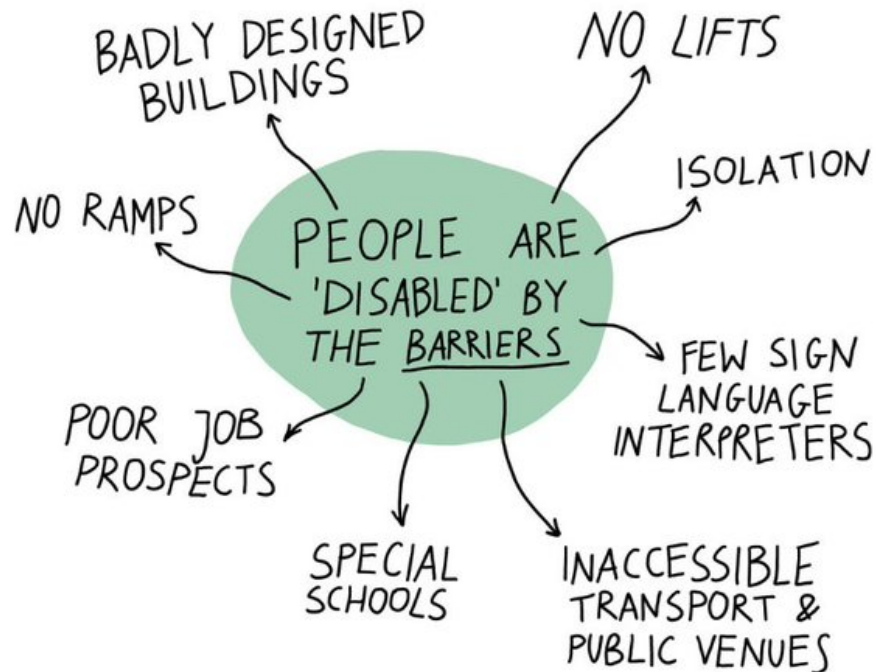
Overt Ableism	Subtle Ableism
Refusing to provide a student with a required educational accommodation.	Teachers assuming that all students can complete homework within the same timeframe.
Excluding students with disabilities from field trips or extracurricular activities due to perceived inconvenience.	Using ableist language, such as referring to something confusing as “blind” or saying a hectic day was “crazy”.
Openly expressing or implying that students with disabilities are less capable or intelligent.	Attendance and grading policies that do not accommodate mental health or sensory needs.
Segregating students with disabilities from their peers unnecessarily.	Designing activities without considering accessibility for all.
Using derogatory or insulting language when referring to students with disabilities.	Not considering the needs of all students when planning school events.
Disciplining or punishing students for behavior related to their disability.	Ignoring or downplaying instances of bullying against students with disabilities.

[Oregon Department of Education](https://www.ode.state.or.us/)

Models of Disability

The Social Model

VS The Medical Model



Deficit-Based Language

Emphasizes what people with disabilities cannot do, rather than focusing on their abilities, strengths, or inherent value as individuals.

This type of language reinforces stereotypes and marginalizes people with disabilities by focusing on their "perceived" differences from what's considered "normal."

Ableism in Language

Casual Ableism: Ableist terms or phrases that are used in everyday conversation. The casual usage can "normalize" ableist ideas in our culture.

Examples:

- Crazy
- Psycho
- Bipolar
- Insane

Deficit-Based Language, continued

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Deficit-Based Language, continued 2

Examples:

- “Afflicted by” / “Suffers from”
- High-functioning/low-functioning
- Handicapped
- Wheelchair-bound
- Non-verbal



Euphemisms and "Special" Terminology

Examples:

- Special needs
- Differing abilities
- Differently-abled
- disABILITY



Gregory Mansfield
@GHMansfield

If one more person refers to me as “special needs” today, I am going to lose my patience.

Access is not a special need.

Disabled people do not have special needs.

Disabled people have human needs.

Language of Empowerment

Not "Special Needs" Video



[Assume That I Can | \(2:00\) \(youtube.com\)](#)

Person-First Language

Person-first language puts the person before the disability as a way to reclaim personhood.

