

The curious case of impairment and the school textbook

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Abstract:

This 'think piece' re-casts the school textbook as ontological envelopes which enfold an unresolved dialectic between constituting and constituted power into the education of every school pupil. Informed by the writings of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) the authors reveal that textbooks act as 'majoritan' to categorise, contain and constrain societal conceptions of the 'Other'. The authors propose that educators must reinvent notions of freedom, authority and ethical responsibility. The authors conclude that to undermine the pernicious power of the 'normalising' textbook we need the production of a counter signifying semiotic to overcome pathologies existing in schools today.

Keywords: textbooks, Deleuze and Guattari, power, schools

In this paper we, like Petra Kuppens (2003, 4), seek to 'subvert the structural position of disability as a marker'. We likewise want to reveal how the representation of illness and disability are structured to 'contain the Other, to isolate it, present it outside 'normal' society and bodies. . . .'. This paper formalises our thoughts and discussions in which textbooks are re-drawn as ontological envelopes. We suggest such envelopes enfold, constrict and constrain individualisation through 'impoverished representations' (Latour, 2011, 44) sealing such 'smoothed' out images within totalising structures of modern power and ableist agendas (Agamben, 1998). Our thoughts here though do not dwell on absolute governments nor on totalising dictatorships who openly construct textbooks as ideological transmitters of those in power (for example, in China - see Kwan-Choi Tse 2011). Rather, we 're-think' textbooks, as operationalised within democratic systems as 'covert forms of manipulation' where pronominal games and illocutionary mirrors reflect an imposed lexis (Pinto, 2004) and unresolved dialectic between constituting and constituted power (Agamben, 1993). Here then an examination of imposed binary dialectics through the 'sociological study of disability [unearths] the conditions of exclusion experienced by people with impairments' (Goodley, 2007, 145). Within education these dialectical oscillations (Agamben, 1993) and 'rules of civility' (Žižek, 2009, 20) striate individual bodies, freedom and social justice as the information communicated through textbooks

impose semiotic coordinates, (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) which 'maintain a delicate balance between modest imprecision and mannerist stereotype' (Agamben, 1993, p. 58). Within these imposed strata (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) and spaces of mistranslation (see Hodkinson 2012a, 676) representations of the 'impaired organism' are bound within hierarchical organisation, signified through structured language which subjectifies the individual as '*their*' disabled (See Goodley, 2007, p.147).

As logic and praxis blur and language is operationalised from semiotic to a textbook semantic (Agamben, 2005) the enunciating function of these pedagogical tools becomes that of the overcoding machine (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Breaking the crust of this mechanism (Agamben, 1998) reveals a 'smoothing machine' that functions to produce a phenomenon of learning regulated by centring, unification, totalisation, integration, hierarchisation and finalisation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). This disabling machine, like that of racism, in Deleuze and Guattari's mind (1987, 178) produces a page thin hegemonic whose continued operation is oiled by 'the determination of degrees of deviation' to a normalised individualised form (See also Koppers, 2003, 6). This machine then 'cuts [and] tears bodies from their surroundings' as the rich and proud history of disability is contained to a body 'inscribed as subject' and devalued as object (Goodley, 2007, p.152) The textbook thus characterises a regime of becoming - a covert, creeping, 'pernicious, cancerous . . . power . . . [which is] steeped in illusion' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 68). It unfolds and enfolds power from 'innumerate points' (Foucault, 1978, 941). In this envelope education and power, disability and dominance are in-dissolvable couplets where textbooks, as Trojan horse (Apple, 2000), introduce 'enontiomorphosis regimes' which bind pupils to an 'hieratic and immutable Master' and power systems (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 107). Here, in these systems the Master 'legislates by constants. . . [prohibits] . . . metamorphosis and [gives] figures clear and stable contours' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 107). In some countries this Master is obvious, in others he acts as puppeteer king to representations of power itself. Within this kingdom, pretenders to this throne seize control by the employing the capita they possess (Habermas, 2006). In such assemblages, power is not just embedded in 'State apparatus but rather are everywhere', formulating both content and expression (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 68). Textbooks have no state of exception (Agamben, 1993); as Foucauldian analysis reveals learners never stand outside of these power dynamics.

