

2017 Critical Race Studies in Education Association Conference Proposal

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In 1907 Indiana legalized normalcy; in 2017 Indiana dismantled normalcy

A student deemed “Special Ed.” gets an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Historically, IEP concepts show a pre-determined focus on a student’s weaknesses, whether actual, perceived, or implied. Also, research exposes the socio-political-cultural agendas which purposely leave out race and gender, and strength-based views of humanity when developing special education policies.

Since IEPs are based on deficit models of students--what they “can’t do” compared to what is standard/normal--a Strength-Based Individualized Learning Plan (S-BLP) is suggested. Including the special education diagnosis, an S-BLP will also “diagnose” a student’s strengths (interests, talents, and uniqueness), emphasizing what they “can do” and thus mandating services to foster each student’s self-actualization.

The S-BLP concept is proposed for the 2017 CRESA conference for 6 reasons:

1. In 1907, Indiana passed the world’s first eugenics (scientific racism) law legalizing “normalcy.” This law rationalized white supremacy and the sterilization of “mental defectives” and “criminals.” During the Nuremberg Trials Nazi doctors testified they used the “Indiana Procedure” as a model for their sterilization program.
2. Since normalcy perpetuates the myth of the normal child, defines ableism in schools, and justifies special education placements, especially for African American students, it is the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) that exposes, examines, and challenges the manner in which race/racism clearly impact the special education referral process (Allen, 2010).
3. CRT (Crenshaw, et al, 1995) has two themes: a) investigate the possibility of transforming the relationship between law and the possible maintenance of white supremacy/racial power over time: unpacking the why/how of the 1907 law can enable this transformation; b) pursue a project of achieving racial emancipation and anti-subordination: implementing the S-BLP concept is such a project.
4. In fact, Connor, Ferri & Annamma described disability and CRT as 2 sides of a coin (2015) and forged “Dis/ability Critical Race Studies” or “DisCrit” in 2013. Two relevant traits are: a) DisCrit shows how forces of racism/ableism circulate inter-dependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways--upholding notions of normality: an S-BLP also focuses exposing race/ableism; b) DisCrit requires activism and supports all forms of resistance: the S-BLP concept exemplifies activism/resistance—and, from the grassroots level.
5. The conference takes place in the shadow of Eli Lilly, a global entity seemingly bent on making pharmaceuticals to normalize all students especially those with a “sitting disability.”
6. In contrast to past social constructs of race, disability and intelligence based on a deficit model of humanity codified by the 1907 Eugenics Law, the S-BLP challenges the Indianapolis Public Schools and the wider Hoosier community to reconcile its infamous past, and discredit and abandon normalcy, leading the nation to an enlightened view of our human potential.

Current IEPs focus on deficiencies in order to satisfy the ethos of normalcy that plagues public education. The S-BLP will circumvent and neutralize race, gender, ability, class, and age by creating possibilities for students to leave school with experiences meeting their own standards, developing their passions--fulfilling their uniqueness.