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BEYOND ABILITY RANKINGS: EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT AS RELATIONAL RIGOR AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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In this abstract, we present a way of framing and exploring the body, mind and knowledge beyond taken for granted frontiers. The paper connects to disability studies in mathematics and aims at triggering discussion about inclusive relational equity in research and practice. We draw on frame analysis as a mode of exploring new forms of relational rigor and accountability pertaining to students with and without disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

Our purpose in this paper is to (1) interrogate "data-driven," comparison-centered, standardized assessments' capacity to self-feed and self-perpetuate in pre-school to post-secondary systems of mathematical and other forms of knowledge transmission and reproduction; and (2) explore tangible ways to break away from this self-perpetuating paradigm. In dealing with these two components, we defend caring relationality as a core contemporary approach to catalyze inclusive equity through multiple knowledges without borders. This kind of inclusive accountability centered on situated multiple ways of knowing and mutual experiences of caring relationality is what we define as new relational rigor and accountability (NRRA). As such, we stress the significance of caring interdependence called forth by the sociopolitical (Gutiérrez, 2013) turn in mathematics education and inclusive equity principles espoused by the sub-discipline of disability studies in mathematics education (DSME, e.g., Greenstein & Baglieri, 2018; Tan, Lambert, Padilla & Wieman, 2018; Tan & Padilla, 2019). By inclusive equity we mean that all students belong to and are valued members of the community regardless of disability differences (Tan & Padilla, 2019). DSME is explicitly concerned with relational domains. These domains pertain to the sociocultural and sociopolitical ways in which disability is constructed and experienced in formal and informal educational settings and how this resonates to aspects of equity. It has been shown that in calls for equity within research on mathematics education, disability is often left out. This entails that students with disabilities are often not included at all in mathematics education and other kinds of equity research (Lambert, 2015). Our aim is to contribute to moving this particular frontier within the field of research on mathematics education. We align to Lamberts vision that this could contribute to: 'create enabling rather than disabling mathematics classrooms for a broader range of learners (p.15).'

Students with disabilities are often preempted and marginalized through deficiency-centered frames of interpretation grounded on ideology-driven assessment parameters of normalcy and predetermined knowledge hierarchies (Anesia, 2019; Meekosha, 2011; Valle & Connor, 2011).

NRRA aims to dismantle such frames by expanding curriculum to capture different ways knowing and doing, for example, mathematics (Greenstein & Baglieri, 2018). Diaz (2018) puts it this way:

> The study of school mathematics is not about mathematics ... the curriculum embodies cultural and political dimensions that order what is known, thought, and said about who children are and who they should be (p. 2).

In other words, this paper is born out of the need to have a reframed understanding of the political insofar as mathematical knowledge production and distribution is concerned.

FRAME ANALYSIS AS A MODE OF RELATIONAL EXPLORATION

Our exploration of relational dimensions is carried out through frame analysis. Originally formulated by Goffman (1986), frame analysis captures the interpretative and transformative learning power of frames as one deals with both traditional and non-traditional modes of educational assessment. Thus, for example, a careful focus on frames shows how, in a deficit framing of disability, the interpretative presentation of student's capacity for mathematical knowledges is filtered through remedial modes of assessment that assume limitation, inability, and the like, as if these students, by default, do not have a place in mathematics as a discipline (Greenstein & Baglieri, 2018; Lambert, 2018).

Frame analysis as a relational exploration tool must be carefully applied so as to demonstrate the power of relational alternatives such as those of NRRA. In NRRA's framing of disability, inclusive equity and multi-sensing knowledges are the default norm. They are no longer a mere remedial compliance option. Frames, therefore, are presented as firsthand micro-level mathematics education teaching/learning experiential encounters situationally incubated. By incubated we mean that these frames must not be presented as traditional external comparisons. Rather, they must convey specific/situated frames of reference anchored in their own unique educational and interpretative contexts. Through these kinds of relationally situated frames, an exploration of the transformative implications of inclusive and relational equity is made possible with a particular emphasis on DSME principles and practices. By stressing relational equity, we link our frame analysis work with Boaler's (2006) expression in which individuals' differentiated prerequisites and inequalities are recognized and respected within the learning in classrooms. In this sense, frame analysis accomplishes three core exploratory roles: (1) the interrogation of how framing narratives relate to traditional meanings of educational assessment; (2) the investigation of how the narratives in their relational framing point to innovative learning themes; and (3) a survey of the preliminary relational rigor implications for transformative DSME dynamics. Ideally, these DSME dynamics should transcend classroom circumscribe modes of framing and interaction. They should operate through a reflexive look at one's specific power-driven relational practices as educators in terms of carefully monitoring how one affects and gets affected by authentic caring relationality with all students regardless of whether they are categorized as being with or without disabilities.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Our overall relational reframing argument emphasizes caring relationality's role in catalyzing inclusive equity through viewing knowledge, bodies and minds as being without borders or limitless As such, we enact a transgressive spirit against standardized exclusion, which regarding disability, gets perpetuated via dualist conceptions of being and external comparisons where certain types of people (Diaz, 2018) and their knowledges are considered inferior, precluding authentic caring (Rector-Aranda, 2018) modes of relationality and accountability. For students with disabilities and their advocates, authentic caring modes of operating are crucial to disrupting the status quo of compliance-driven and disempowerment-based processes and outcomes. Grounded in authentic caring, NRRA becomes a vehicle for decolonializing mathematics education and toward inclusive equity. In practice, to know how far the individuals mind and body could stretch and what knowledge is possible to achieve, cannot be known until the body, mind and knowledge has been allowed to grow and stretch beyond already known frontiers. This is why we are so concerned with the configuration of a purposive epistemological approach helpful for transcending these frontiers through the micro situational relational power afforded by frame analysis.

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