The importance of textbooks

Within English schools a 'tool of the trade' (Wigginton 2005, 197) in achieving curriculum aims has, 'since the advent of typography and the rise in mass schooling' (Luke et. al. 1989, 245), been the textbook. A textbook's significance should not then be underestimated. Indeed, Olsen (1989) accounts pupils encounter at least 32,000 textbook pages and spend 75 per cent of their school time engaging with the material presented within. Podeh (2005, 2) suggests the employment of the textbook resembles a religious ritual, where the 'authority of print' puts ideas and beliefs above criticism. This importance has been heightened by the culture of educational accountability in England. In this culture of accountability teachers have become reliant on textbooks as the 'locus for [the] information exchange' (Luke et. al., 1989, 252).

Textbooks though are based upon 'specialised forms' of institutionalised school knowledge (Dowling 1996, 49). Taxel (1981, 33) argues such knowledge is 'dominated by a world view and the ideology ... of those occupying positions of socio-economic pre-eminence in society'. Crawford (2004) relates that textbooks are social constructions employing a selective tradition (Williams 1961) to inculcate pupils into the cultural and socio-economic order of society and relationships of power and dominance. Commeyras and Alverman (1996, 32) argue this specialized knowledge has serious consequences in that it legitimates, in the mind of the reader, the constructed 'social realities' contained within the textbook. They argue that these realities are harmful because they provide distortions of the truth leading the reader to conclude that 'certain groups and individuals . . . are not important members of society' (Taxel, 1989, 341). They (1996, 32) contend that such constructions of minority groups serve to 'impede the development of respect for all human beings.' For Stray (1994) textbooks are instruments of socialisation which convey an 'approved, even official version of what youth should believe' (Podeh 2005, 2). To employ a Kantian perspective, textbooks construct their realities, their 'belongings and beings,' only in relation to an indeterminate totality (Agamben, 1993, 66). This totality we suggest is power itself. Here, then, in this 'metaphysical aporia' we observe the 'automatic rules for the inscription of life' (Agamben, 1993, 46, & 171) passed onto the next generation of learners.

Degrees of deviance

Rethinking the ontological categories enunciated in textbooks *in toto* we observe their importance centres upon the recognition that they can, and do, reproduce the inequalities in society. As such they 'propagate waves of sameness until those who resist identification have been wiped out... [This] cruelty is equaled only by its incompetence and naiveté' (Agamben 1993, 178). As minority identity is suppressed (Ninnes, 2002), by the process of a selective tradition of knowledge we observe the overcoding machine at work. Here, it defines 'a rigid segmentarity, a macrosegmentarity' to produce and reproduce for generations of learners a 'divisible, homogeneous space striated in all directions' by power (Agamben, 1993, 223). Control of such power enables fabrication of a 'dominant history' that accelerates some narratives over others (Agamben, 1993, p. 276). Williams (1961) observes that this power centers upon the fact that authors of textbooks make choices about the content, images and text they include in their textbooks from the whole of an accepted storehouse of knowledge (Apple and Christian-Smith 1991). Such personal selections, he contends, ensure textbooks contain a 'hidden structure of interest' (Anyon, 1979, 352) which disenfranchises some groups whilst promoting the perspectives of other dominant groups (Anyon, 1979; Ninnes, 2002). Foster (1999) cogently argues it is this selective tradition which ensures the social control of society by validating an official sanitised knowledge base. He (1999, 275) accounts that the employment of such validated knowledge 'render[s] marginal or invisible the achievements and experiences of some groups within our society'. Textbooks, then, empty out space they deterritorialise it only to re-territorialise it with an acceptable image (in their eyes at least) of the Other (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

To evidence this argument it is perhaps worthwhile here to briefly recount the findings from three pieces of research, conducted by the authors (For full details of methodology – see: Hodkinson, 2007, 2012b & Ghajarieh, 2012). In such was revealed the majoritan - the

power of which we speak - that propagated a 'constant and homogeneous system' of power (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 187 & 108) which operated to categorise, contain and constrain societal conceptions of disability and Disabled people. We should not forget that this 'majoritan' is embedded in other areas to. (For example – gender (Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008), race (McLaren & Helms Mills, 2010 and sexuality Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008).

