

# CONSTRUCTING SOVEREIGN SELVES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

## *CONSTRUINDO SERES AUTOSSUFICIENTES PELA EDUCAÇÃO ESPECIAL*

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### ABSTRACT

The history of special education is also a philosophical history of conceptions of the self. Inspired by the *genealogical* works of Foucault, this essay will explore the philosophical history of special education as a constitutive force in shaping special education students. While this article focuses on the United States, the analysis of conceptions of autonomy is relevant to special education in the Western World. In conclusion, this paper proposes a return to the constructivist roots of special education to broaden the appreciation and valorization of the aesthetic and ethical connections that sustain a meaningful life.

**Keywords:** Special education. Philosophy. Inclusion. Self-determination critique.

### RESUMO

*A história da educação especial é também história filosófica de concepções do ser. Inspirado nos trabalhos genealógicos de Foucault, este artigo explora a história filosófica da educação especial como uma força constitutiva na formação dos estudantes de educação especial. O artigo foca a realidade Americana mas a análise das concepções de autonomia tem relevância para a Educação Especial no mundo Ocidental. Este trabalho propõe um retorno às raízes construtivistas da educação especial para expandir uma apreciação e valorização das conexões éticas e estéticas que sustentam uma vida plena.*

**Palavras-chave:** Educação especial. Inclusão. Crítica autodeterminista.

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## INTRODUCTION

A critical reading of the past is essential to reach a richer understanding of the present. Inspired by the *genealogical* works of Foucault, this essay will philosophically explore special education as a constitutive force in shaping special education students. Two discussions, “inclusion” and “self-determination” are arguably driving special education theory, research and practice. Understanding these discussions, both explicitly and implicitly, requires layer-by-layer, an conceptual excavation of the evolving rationales of education. While many different rationales exist for education in general, inclusion and self-determination strike the deepest chords in Western philosophical thought since the Enlightenment. The troubled relationship between concepts of equality and equity continue to plague justifications for the discussion on inclusion. Likewise, the discussion on self-determination (e.g. self-directed choices, self-directed goal attainment, etc.) operates in a context of dissonance, since it depends on judgments by others who wield considerable control over the target learners of self-determining behaviors.

Whether human beings are free agents or determined subjects is one of the oldest questions of philosophy. In any case, drawing on Foucault’s conception of “disciplinary practices”, the very process of developing a sense of autonomy often involves imbrications of power that bind and shape the individual within a certain conception of personhood (Foucault, 1977; 2008).

### Special education and the construction of a sovereign self

Questions on raised by education reach back to the antiquity of the Pre-Socratics and Plato’s Republic. Contemporary education acquired many of its discourse-justifications from the Enlightenment, marking a shift in the understanding of governance and authority. In the Enlightenment, a shift occurred transferring moral

and epistemological authority from traditional institutions, the Church and the monarchy to inherent property of personhood. Moreover, with the Enlightenment the view arose that the universe was a knowable realm where human beings (i.e. males) were endowed with “certain inherent and inalienable rights” (U.S. Declaration of Independence) and that each ‘man’ was a discrete sovereign ‘self’.

If morality and epistemology were no longer founded on tradition, on what foundations could certain knowledge or moral truths rest? While philosophers responded differently, for example by contrasting the schools of idealism and empiricism, their perspectives came together to regard reason, the *lumen rationale* (i.e. the light of reason), as the defining characteristic of personhood. The establishment of truth and morality therefore depended on the exercise of reason by a ‘juridical self’ that could recognize the order of the universe and legislate according to its fixed principles. Despite the taken-for-granted universality of truth, not everyone merited consideration as a juridical self endowed with reason. The extent to which the attribution of personhood depends on the degree that an individual complies with a normative set of expectations is not taken into consideration. Who is and who is not a fully-fledged person remains by no means a marginal issue in the history of special education.

One of the enduring legacies of the Enlightenment is the connection of personhood to the ownership of property. Indeed, John Locke integrally connected personhood, the body and the labor of one’s body all to features of property.

Though the earth and all inferior creatures, be common to man, yet every man has a property in his own person: this nobody has any right to but himself. The labor of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labor with and joined to it something that his own and thereby makes it his property (Locke, 2003, p.111).

