

## Global Perspectives on Inclusion

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In spite of all the rhetoric surrounding inclusion in the United States and abroad, many students continue to be excluded on the basis of presumed difference and “special” needs (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Liasidou, 2008). Across the US, the risk of identification as disabled, and subsequent placement within a special education classroom, is greatest for certain culturally and linguistically diverse students (Zion & Blanchett, 2011). At the core of this dilemma are questions related to difference, perceptions surrounding it, and beliefs about how it is best responded to within schools.

Since its inception, the field of special education has been guided by a medical model discourse that equates student difficulty with inherent pathology. Within this dominant narrative, “symptoms” result from an underlying biological condition and assessment is subsequently focused on the individual in order to discern proper diagnosis and treatment. Similarly, within special education, ability and potential are assumed to be inherent qualities, also subject to diagnosis and treatment (Mehan, Hertweck, & Miels, 1986). This discourse of intrinsic deficit has become so naturalized within the field of special education that it is commonplace for practitioners to speak of student difficulty in terms of inherent qualities and characteristics. In one research study examining race and disability in schools, a

teacher discussing the nature of student difficulty commented, “Some children, you know, are just born with it...You know, like some children have blue eyes” (Harry & Klingner, 2006, p. 72). Deficit-based discourses embed assumptions about the nature and meaning of difference, and thus limit interpretations that can be reached about the academic and social behaviors of individuals who differ from institutional and social norms. Too often, such differences are equated with pathology, resulting in special education identification and placement.

Rather than a search for intrinsic deficit, scholars within the field of education have proposed an alternative view of disability as a product of the interaction between the individual and his environment (Collins, 2003; Forman & McCormick, 1995; Gindis, 1999; Goodley & Rapley, 2002; Poplin & Phillips, 1993; Reid & Valle, 2004; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). This sociocultural perspective calls for an examination of the myriad ways in which schools and classroom environments facilitate success for some students and failure for others (Collins, 2003;

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Slee & Cook, 1993). Both perspectives on difference hold implications for the ways in which inclusion is conceptualized and practiced within school contexts.

In this inaugural issue of *Global Education Review*, we engage the broad and controversial topic of inclusion by examining dominant perspectives, international efforts and issues, and core values for teachers. Curt Dudley-Marling and Mary Bridget Burns begin the conversation with a critical analysis of two dominant views on inclusion: the deficit view and the social constructivist view. In *Two Perspectives on Inclusion in the United States*, the authors consider the goals, assumptions, and practices that undergird each perspective while clearly aligning their interests and work within a social constructivist framework. In their discussion of inclusive practices, Dudley-Marling and Burns explain that in the United States, the deficit perspective draws heavily on special education law, specifically the *least restrictive environment* mandate, and this ultimately becomes the basis for determining whether students will gain entry into the general education classroom. If so, further determination is made regarding the suitability of full or partial access. In contrast, the social constructivist perspective assumes, from the outset, that the general education classroom is the suitable environment for all students; as such, it should be appropriately modified to meet the variety of student needs it encompasses.

In the following article, Maria-Luise Braunsteiner and Susan Mariano Lapidus consider the ways in which perspectives on inclusion fuel resistance to inclusive efforts. They offer that resistance is based on limited and narrow perceptions of inclusion and concern over limited resources such as teacher time and attention. The authors provide several suggestions for moving an inclusive agenda forward, focusing mainly on teacher training

institutions and the *Index for Inclusion* as a comprehensive resource to facilitate inclusive schools.

Thus it is evident that *inclusion* defies any simple explanation. This is especially true in the international arena where its meaning and significance derive more from the context in which it is implemented than from the policy documents that define it. International resolutions such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and UNESCO's *Education for All* (UNESCO, 2010) champion inclusion and equality in education, but empirical studies within some developing countries shed light on the limits of these policy documents in guiding the implementation of inclusive education (Naraian, 2013). They furthermore raise questions about the feasibility of inclusive practices within educational systems that are plagued by persistent low achievement and challenges in effectively educating most of the student body (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011). Although these countries may adopt the language of inclusion, the reality may indeed stray far from the goal of a truly egalitarian educational system for all.

Whether the context is national or international, inclusion requires examination of the values and goals held across a system; it requires understanding of the concept in the sociocultural contexts within which it is being implemented, and it requires multidimensional transformation of schooling systems (Miles & Singhal, 2009; Naraian, 2013). The next two articles grapple with some of the aforementioned issues related to inclusive practice within an international context. In *It Takes Two to Tango: Inclusive Schooling in Hong Kong*, Jeremy H. Greenberg and Christine Greenberg discuss the challenges associated with the inclusion movement in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China. Among those mentioned are attitudinal barriers, limited specialized training for teachers, an inflexible

education system, and the theoretical and practical shortcomings of a government issued tool for school self-evaluation and development. The authors propose a need to look abroad for successful evidence-based practices in the education of students with special needs and specifically recommend the use of a teaching methodology called, “applied behavior analysis” in teaching students with special needs. They conclude by examining one successful inclusive school model that implements this approach.

The next article attempts to bring the subject of disability and inclusion to the forefront of the comparative education literature. Alisha Brown, in *Situating Disability within Comparative Education: A Review of the Literature*, first examines representations of disability across four comparative education journals and also analyzes global and national perceptions of inclusive education as represented within these journals. Brown finds that disability is commonly represented as a social product, resulting from an individual’s interaction with the environment. This finding is significant in that inclusive efforts require naming, critiquing, and dismantling of all environmental barriers preventing full inclusion. Brown’s work also highlights the dilemmas that emerge when global educational initiatives intersect with local educational values, norms, and realities.

We close this theme issue with a look at core values for teachers working within inclusive contexts. Amanda Watkins and Verity Donnelly in *Core Values as the Basis for Teacher Education for Inclusion* begin their discussion of teacher education policy issues in the context of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (The UN Convention) (UN, 2006) and discuss how The UN Convention served as an impetus for change in the educational landscape of Europe. The authors later delve into the current policy agenda for teacher education for inclusion in Europe and discuss the core values necessary for

teachers to work effectively in inclusive education. The core values discussed were drawn from the work of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education project on Teacher Education for Inclusion (The Agency) and on the feedback of hundreds of European stakeholders in education from the policy makers to parents as well as learners themselves. Subsequently, the authors present a framework of core values linked to critical areas of teacher competence which The Agency developed.

In this first issue of *Global Education Review*, the authors contribute to a growing body of knowledge on the controversial issue of inclusion. Their contributions enrich an age-old conversation surrounding the nature and meaning of difference and the ways in which societies treat those deemed “other.”

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