The representation of disability in all three data sets was extremely limited. However, analysis of the substantive context of the images provided some interesting data. It is of interest to note that one common theme in all the textbooks analysed was that disability was commonly referenced to represented people hospitalised or 'bedded' as a result of a car accident or arguably a temporary sickness. These images, one might suggest, portrayed physical disability in a transient form i.e. that the person might recover from their impaired mobility. The remaining images, within the English sample, seemingly represented people with learning disabilities. Also of note, was that four of the images specifically referenced disability, ie visual impairment to represent 'difficulties with the eyes' or disability in context of discrimination. Specifically, in the first study (Hodkinson, 2007), 4561 images and 3717 pages contained within 96 textbooks were analysed. Only 0.16% of the images analysed represented Disabled people. (It is of interest to note here that around 6% of children, 16% of working age adults and 45% of people over 65 are disabled in the United Kingdom). Of further concern, was the construct of disability observed was formulated within the realms of medical deficit. In the second study (Ghajarieh, 2012) in the three sampled Iranian high school textbooks only one instance of text and only 10 out of 321 images were found that might possibly relate to disability. This text presented impairment as one which was again contextualized by medical deficit and the text reinforced the ideology that disability and happiness can never co-exist due to the social, physical, and intellectual limitations of Disabled people. In the third study (Hodkinson, 2012b), 494 electronic resources, textbooks and associated media were examined. The analysis of 4,485 illustrations, 930 photographs and hundreds of pages of text again revealed the limited picture of disability. One also contextualised within medical deficit. Of interest is that in these research studies out of the numerous images of playground and classroom scenes, not one image of a Disabled child was observed. Textbooks here then were formulated upon what Žižek (2008) would name as 'epitimisation' - a reduction of the 'Other' from a multitude of perspectives, and a rich proud history, to that contextualized as a single determinant characteristic (Žižek, 2008).

Textbooks and inclusion

Over the last few years great emphasis has been placed on the importance of inclusive curricula, in an attempt to increase the visibility of minorities (Nind 2005). The importance of disability portrayal in general education arises because the inclusion of disability issues can influence positively the self-image and motivation of such students (Wieman 2001) and will likely motivate non-disabled students to learn more about their disabled classmates. Furthermore, non-disabled young learners could perceive diversity in a class or a school, which enhances admiration for diverse and dissimilar traits, and develops a better understanding among these students of others' impairments (Rasche and Bronson 1999).

An education system then is a reflection of society in general; 'all that society has accomplished for itself is put through the agency of school at the disposal of its future members' (Dewey 2007, 19). We may observe that changes at schools encourage attempts to extend inclusion into the sphere of society (Dewey 2007; Wood and Richardson 2000). Among varied agencies in education, 'the textbook is, in fact, the heart of the school and without the ubiquitous text there would arguably be no schools, at least as we know them' (Westbury 1990, cited in Mohammad and Kumari 2007). Thus, finding instances of disabled people's representation in textbooks, which students spend a lion's share of their time on these materials (Blumberg 2007), we suggest can be of significance. Given the obstacles that lie ahead we argue that when attempting to incorporate disabled students into mainstream education, we need gradually to mainstream the issues of students with disabilities in the curriculum of regular schools and classroom environments. Nunes, Pretzlik and Olsen (2006) suggest that inclusion of students with disabilities, without setting the stage for non-disabled students, has social consequences. It is our contention, then, that in respects to the creation of favourable inclusive learning environments the portrayal of disability within textbooks has importance at two levels. We suggest importance firstly centres upon the recognition that textbooks can, and do, reproduce the inequalities which exist in society (Ninnes 2002). Second, we believe, textbooks have importance to inclusive practice because they enable children to identify with the social world in which they live.

From this perspective, we argue, that the representation of the world, contained within textbooks, impacts upon a child's ability to take on the identity of a learner as well as to feel a sense of belonging within their school community (HSRC 2005). Greenfield and Subrahmanyam (2003) supports this premise, arguing that learning materials are key to reshaping the identity of learners. This evidence suggests that if teachers are to create enabling inclusive learning environments, where all students feel valued and welcomed, then, all learners must be able to 'find themselves and their world represented in the books from which they learn' (HSRC, 2005, pg7).

The undermining of our thought processes . . .

The mediating role of the textbook, in the research studies cited above and the reviewed literature, was then perhaps one of the promotion of a social construction of disability based upon inexact scholarship, omission and imbalanced information (David, 2001). There are those researchers who contend that this leads pupils inextricably to the formulation of negative attitudes towards the Other (See Taxel, 1989). Employment of Deleuzian analysis (1987, 60) here renders the textbook's 'forms of content' as 'alloplastic' rather than 'homoplastic'. Thus, texts are able to bring about modifications in the Real. We believe though that such analysis is flawed. This is because we observe it to be formulated upon a simplistic and contrived notion of the role of the learner.

