



Neurodiversity:
The new cultural
competency in social work
education

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Agenda

- Theoretical frameworks of disability
- What is neurodiversity?
- How did neurodiversity come about?
- Strengths and weaknesses of neurodiversity
- Culturally competent practice with person with ASD
- Implications for social work education

Theoretical Frameworks

- Medical model of disability – person is diagnosed and needs treatment (ICD-10, DSM 5, AAIDD) (Odom, Horner, Snell, Blacher, 2007).
 - Accurate diagnosis important for:
 - 1. identification of etiology
 - 2. prediction of effects on development or behavior,
 - 3. design of intervention and organization of scientific programs of study
 - 4. eligibility for services

Theoretical Frameworks

- Social model of disability looks at the disabling barriers which impact on the emotional well-being of people with impairments (Reeve, 2008).
 - structural dis-ableism that affects activity
 - psycho-emotional dis-ableism that affects being (Reeve, 2012).

Theoretical Frameworks

- Critical disability studies
- Minority Model and Independent Living Movement are ways to achieve social justice for those with disabilities (Mackelprang & Salsgiver (1996))
- Independent living suggests people with disabilities are not patients or clients but are active consumers

Theoretical Frameworks

- Cultural perspective on autism: In an increasing heterogenous world, there are increasing diverse sub-societies
- May be increasing conflict, but also gradual recognition of differences as part of social fabric of society (Miles and Ahuja, 2007).
- Autism now has its own culture (Mesibov, Shea & Shopler, 2005)

What is neurodiversity?

- The fundamental notion of neurodiversity is that rather than seeing autism as a deficit, dysfunction or even as a mental health disorder as it is currently classified in the DSM 5, it is regarded as a naturally occurring cognitive variation. It is considered a genetic expression of differently wired brains with various strengths and weaknesses.

NOW

THIS

Opinions

How did neurodiversity come about?

**Neurodiversity drawn
from
two theories: Social
Model of Disability
& Critical Disability**

(Ferguson & Nussbaum, 2012, Goodley, 2017)

Refined by three concepts

1. Strength-based social work practice

(Saleeby, 1992)

2. Idea of multiple intelligences

(Gardner, 1993)

3. Idea of neurologically based strengths

(Armstrong, 2010a, 2010b, 2015)

How did neurodiversity come about

- 1. Social Policy and Research
- Human Genome Project (1990-2003) mapped out the entire human genome expressions (Autism Genome Project, 1990)
- Autism Speaks and burgeoning of genetic research
- Raised concerns of eugenics
 - Dr. Peter McParland quote (Bell, 2017).

How did neurodiversity come about

- 2. Public relations fiascos
- Autism Speaks video: Autism Every Day
- NYU Child Study Center-Ransom Notes Affair: billboards equating autistics as kidnapped, negative, stereotypical messages (Kras, 2010)