While Locke's connection between labor and property reinforced the view of the inviolability of the person, it encouraged proprietary views of relations between individuals. In time, with changing conditions of material production dispersing economic functions over a larger social terrain, the significance given to labor evolved to include the concept of acquisition. A central characteristic of proprietary views of relationships between selves included marking off boundaries of responsibility and limiting obligations. The connection between property and freedom rested on a negative framing (i.e. *freedom from*) to ensure minimal interference by the state or others in the private accumulation of property. Consequently, acquisition became the tangible measure of control over one's destiny and the *sine qua non* of freedom.

The implications for education of these two moments in the developing conception of the sovereign self are: (1) internalization of the foundations of epistemological and moral certainty, (2) profound proprietary views of the relationships between individuals. Sir Francis Bacon, a progenitor in the empirical shift towards a positivist vision of knowledge, famously claimed that "knowledge and human power is synonymous", thus aligning control with proprietary purpose (Bacon, 1902, p.11). The Enlightenment view of autonomy condemned anyone who manifested dependence to diminution. Physical disability implicated incapacity to work and intellectual disability implicated an incapacity to act as a 'juridical self'. The following excerpts from the writings of Jean-Jacque Rousseau and John Locke, respectively present pejorative views of disability in any form:

[In the *Emile* Rousseau writes], I would not take on [tutor] a sickly and ill-constituted child, were he to live to eighty. I want no pupil *always useless* [italics added] to himself and others (Rousseau, 1979, p.53).

[Locke writes in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*] Brutes abstract

not [...] [And] the power of *abstracting* is not in them at all [...] an exact observation of their several ways of faltering, would no doubt discover [...] (Locke, 2004, p.156).

Despite these inherently negative views of disability, a growing interest in disability education arose from philosophical impulses: (1) to investigate man in a "state of nature", that is without the benefit of formal law, language or sociality and (2) explore the role of experience in the acquisition of knowledge. The enormous successes of the natural sciences led philosophers and scientists to consider the possibilities of scientific methods in the study and *improvement* of human beings. With changing modes of production and material conditions "progress" itself acquired quasi-theological significance, combining acquisition and material growth with trans-historical salvation. Henceforth, the sovereign self, a constructed autonomous actor became also 'himself' susceptible to commodification.

The emergent social sciences (e.g. August Comte, Herbert Spencer) reified conditions associated with living organisms (e.g. health, illness, growth, death, etc.) and applied them to the body politic with great consequence for education. One lasting consequence was the construction of a concept of the *norm* aided by the rise of demographic studies and statistics (Davis, 1995; Davis, 2006). Statistical theory provided the grammar needed to categorize individuals according to this newfound concept of the 'norm'. That the norm itself rested on arbitrary assumptions escaped theorists who believed the resultant categories represented reality as it was. Hence the construction of normality rested on a concomitant construction of abnormality in the body politic. The categorization of some as abnormal encouraged a medical view of education: to educate was to cure. It was no coincidence that the pioneers of special education were physicians. The language of treatment invoked moral categories to emphasize self-control. In Foucault's explanation of the "disciplinary procedures", he describes "moral treatment" as

a strategy for deploying control through which “the patient” not only acquiesces to the expertise of the physician, but also confesses his need for control imposed by others (Séguin, 1907; Foucault, 1990).

Despite the significance attributed to reason (manifest in language) as a marker of autonomous personhood, its *use* value lay not simply in juridical capacities but also in one’s station and capacities in the divine order. John Locke’s political philosophy draws explicit relations between God, reason, labor and property.

He by his own labor does, as it were, *enclose* [italics added] it from the common [...]. God and his reason commanded man also to labor and the penury of his condition required of him. God and his reason commanded him to subdue the earth... and therein lay out something upon that was his own his labour (Locke, 2003, p.113).

Locke and Rousseau are decisive to the emergence of special education. While neither had interest in persons with disability except for taxonomic purposes, both regarded experience as developmental in nature. Locke used ‘natural law’ to ‘demonstrate’ grades of personhood, suggesting that for some development was simply not possible (Goodey, 1994). Locke’s epis-temology is in every way integral to his political views and his view of reason as a capacity necessary for governance over property. The political transition from a monarch exerting control to the so-called sovereignty of the individual did not actualize freedom. Instead, as Foucault illustrates in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977) modes of training ‘self-surveillance’ replaced external forces of corporeal punishment and torture. Ironically, the efficiency of social control was enhanced by the internalization of beliefs that individuals were sovereign selves ruling themselves. According to Foucault, the instantiation of mechanisms of self-control became a fundamental aim of institutions involved in education.