Whilst we accept, to some degree, that the *modus operandi* of textbooks is the cultural transmission of sanitised societal values we do not accept the learner's role in the information exchange is always the passive assimilation of the 'social hieroglyph' (Stray, 1994, 1). Therefore whilst we recognise that 'what is read does indeed influence the reader' (Zimet, 1976, 10) textbooks, we suggest, provide but an 'alloplastic veneer' as there is a 'light year difference' between simply reading a text and finding 'out how people

actually respond to it' (Kell-Byrne 1984, 196). Central to our thinking then is that the learner is not passive but is an 'active, creative and dynamic' person who interacts proactively with texts 'in the process of meaning making' (Taxel, 1989, 35). If the role of the textbook is as straight jacket to cultural transmission of ableism we must also acknowledge that other factors mediate the process of meaning making. For example, Luke *et. al.* (1989, 241) relates the 'school text is always the object of teacher mediation' and that some 'teachers make children aware of ...the cultural geography of the knowledge presented in textbooks' (David, 2001, 140). In Latour's terms (2011, 22) then textbooks do not exist entirely as 'Factish gods'. This is because practitioners seemingly do not allow knowledge to pass into action without a belief 'in the difference between construction and reality, immanence and transcendence'. Therefore, as Apple (1992, 10) relates 'we cannot assume what is in the text is actually taught. Nor, can we assume what is actually taught is learnt'. Based upon this rationale, we suggest that the exact role of the textbook in socialization becomes difficult to establish (Podeh, 2005).

In the thesis we propose, however, the textbook has a much simpler role. We suggest that the page of the textbook reveals the *Zeitgeist* of society; a sight of a 'past and present landscape embedded in culturally informed practices' (Hodkinson, 2013). A landscape which when deciphered reveals the active formulation of identity and of power; of dominance and of 'othering'. The revelatory nature of deciphering the cipher is that it focuses surveillance back onto the, dominant groups sense of self providing mirror to their bigotry. In this form, the puppeteer king's complex power relationships are revealed through concepts such as domination/ inequality/ othering and colonisation. As with colonisation, textbooks reveal terrains of dialectic and praxis where authors have power to 'narrate or block narratives' (Said, 1993, xiii). Here, then, as Larson (2000, 40) succinctly accounts, 'the power to represent the nation is already the power to dominate it'. In these ontological envelopes, authors' (and their publishers) ideological perspectives control the 'system of representing, as well as speaking for everything in the domain' (Said, 1993, 13). The textbooks' power then is that they are able to manage heterogeneity through 'imposition, restriction, regulation and repression' (see Quayson 2000, 112). The textbook page to us therefore reveals the 'mental attitude' of the author 'inability to conceive of any alternative' thus revealing the formulation and control of a disabling demographic. Within this terrain, authors may be observed as a repressive force who occlude the heterogeneity of society recasting the strong and positive image of disability, within an institutional homogeneity of normalisation and abilism (Quayson, 2000). This is *their* acceleration of the narrative.

Cultural democracy, inclusion and textbooks: a counter signifying semiotic?

Whilst one might argue as to the immediacy of the role of textbooks in influencing a child's conceptualisation of disability, it is our contention that to truly understand the textbook's mediating role one must return to the foundations upon which inclusive education is built. Inclusion, many argue, is founded upon the principles of human rights, democracy, equity and social justice with its ultimate goal being to develop schools 'where all children are participating and treated equally' (Sandhull, 2005, p.1). However, we suggest, that inclusion in this guise although 'widely accepted' has problems in converting its theory into practice.

To substantiate our contention lets us take a moment to consider inclusion as formulated upon the principles of human rights and democracy. From a human rights and democracy perspective, the imperative of inclusion must be to 'discrimination equality and to the status of vulnerable groups' within society (Sandhull, 2005, p.4). In this form, inclusion becomes a form of cultural democracy and as such, we suggest, becomes a moral concept which necessitates the expression of the values of 'self-fulfilment, self-determination and equality (Carr & Harnett, 1996, p. 40). However, for Bernstein (1996) an essential pre-requisite, in the promotion of cultural democracy, is that the individual will have the right to participate and to be included within society at a social, intellectual and cultural level. Problematic, to the pursuance of inclusion as a facet of cultural democracy is that the very term itself suggest that 'something smaller is included into something bigger' (Garcia & Metcalf, 2005, p. 34). For Garcia & Metcalf, then, the term inclusion brings into sharp focus the connotation of dominant and subordinate groups within society i.e those who include and those who are included. We are minded, here, of Slee's (2001, p. 387) contention that for inclusion to be effective 'we have to recognise that relations of dominance' exist in society. By doing this, it becomes apparent that obstacles to effective 'inclusion are embedded in simple everyday habits' and that schools as 'integral parts of society' are controlled by the attitudes of its dominant members (Highbeam, 2005, p. 1). Slee (2001, p. 386) contends that if inclusion is to be made effective then educators must 'recognise disablement as cultural interplay characterised by unequal social relations'. He suggests a failure to recognise that disability is created, in such a manner, condemns inclusion to the realms of resource allocation and the physical location of Disabled students. It is our contention, then, that if inclusion is to move beyond the 'phenomena of structure' (Clough, 2005, p.74) and is to be truly built upon human rights and the democratic imperative, then, it must give 'preference to strategies of empowerment over more service delivery orientated responses' (Sandhull, 2005, pg.6). We suggest that it is in the pursuance of this democratic imperative where the mediating role of the textbook becomes most important.