How did neurodiversity come about

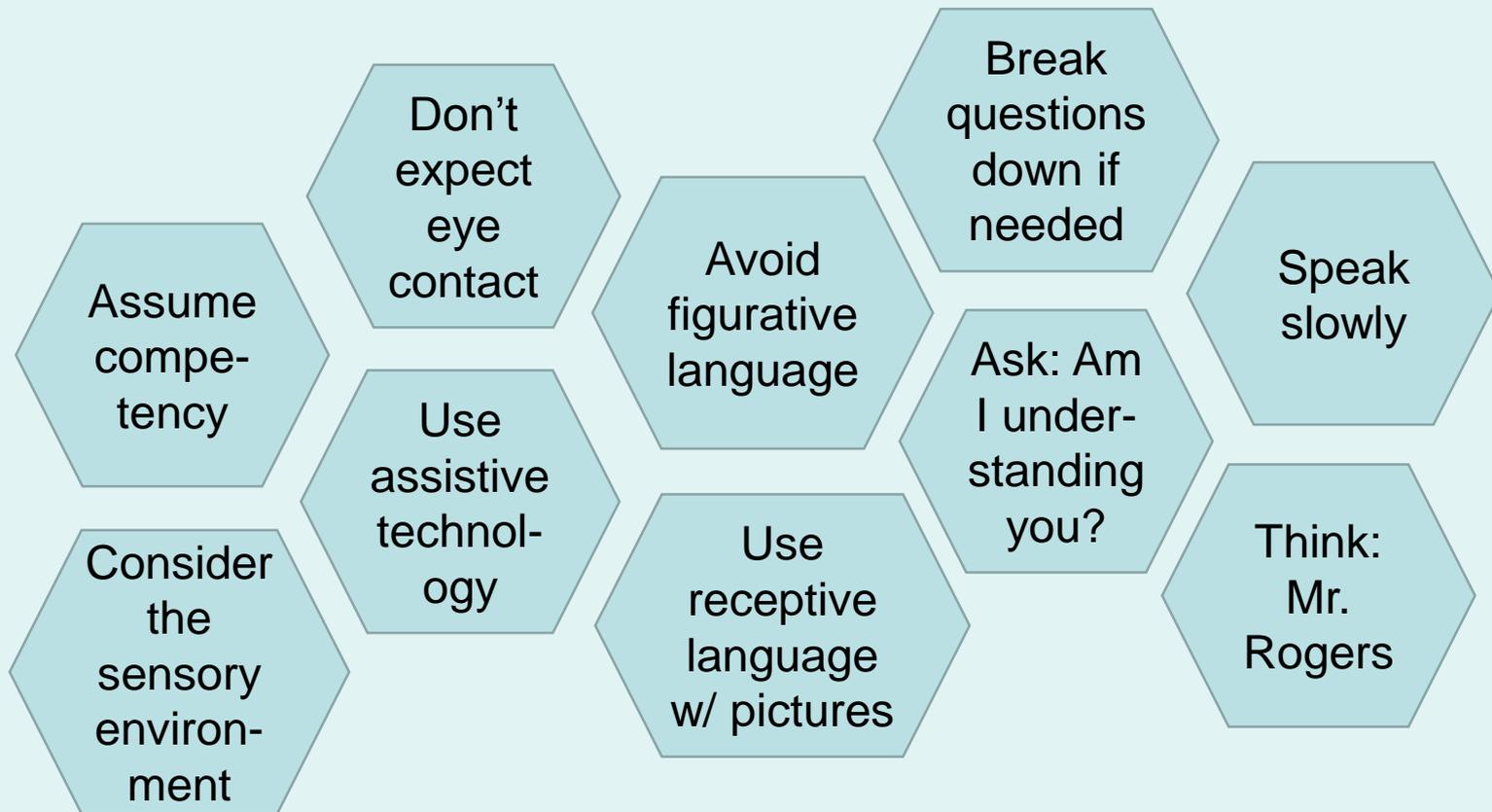
- 3. Lack of any autistic people at Autism Speaks (Chamak, Bonniau & Cohen, 2008, Ortega, 2009).
- 4. Rise of the internet as prosthetic device (Linton, 1998).



Strengths/Weaknesses

- Strength based perspective
- Consistent with social work concepts of self-determination and social justice
- Autism culture has formed already
- Social Work role is limited to supportive one, acceptance
- Proport to speak for everyone with autism
- Better model for those higher functioning individuals(Jaarsma and Wellin, 2012).
- Still face oppression and discrimination (Robertson, 2010)
- Offers no treatment but many struggle with self-injurious behaviors, compulsive rituals