## The origins of the special education curriculum

Rousseau’s fictional account of a student (Emile) and his tutor, as well as Locke’s essay “Some Thoughts on Education” consider pedagogy as a deliberate arrangement of experiences to facilitate intellectual and moral growth (Rousseau, 1979; Locke, 1996). This concept of deliberately structuring experiences played a crucial role in the development of education for people with disabilities. In the case of Rousseau, his belief in the child’s natural propensities (relying on the senses) encouraged a child-centered conception of education, also found later in Dewey and Maria Montessori. Rousseau’s theory of education and his view of the “natural man” established a wave of inquiry into the nature of native capacities and how individuals become educated.

Édouard Séguin’s *Idiocy: Treatment and the Physiological Method* (1902), originally published in 1866, provides insight into the emergence of education for children with disabilities (Séguin, 1907). It is clear that education for children with intellectual disability has always been the most direct challenge for inclusive education, while other forms of disability were more amenable to concealment, remediation or changes in social attitudes.

A watershed moment in special education occurred with the case of Jean-Marc Itard’s “wild boy of Aveyron”, a feral child discovered in a forest outside Paris in 1804 (Itard, 1962). Itard, a French physician, chronicled attempts to educate “Victor” in accordance with philosophical ideas of French “sensationalism”, a set of doctrines that held that the foundations of knowledge lie strictly based on sensation, sight, touch, taste and smell (O’Neal, 1996). Itard’s work with Victor provided the first documentary evidence of an *individualized* curriculum based on an assessment of the “needs” of the student, a hallmark feature of the special education curriculum in its modern form. At the time of Itard’s work in the early nineteenth century few philosophers and physician-pedagogues believed that intellectual disability (then referred

to as “idiocy”) was responsive to education (Itard, 1962).

By his own account, Itard concluded that his efforts were largely unsuccessful, as Victor never learned to speak. Although no doubt motivated by an humanitarian impulse, Itard’s primary interest in Victor was to explore a theory of moral development. The significance of Itard’s work was not its success or failure, but rather in his conception of shaping an individual to accord with his “constitutional laws”. Implicit in this conception is the notion that “difference” implicates incapacities to obey these laws. Pedagogical began to consider how to devise instructional procedures to bring a person into being what Foucault described as disciplinary techniques (Foucault, 1997, p.137).

### **The rise of constructivist pedagogy: A promising beginning**

At the time of Itard’s work in the early nineteenth century many philosophers and pedagogues did not believe intellectual disability (then referred to as “idiocy”) benefited from education. Édouard Séguin opposed this view with his proposal for a “physiological method” of education for people with intellectual disability, drawing inspiration from Itard and the French philosophers known as the “sensationalists” (Séguin, 1907). Séguin’s pedagogy sought to replicate developmental events to correct the neurophysiological development of the child, thus anticipating theories of later constructivists like Piaget. Séguin’s contribution to disability and education was his insistence that congregate facilities serve as schools and not simply as repositories for the unwanted. Séguin left France to flee the political unrest and came to the United States where he exerted influence on the education of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Maria Montessori, the first woman to graduate from medical school in Italy, developed her pedagogical methods that made her famous

working with Seguin at French Asylum Bicêtre in Paris, where she instructed children with intellectual disability. Although Montessori was a physician, she regarded intellectual disability as a pedagogical problem and not a medical one, a view that distinguished her from many others before and after. Based on her success with patients at the Bicêtre, Montessori was asked to develop an educational program for poor children in the San Lorenzo district of Rome. Montessori’s child-centered approach to education depended on a constructivist view of children, privileging their natural propensities to learn through exploration. Montessori designed precise activities chosen to take advantage of developmental steps that Montessori referred to as “sensitive periods” (Montessori, 1972).