Conclusion

In the research cited above the textbooks did not separate figures from affectations. Rather they (rein) forced morphological formulations as the primacy of the theorem element where people with impairments became segments of their segmentations (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Thus, images captured within the text were over coded by old world geometry which empowered a phenomenological reduction and the, 'homogenising logic of the institution' to, '(re) produce a homogeneity of demographic' (Golberg, 2000, 73). This hollowed out the textbook space as a site of emancipatory possibilities (Žižek, 2009).

In the terrain of dialectic and praxis which is the textbook, knowledge is not neutral but rather shamelessly privileges specific values which constrain subjects to their social role (Žižek, 2009). In this space of 'false identification' (Žižek, 2009, 203) a pre-existing 'regime of signs' provides a semiotic to semantic conversion machine (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) whose paradox of universal openness is rooted in western modernity (Žižek, 2009). Such over coding assures a 'redundancy of consciousness' and 'deception of interpretation' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 135) that promotes 'regimes[s] of circularity' and 'false distance towards the actual coordinates of the subject's social existence' (Žižek, 2009, 203). This 'formation of power is much more than a tool', (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 63)

though for it is also cancer to emancipatory opportunities and corrosive to implementation of policies of inclusive education in schools (see Author, 2012c)

Textbooks, thus revealed become an important source for the study of the 'Zeitgeist of a certain time and people' (Wiele van, 2004). They provide a 'powerful lens' to facilitate the critical examination of the dynamics underlying the cultural politics of education and of disability (Crawford, 2004). To realise this, though, is not enough – far from it. Teachers, need to ask as Žižek (2009, 431) does 'how do these conditions compel us to transform and reinvent the very notions of freedom, authority and ethical responsibility'. It seems to us that what is needed is the production of a 'counter signifying semiotic [to overcome this] fashionable pathology' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 118). We need a 'line of flight' to overcome the 'pincer-like hierarchical grip' of the processes of the 'smoothing machine'. We need, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms to create a 'Body without Organs', a cautious escape from the 'smooth-striation-smooth ordering of the organism or body or person' (see Goodley, 2007, p.152). We must 'blow apart [these extant] semiotic systems [and] regimes of signs which raise organisations of power immutably' within a double bind of 'signification and subjectification' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 135 & 167). As Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 138) relate this 'significance and interpretation are so thick skinned they form such a sticky mixture with subjectification, that it is easy to believe that you are outside them, when in fact still secreting such. Like Goodley (2008 p. 245) we believe that the employment of Deleuze and Guattarian theory helps to challenge disabling practices, by recasting – 'the impaired subject [as] no longer impaired . . . [but as] a subject ever moving. A subject becoming. A body without organs'.

'The micro-politics of knowing and being known require a social praxis; a shared translation of the dominant disability discourse into new discourses that produce a promise alternative and free ways of being, becoming and living' (Goodley, 2008, p. 245).

In *Our translation- our deciphering-* the school textbook's construct of disability was revealed as 'infected with the notion of child deficit' (Clough, 2005, 74). In developing a future shared translation textbooks must be re-constructed with a concern for the well-beings of all learners (Sandhull, 2005). Textbooks should seek to confront the 'current injustice [within schools, which are] based upon continued practices of privilege and power' (Highbeam, 2005, 1) and of the cultural dominance of non-disabled people within our society. In Victor Turner's terms (1982 cited in Kuppers, 2003, 25) employment of textbooks must become 'Liminoid' –a 'potentially disruptive, resistant activity. . . 'as opposed to texts which reaffirm . . .'. They must challenge extant structures of 'seeing and knowing' (Kuppers, 2003, 26). Teachers must become educators who strive to support a cultural responsive pedagogy that would observe disabled people being more prominently, positively and realistically located within the textbooks and learning materials that support the teaching and learning of pupils within our schools. This is *Our* narrative- let the acceleration begin!

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