

Book Review of *Inclusive Education: A Systematic Perspective*

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The right of students with disabilities to receive a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment is guaranteed equal protection under the law granted to all citizens under the Constitution of the United States. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004 (IDEA) requires that students with disabilities be educated to the maximum extent possible with students without disabilities. As a result of this bill, a higher percentage of students with high incidence disability categories have been placed in general education classrooms over the past 30 years (National Center for Education Statistics, [NCES], 2019).

Despite ample evidence of research-based findings that demonstrate the benefits of inclusive educational environments for all students with disabilities, many students in lower incident disability categories continue to be segregated in self-contained classrooms or in separate schools (Agran et al., 2020). These students typically have limited or no opportunities to participate academically or socially in general education classrooms which leaves them ill prepared for adult life (National Council on Disability, 2018). Only limited progress has been made for the development and sustainability of effective inclusion programs for these students (Brock, 2018).

Systematic and coherent approaches to well-designed inclusive programs are more likely to increase progress toward improvements that can be made and sustained over time (Bryk et al., 2015). *Inclusive Education: A Systematic Perspective*, edited by Howley and colleagues, provides a collection of inclusive models of teacher preparation, educational leadership, and state and local educational services in Ohio that have demonstrated effective, equitable, and inclusive education for all students. The authors note that one of their goals

with this book is “to provide a context for critical thinking about ways to increase broad and deep opportunities for equity and inclusive practice” (Howley et al., 2020, p. xv). The authors share practical solutions and recommendations for inclusive practices at a variety of levels of the educational system, including higher education, with a focus on teacher preparation programs, principal preparation programs, and state and local educational agencies. Additionally, this book provides an examination of practices at the PK–12 school level that provide examples of faculty and administration professional development that incorporate concepts of inclusion into the curriculum that have resulted in positive outcomes. Although the collection of chapters represents a multilayered framework of ideas generated primarily through work that has been done in Ohio that promote effective inclusive education for all students, contributing authors include professionals outside of Ohio.

The 27 chapters of *Inclusive Education: A Systematic Perspective* are divided into seven sections. Section I introduces the meaning and significance of inclusive practice. The authors call attention to ethical considerations related to social justice in Chapters 1, 2, and 3. Classroom structures and routines that marginalize some students are contrasted to inclusive practices that ensure quality instruction, high expectations, and supportive learning environments. Section II outlines the basic components essential to effective inclusive practices that have demonstrated promotion of successful inclusion in classroom. The authors of Chapter 4 present an assessment tool that can identify observable teacher behaviors that help to promote inclusive environments. Such an assessment can be useful for nonstandardized evaluations of implementation of inclusive practices both in the classroom and across an entire school. In Chapter 5, the authors share their efforts to provide contexts to preservice teachers that enable them to confront and examine preexisting biases and stereotypes in their own perspectives of race, class-based disparities, and poverty that impact their approach to teaching and to inclusion of all students.

The focus of Section III is inclusive assessment practices. Chapter 6 reviews the finding of a study involving school districts which have been successful in promoting inclusive education that have resulted in improved achievement for students from marginalized groups. Chapter 7 presents a formative cross-content assessment framework, designed to support inclusion and to provide data that can measure students’ progress within the general education curriculum. Section IV covers the role that leadership plays in implementing and sustaining schoolwide inclusive practices. Supportive ideas are provided in Chapter 8 for principals, which include consistent use of evidence-based instructional strategies to reach targets and the value of sharing leadership, coaching teachers, and reflecting on practice. Chapter 9 provides an example of a school district

that is in the process of working to increase the use of inclusive practices by stressing the importance of collaborative teams and communities. Chapter 10 highlights the need for school leaders to celebrate diversity by effectively reaching students from diverse backgrounds and empowering all students to become active members of the learning community.

Section V consists of eight chapters in which the topic of preparing teachers for inclusive classrooms is discussed. In Chapter 11, the authors examine the organizational dynamics of the dual-licensure teacher preparations programs (in special education and general education) of six higher education institutions. In addressing the findings, the authors focus attention on challenges associated with curriculum restructuring efforts. Chapters 12–18 discuss curriculum reform specific to dual-license programs that include a focus on early childhood, middle school, online, and Montessori education, as well as culturally responsive restructured programs that all incorporate inclusive practices.

Section VI focuses on the critical role that school principals play and the distributed model of leadership. In Chapter 19, the authors describe how, together with professional development that features evidence-based instructional curriculum and instructional leadership practices, it is possible to prepare principals to become inclusive instructional leaders. Tools to evaluate inclusive teaching practices resulting from the collaborative efforts between higher education and middle grade PK–12 partners are described in Chapter 20. Through the findings of an online survey, insight into inclusive instructional perspectives and perceived barriers of classroom teachers and building administrators are shared in Chapter 21. The authors of Chapter 22 describe invitational education in a professional development initiative designed to encourage schoolwide inclusive attitudes. The author of Chapter 23 reviews integration as a focus of social justice and the development of special education and dispositions into the reconstruction of a principal preparation program.

State support for inclusive practices is discussed in Section VII. Providing equitable education programs statewide involves a multifaceted collaboration among institutions of higher education and state and local education agencies. Chapters 24–27 in Section VII cover restructuring teacher preparation, practices that foster and support reform of licensure standards, formation of partnerships that support sustained collaborative efforts, and education policies that promote inclusive educational practices.

Given the generally fragmented approaches in the literature regarding inclusive education, a systematic approach especially geared to administrators within higher education, PK–12 schools, local and state education agencies, and state and local policymakers is much needed. This book offers examples of systemic, coherent, and well-designed change efforts that have the potential

of advancing inclusive education (McLeskey, 2020). Building upon inclusive practices identified as working well in Ohio, the many authors of *Inclusive Education: A Systematic Perspective* have provided to a broader nationwide audience the possibilities of change that can lead to widespread development and scaling up of effective inclusive programs.

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