Montessori’s influence on American education in general might have been greater had it not been for a vitriolic attack on her pedagogy by American educator William Heard Kilpatrick (a colleague of Dewey), who dismissed Montessori as simply an example of “antiquated methods” derived from Rousseau, Froebel and Johann Pestalozzi. Kilpatrick argued that Montessori’s pedagogy ignored social relations, a view difficult to reconcile with Montessori’s writings, as well as with her efforts to address social problems of poverty through education (Montessori, 1964, p.153). Montessori’s work emphasized fostering a child’s independence and sociality through intellectual growth. Montessori never endorsed the conception of fixed intelligence, encouraged by the rise of intelligence testing that gained influence in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the end, Montessori’s theory of education had much more in common with John Dewey than Kilpatrick’s critique would allow, while views distinctly different from Dewey, such as the views of Dewey’s contemporary, Edward Thorndike gained ascendancy over educational practice (Winfield, 2007; Danforth, 2008). Indeed, the insights of Montessori and Dewey’s constructivism have been largely eclipsed by rigidly narrow curriculums and a total focus on economic productivity with demonstrable consequence for special education.

### Struggle within progressivism: when science becomes culture

In every instance science has been integral in determining methodologies of response to the differences that disability represents. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the growth of market capitalism, industrialization and urbanization, along with the influx of immigrant populations (in the United States) profoundly altered the significance of education and the role of government in managing these changes. In the United States and Britain in particular there was concern for the integrity of culture (often described in terms of 'race') and an intense focus on what were considered forces of moral degeneracy that came to include the poor, the disabled and those born abroad. Science as a method of inquiry became an instrument of policy, by grabbing with strategies of assimilation or segregation. Prominent progressives argued in favor of education as a means to solving societal problems, while cultural conservatives (including proponents of eugenics) advocated repressive measures designed to further marginalize those considered undesirables. The rise of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) testing provided pseudo-scientific justifications for segregation and discussions on eugenics.

John Dewey opposed the use of intelligence testing scores to determine the curriculum based on his belief that human beings were adaptive organisms and that intelligence was context-based and malleable. Moreover, Dewey believed attempts to ground potential in fixed heredity were inimical to a democratic ethic (Danforth, 2008). Biological reductionism nevertheless captured the scientific and popular discourse in many publications with titles like: *The Right of the Child to be Well Born* (Dawson, 1912); *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* (Davenport, 1911); *Backward and Feeble-minded Children* (Huey, 1911); and *Methods of Race Regeneration* (Saleeby, 1911, in a series entitled, "Tracts of the Times").

### Special education: normalizing the different

Osgood (2005) recounts that one of the first references to "special education" occurred in 1902 at the annual meeting of the National Education Association (Osgood, 2005, p.3). By 1918, all states of the United States had enacted compulsory public education legislation for all children. This did not mean that all children with disabilities were educated in public schools. Large institutions continued to dominate "treatment" for those deemed "too disabled" to live and work in society. The conflicting paradigms of "nurture" versus "nature" continued to frame debates over curriculum, creating different tracks for students of putatively different capacities to follow, in order to find a place in society. Professional organizations such as the National Education Association (NEA), the International Council for the Education of Exceptional Children (CEC), the American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD, later changed to AAMR and most recently renamed AAID) and the National Association for the Deaf (NAD), among many others were influential in framing debate and gradually influencing public policy. Parent groups also came to exert a stronger influence on the development of public policy by founding organizations such as the National Association for Retarded Children (NARC, now changed to ARC).

The concept of education for children with disabilities as a "right" gained momentum in the United States with the Civil Rights movement and the Supreme Court Decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) overturning the "separate but equal" doctrine institutionalized in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896). This legislative precedent opened the door for education debate on children with disabilities, culminating in the landmark passing of Public Law 94-142 in 1975 (which passed despite President Ford's veto threat), requiring that all children, no matter their degree or type of disability be entitled to public education. This law, reauthorized and reframed in the

Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990, and again in 2004 required that all students with disabilities receive a “free and appropriate education” in accordance with their “individual needs”, thus requiring special education students to have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