By placing the person first:

- disability is not what defines the person
- language reduces generalizations and stereotypes by focusing on the individual
- language encourages mutual respect

Identity-First Language

Identity-First Language puts the disability before the person.

By placing disabled identity first:

- emphasizes that disability plays a role in who the person is
- reinforces disability as a positive identity
- allows the person to control how they are identified, by their own choice, rather than being told they are disabled by someone else who is usually not



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Disability Justice

From The Disability Rights Movement to Disability Justice

- The US Disability Rights Movement established a civil rights for people with disabilities
- The ADA is the floor not the ceiling
- Focus on the symptoms but not the root cause

Cliffhangers of The Disability Rights Movement

- Disability rights is based in a single-issue identity. It focuses solely on disability at the expense of other intersections
- Leadership of this movement has historically centered the experience of white folks.
- Centers people with mobility disabilities, invisibilizing and marginalizing other types of lived experience and disability.

Disability Justice, continued

- Recognizes that changing laws and policies does not address the way society is setup to treat disabled people as “bad”, “unproductive”, “disposable”
- Acknowledges that each person experiences disability differently and how those differences shape our everyday relationships, health outcomes, and quality of life
- Independence vs Interdependence
- 10 Principles

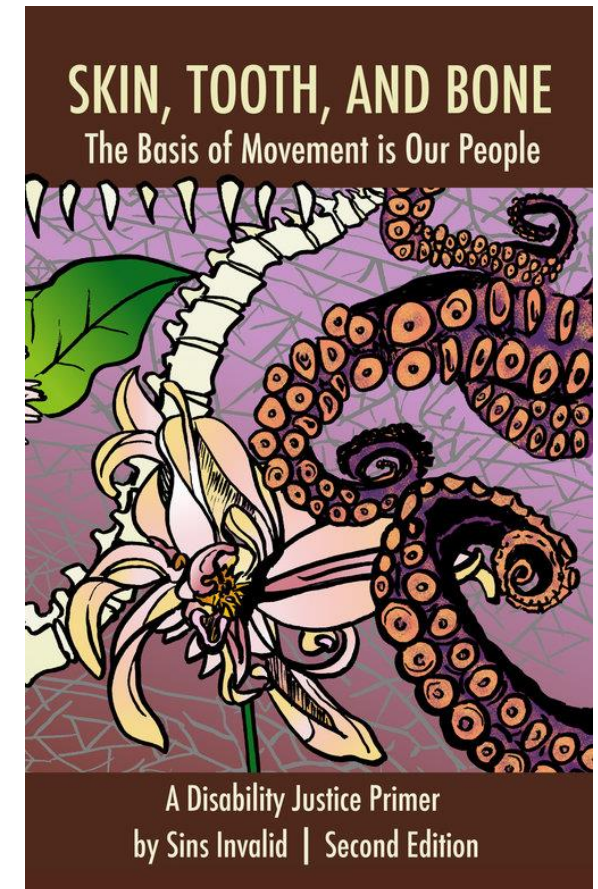
Disability Justice Understands

- All bodies are unique and essential
- All bodies have strengths and needs that must be met
- We are all powerful, not despite the complexities of our body/minds, but because of them
- All bodies are confined by ability, race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, etc - and we cannot separate them

Disability Justice Primer



Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Movement is Our People
A Disability Justice Primer by [Sins Invalid](#)



Justice in education requires a deep understanding of how ableism shapes our world and impacts our students.



Making Your Mark!

Making Your Mark

- Unpack and unlearn ableism
- Recognize the power you have in shaping the lives of your students
- Break down barriers
- Challenge stereotypes
- Advocate for inclusivity and justice in education and beyond
- Advocate for representation in schools
- Be patient with yourself, this is a lifelong journey!



**ACCESS
IS
LOVE!**

- MIA MINGUS, ALICE WONG, AND SANDY HO



Thank You!

Please feel free to reach out to me.

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Q & A