

Introduction

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When I first proposed the nominal topic of this special issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly*, I thought (naively) that I would be able to publicize at least one or two programs or data-based studies that would begin to shed some light on how children with disabilities (generally served, in the United States, under the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997) are starting to learn how to responsibly exercise their rights as adults. What I found, instead, is that despite the clear language of the law, and the clear opportunity for progress being extended to the schools, most schools seem to be viewing this aspect of IDEA as just another annoying piece of paperwork to get signed. There appears to be little understanding of the opportunities for promoting the competence and self-determination skills of young people with disabling conditions.

Sharon Kruse, Susan Clark and I outline the situation: while understanding of disabling conditions seems to be most promising through a social constructionist model (eg., Berger & Luckman, 1966; Barnes, Mercer, & Shakespeare, 1999), except that a civil rights approach might be more successful when considering people with significant cognitive impairments (Watson, 1996), the barriers in school culture and the lack of understanding of the laws by the schools means that little progress is being made.

Sarah Triano contributes a thoughtful and challenging view of the IDEA: namely, that it is based on a medical model approach and therefore useless. She calls for elemental changes in the system.

James F. Austin reminds us that (as with any children) parents have a role in advocating for their children with disabilities and in helping their children learn how to advocate for themselves, as well.

I was glad to receive some interest on this issue from outside the US and welcome the contribution of Hazel Jones, whose recent advocacy work has focussed on establishing that children with disabilities are often not considered as having rights, in international settings, and in remediating that problem. She has contributed a fascinating piece on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, along with examples showing how children with disabilities are losing out being among the most marginalized of any group of children.

Patwell & Herzog have contributed an approach that needs to be illuminated: what is happening at the college or university level? Are students with disabilities who attend college learning about their rights?

In conclusion: the call for papers generated a number of responses that, in turn, raise their own set of questions. Should IDEA be replaced after 25 years and incremental progress? Should we continue to advocate assertively for rights for people with disabilities or look to the international arena and see that in some parts of the world things could be much worse? Is there a role for parents in helping their children make choices (not substituting their own choices)? Can the school culture be influenced so that children with disabilities change from "those children" to "our children" in the eyes of the school?