The momentum of the civil rights movement propelled the legislative efforts to enfranchise people with disabilities in education, employment and public access, but the focus of discussion among disability advocates drew on Enlightenment conceptions of personhood, valorizing independence and autonomy. Special educators were at the center of this growing advocacy movement that also involved parents of children with disabilities. A pivotal text in the history of reform in Special Education penned by Lloyd Dunn in an article entitled, “Special Education for the Mildly Retarded - Is Much of It Justifiable?” (1968) lead the way for a full assessment of the foundations of special education, challenging *separateness* as a core practice. Sensitive to the role of socio-cultural and socio-economic phenomena in the identification (i.e. *labeling*) of special education students, Dunn explicitly draws on constructivist principles of learning and egalitarian strands of Enlightenment thought. Dunn however separates students “with more moderately and severely retarded, [and] other types of more handicapped children, or the multiply handicapped” as perhaps requiring a more segregated education (Dunn, 1968, p.6). Nevertheless, Dunn’s recognition of social construction and the role of educators in labeling individuals as deficient stands the test of time as a warning to be heeded. More current special education literature argues for maximizing “the inclusion” of *all* students in “general” education classrooms and extracurricular programs (Stainback; Stainback, 1984).

Another potent force for change in the 1970s emerged in Wolf Wolfensberger’s text *The Principles of Normalization in Human Services* (1972). In publications that followed Wolfensberger attempted to clarify the meaning of normalization as something other than a

hegemonic process for forced conformity (to a statistical norm) on disadvantaged groups with particular focus on individuals with disabilities (Wolfensberger, 2003). Wolfensberger’s efforts to clarify what normalization might mean for human services (including schools) is a latent example of conflict between concepts of equity and equality. How are students with more marked forms of disability, especially students with cognitive impairment to be included? Such questions implicate the larger purposes of education. To be sure, societies require material production to sustain life and culture. Thus, education must address different capabilities and interests, but, as philosopher of education Jane Roland Martin has argued, imposing a fixed hegemonic curriculum immediately discounts other forms of “cultural wealth” and places those students outside such a curriculum in a position of diminution.

While the United States heralds its tradition of local control over schools and curriculum, there are numerous examples throughout history where education has become an arm of national economic policy. Perhaps one of the most paradigmatic examples of education as an extension of national purpose is the publication of *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 under the Reagan administration. This report warned that the United States was being undercut in its preeminently military and economic power by a decline in educational standards and less curricular emphasis on the sciences. One consequence was a realignment of resources in education at the national level toward the promotion of science and the military. Expenditures on behalf of special education students remained static in the Reagan years, as age old debates over the justification of educating those who some believed served no productive purpose (“useless eaters” discourse in more palatable guises) for the sovereignty of the nation. Later justifications offered by the United States Department of Education for expenditures on behalf of special education included assurances to Congress that monies

devoted to special education contributed to the national economy.

Conflicts over the education of students with disabilities in the United States have continued through the tortured attempts to reconcile the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, Public Law 108-446) and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, Public Law 107-110). While original principles of IDEA (originally the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-142) remain intact in the calling for individualized instruction, the latest reauthorization of IDEA (2004) requires that special education students be brought under the rubric of the general education curriculum. NCLB places particular emphasis on “core academics” of reading and mathematics. Schools are judged on the basis of standardized tests intended to determine progress along the lines of benchmarks that individual states are mandated to establish in order to receive federal funding.

To enforce “accountability”, schools are required to demonstrate progress by showing that all students “meet or exceed state proficiency standards” in core academic subjects “not later than 12 years after the end of the school year 2001-2002” (NCLB, Section 1111 (a) (2) (E) (F)). The logical and logistical problems of such a request defy a short explanation, but the intensification of curricular effort into a narrow scope of academic skills underscores which capabilities count and which do not. Ironically, the defenses of these draconian measures are couched in the legislative purpose statements in terms of equality and equity, that all students receive a challenging “high quality” education whatever their original circumstances (NCLB, Section 1001. Statement of Purpose).

The mandate of NCLB for constructs an elaborate system of accountability that represents a particular challenge for special education. The trajectory of reform moving from the isolation of special education students to mainstreaming and now, toward an emphasis on inclusion now must grapple with a fixed curriculum thought to represent the only information a student needs. Inclusion of special education students in the

general curriculum is defended on the grounds that students with special needs were excluded in ways that limited opportunities for a “normal life”. Adding to the strain on special education only a very small segment of special education students are exempt from testing requirements (two percent) in each state, according to the mandates of NCLB based on marked cognitive impairment. The pressure on teachers and administrators to demonstrate “adequate yearly progress” arguably increases dramatically if they are responsible for “too many” special education students (Osgood, 2005, p. 193; “Adequate Yearly Progress” is defined in NCLB, at section 1111 (b) (2) (B)).