Culturally Competent S.W. Practice



Implications for S.W. Education

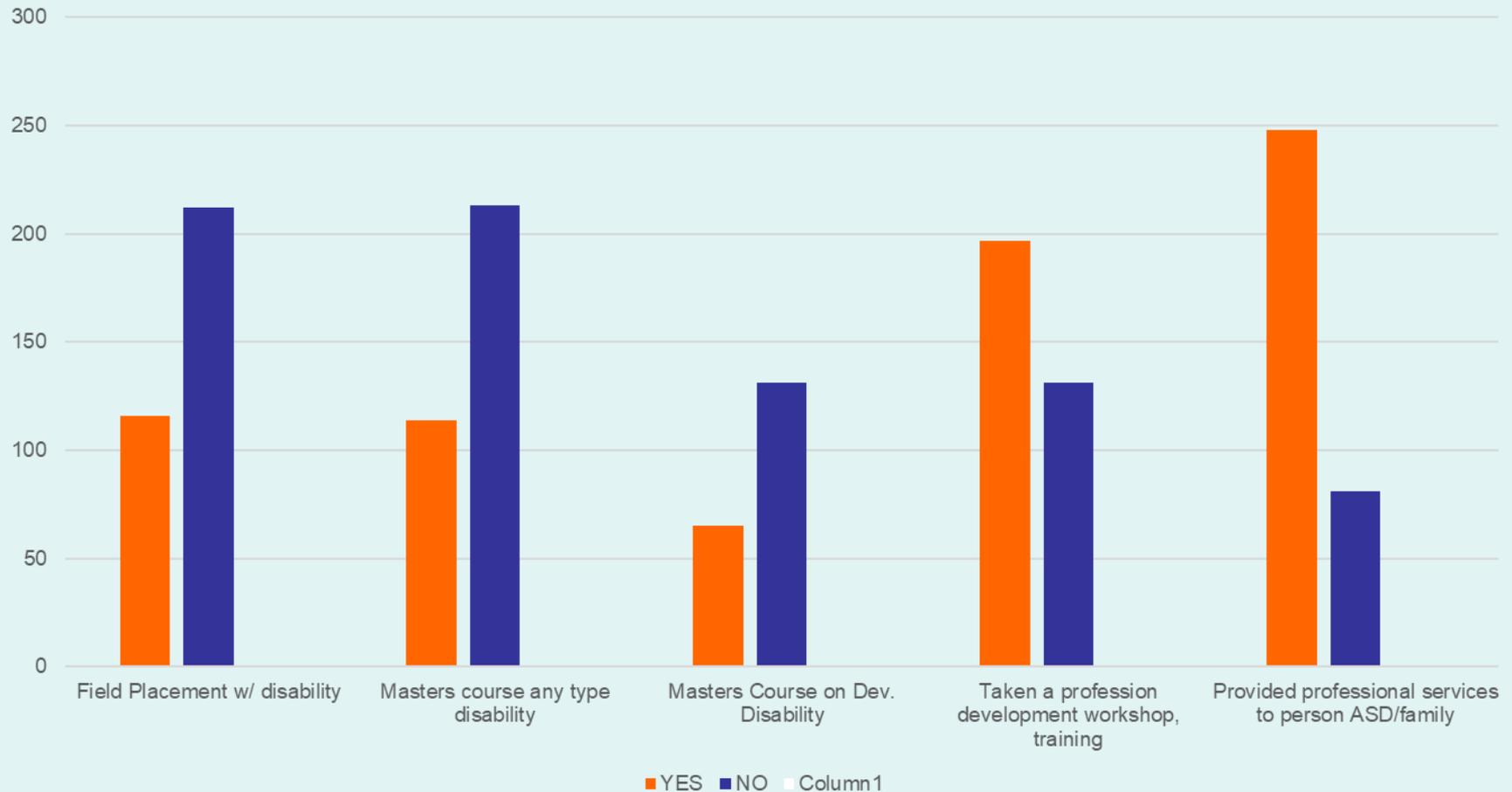
- Rising prevalence of ASD and new generation of consumers that are knowledgeable about their education and civil rights
- CSWE report found 0.9% of MSW's entering health care worked with people with developmental disabilities, 0.1% of all master's social workers (Salsberg et al., 2018).
- Social workers are disinterested in working with intellectual disabilities (Werner and Grayzman, 2011).

Implications for S.W. Education

- NASW study in 2007, 2% social workers work in field of DD (Whittaker and Arrington, 2008).
- 50 U.S. schools of social work, 3 (6%) offered concentrations in developmental disabilities (DD) studies (Laws et al., 2010)
- Social workers had strength based attitudes towards those with ASD, yet still misunderstandings (Haney and Cullen, 2018)

Preliminary Results: my dissertation research

Table 1 Characteristics of Masters Trained Social Workers preparation to work with people with ASD N = 321



Implications for S.W. Education

- much disability-related content continues to be taught from a medical, deficit-focused model (Mackelprang, 2010).
- Global and social changes necessitates changes to make society more inclusive
- CSWE and NACW both recognize disabilities as an aspect of diversity, but it is medicalized by diagnostic categories (Mackelprang, 2010).
- Disability was most frequently covered in classes on diversity & least frequently covered in courses on research and evaluation
 - Faculty struggle to find time to fit disability content into the crowded curriculum
 - Creation of disability-focused material (Ogden, McCallister, Neely-Barnes, 2017).

Questions and Thank you

- Questions?
- Thank you!

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