



## DLM (Disabled Lives Matter)



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**Submission:** July 27, 2020; **Published:** August 04, 2020

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### Abstract

The lives of individuals with disabilities matter (DLM-disabled lives matter). In the appropriate education of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, resistance to a full continuum of alternative placements (full inclusion) and anti-labeling rhetoric are distractions from the primary objective of appropriate education.

**Keywords:** Disabled Lives Matter; Environment; Students; Education; Restrictive; Demeaning; Inclusion; Labeling; Ethical treatment; Special talents; Supreme Court; Demagogic; Clinging; Argumentation; Works; Program; World; Minorities; Impairment

**Abbreviations:** BLM: Black Lives Matter; IDD: Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities; DLM: Disabled Lives Matter; CAP: Continuum of Alternative Placements; DS: Disability Studies; LRE: Least Restrictive Environment; ALM: All Lives Matter

### DLM

About 70 years ago, Richard Hungerford [1], then president of the organization now called the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, published a classic editorial titled "On Locusts." He seemed to anticipate many of the issues we now call "inclusion" and "labeling," which are perhaps perpetual issues [2].

Inclusion and labeling are also issues in the world-wide Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement of the year 2020, and BLM might remind us that the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) also matter-that Disabled Lives Matter (DLM). Recognizing the differences between disability and impairment and the meanings and implications of both are important for ethical treatment [3]. Certainly, the labels Black and Disabled do not describe everything about any individual's life, but both Black and Disabled are categories and labels that are necessary to focus advocacy.

People with disabilities, like those who don't have them, can have remarkable abilities and special talents and need their rights and opportunities to exercise them [4]. Those with IDD, like those with others with and without any disability, are extremely varied in what they can and can't do. Inclusion and labeling are among the most important issues for people regardless of their color or ability, and diversity of all kinds must be seen in relation

to the particular activity under consideration. In the following comments, the activity under consideration is education.

If "inclusion" in education means being engaged in a program of instruction that is meaningful and challenging for the individual, then what Kauffman and Badar [5] called *proprium instructio* meets the requirement of the United States Supreme Court regarding the education of a student with any category of disability [6]. Appropriate instruction is the primary task of educating all students, including those with disabilities. Appropriate education for all requires special education for some, including teachers with special training rather than a generic or all-purpose preparation [7]. Such education also requires identifying, categorizing, and labeling students who need something other than the standard education given to students who do not have those special needs.

The anti-vaccination movement also parallels some aspects of the rejection in education of a continuum of alternative placements (CAP) for students IDD. Anti-vaxxers include individuals known to support other causes with rational, morally justified arguments, but when it comes to vaccination these people ignore scientific evidence in favor of ideas that are dangerous and demagogic [8]. They apparently are convinced that clinging to their ideology regarding vaccines is more important than scientific evidence. In argumentation, their conclusions are inevitably wrong because they begin with false premises. The same problems of science

denial and illogic are found in disability studies (DS), an approach that portrays special education as a disservice and makes the assumption that special education, particularly if not practiced in a general education environment, is second-rate and demeaning, even if it is the least restrictive environment (LRE) chosen from a CAP [9,10].

BLM illustrates what is at stake in labeling and categorizing. True enough, *all lives matter* (ALM), but repeating that truism distracts attention from the fact that the lives of Black humans have not been valued as much as White ones. ALM works against a necessary focus on Black lives. Attiah [11] pointed out how naming neither the category (Black) nor the individual (say, George Floyd or Breonna Taylor) guarantees that justice will be done (i.e., naming is not a sufficient condition for change, but naming is a necessary condition). Justice will not be done without naming the category or person. The plight of minorities, including those with IDD will be ignored if their category is not labelled-named.

Some who advocate for students with IDD do not seem to understand that individuals who need special help will be ignored if they are not clearly labeled. If a student is judged to have no disability or deficit, then that student inevitably must forego a special program and will receive only that which is provided to all students. Moreover, some students with disabilities need a special, dedicated environment-the LRE chosen from a CAP [12].

Labels and categories are not inherently evil, even when applied to people and their education. We need labels and categories to make sense of the world. Any word (i.e., label) can be abused, and all words can be used for evil purposes. Resistance to a CAP (including special, dedicated environments other than the general education environment) and to using labels and categories are distractions from appropriate instruction.

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DOI: 10.19080/GJIDD.2020.06.555698

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