IDEA and NCLB further institutionalize a positivist paradigm in the construction and evaluation of pedagogy that harkens back to the roots of scientism as the only valid means of knowing the world. While scientism provides one form of knowledge, it does not exhaust all ways of knowing, nor does scientism escape the assumptions that underlie it. Thomas Skirtic, a special education scholar and critic of educational practice aptly summarizes the ethical and theoretical issues that impugn a reliance on narrow, single-minded methods of knowing in education. Discussing concerns over NCLB’s emphasis on “scientifically based research” Skirtic writes:

[T]he scientifically based research requirement is premised on the instrumental or technical rationality of positivism, which is most suited to a narrowly defined problems that focus on one thing at a time defined by one criterion. As such, on its own [italics added] positivism is ineffective in institutional contexts like schools where multiple goals and activities must be integrated and general purposes must be translated into specific judgments. In these settings decisions cannot be effectively divided into separate, single-aim issues. Therefore, before technical rationality can work, ambiguous situations must be transformed into solvable problems by balancing goals, activities and competing



values and this requires practical rationality, the kind of reasoning upon which the democratic humanist tradition is premised (Skirtic, 2005, p.155).

While the points Skirtic raises directly implicate the entire educational edifice (purpose and practices), he raises some specific questions. What is the place of special education in the larger framework of education? For what reason do we educate students along the spectrum of capabilities? How is it that a positivistic paradigm as opposed to “practical rationality” came to dominate the assessment of education, not only for so-called regular education students, but also for special education students? On what basis is inclusion a “justifiable practice”, recalling Dunn’s article that helped set in motion the drive towards inclusion?

Answers to these questions require inquiry at many levels of analysis. Earlier I argued that the individual and the state have acquired a dialectical relationship where sovereignty of the individual and the state implicate each other. In other words, what is good for the individual is good for the state, where preservation of each are conflated. In a condition of inequality between individuals where difference means ‘danger’, following the logic of Foucault’s analysis, the biopower of the state actualizes machinations of biopolitics in order to maintain social order. From a Foucauldian perspective, rationality and efficiency have become driving forces in the institutional dispersion of power. Schools are among the institutions that Foucault cites as examples of disciplinary practices. An implication of Foucault’s concern with discourses of power and sovereignty is how one’s self-surveillance comes to be seen as a locus of one’s independence. Understood in this way, inclusion becomes a mechanism not to democratize, but instead a machination for maintaining social order. Similarly, self-determination discourses obscure the role of interdependence that in truth allow one to flourish.

The principles of democracy demand a politically inclusive ontology, requiring individuals

with agentic capacities to judge, but they also require a communal sense that is undercut by a Lockean conflation of self-preservation and property, which divides the “in-common” into discrete regions.

Michael Wehmeyer (Wehmeyer, 2004), a scholar and ardent advocate of special education students argues that the concept and term “self-determination” is now overlain with such distorting conceptual baggage that perhaps the term be rejected in favor of a clarifying alternative. Wehmeyer proposes what he calls “causal agency theory” as a fruitful alternative that distinguishes and joins together (1) causal capability (capabilities to make something happen) and (2) agentic capability (capabilities to direct causal actions).

While no doubt these features of agency, as Wehmeyer frames them, contribute to a sense of self-efficacy, they remain socially constructed and actualized in a web of relationships. If self-determination or ‘causal agency theory’ were to become meaningful constructs for empowerment, would they permit any spaces for resistance to special education curriculum? Do they valorize dependence when what one needs exceeds what one can ‘produce?’ These are not questions remote from considering the purpose and practice of special education. The fiction of the ‘sovereign self’ projects diminution on dependence, which is arguably the primary feature human beings share over the full course of a lifetime. Discussions on inclusion require examination to determine how they might in fact contribute to hegemonic views of ‘normal’ personhood that diminish persons with disabilities. In the end, education should teach what we can do with the help of others and not simply what we imagine ourselves to do on our own. ‘Self-determination’ and ‘inclusion’ discourses based on a reified conception of sovereign selves continue to force educators to unreflectively marginalize many with disabilities. Perhaps a return to the constructivist roots of special education found in Montessori and Dewey might change the focus of such education towards embracing the aesthetic and relational dimensions of human experience.

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