

ARTÍCULO ORIGINAL

Inclusion as if we meant it: a social justice perspective

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ABSTRACT: This article explores how in order to understand inclusive education from a social justice perspective, we must attend to four issues: (1) How limited conceptions of "normality" impede inclusion; (2) The ways in which school climate must address issues of student diversity and acceptance; (3) The need to expand beyond restrictive forms of curriculum and pedagogy; (4) The ways in which teachers are prepared for inclusive education. Ways of overcoming these obstacles to full inclusion are presented so that inclusion can be maximally transformative of our educational system and society.

KEY WORD: Inclusion; Diversity; Social justice; School climate; Teacher education

La inclusión real: Una perspectiva de justicia social

RESUMEN: El presente artículo analiza cuatro cuestiones clave para entender la educación inclusiva desde una perspectiva de justicia social: (1) Cómo la limitada concepción de "normalidad" dificulta la inclusión; (2) Las medidas que se deben tomar a nivel de clima escolar para abordar cuestiones relacionadas con la diversidad del alumnado y la aceptación; (3) La necesidad de ir más allá de formas restrictivas del currículum y de la pedagogía; (4) El modo en que se prepara al profesorado para la educación inclusiva. Asimismo, se presentan distintas soluciones para la superación de dichos obstáculos, de manera que la inclusión pueda ser plena y tenga capacidad para transformar al máximo el sistema educativo y la sociedad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Inclusión; Diversidad; Justicia Social; Clima escolar; Formación de profesorado.

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For many people, the word "inclusion" means including students with disabilities in typical educational settings. It is sometimes seen as an extension of the principle formerly known as "mainstreaming," or trying to bring children with disabilities back into the "mainstream" of education.

1. INTRODUCTION

But, increasingly, people are realizing that this definition of inclusive education is extremely

limiting. The first limitation is the failure to acknowledge that children vary in thousands of different ways and that to think about education that is inclusive and responsive to one set of differences (called disabilities) and to ignore differences of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, language, religion, and class doesn't create an educational system that is truly inclusive of all. Modifying an art activity for Jason who has cerebral palsy and limited use of his hands is a good start --- but when Jason is African-American, Muslim, and lives with his Mom, then sending him home with a Christmas ornament that says "For Mom and Dad" doesn't really evidence thinking about him as a student with many characteristics, identities and educational needs.

Perhaps an even more major limitation of current discussions about inclusion is the failure to recognize that school policies are reflections of broader societal values and that the obstacles to inclusive education are thus deeply embedded in social, political, economic and ideological structures (Sapon-Shevin, 2007). We can't just "change schools" unless we recognize the ways in which such changes demand major shifts in thinking and policies that go far beyond education. A recently published book, *Condition Critical: Key Principles for Equitable and Inclusive Education* (Lawrence-Brown & Sapon-Shevin, 2013) makes the case that there are important principles which underlie a social justice approach to education which transcend limited categories and identities.

I often use the following metaphor to explain the breadth and depth of what is required by inclusion and what is possible. When teachers are teaching dental education, they have students brush their teeth and then give them a little red tablet to chew. This tablet is called a "revealing tablet" because it shows clearly any places that have not been adequately brushed, thus alerting the brusher to areas that need more attention (Sapon-Shevin, 1996).

Objections to inclusion are often phrased as follows:

- (1) If we include a child like Marco, then we'll have to look at the school climate --- our kids can be very cruel.
- (2) If we include a child like Terry, we'll have to rethink our curriculum --- much of what we teach isn't really relevant to his life and experiences.
- (3) If we include a child like Carissa, then we'll have to rethinking our pedagogy --- whole group instruction just doesn't work for her.
- (4) If we include a child like Patrick, then we'll have to give our teachers more training and support --- they aren't really ready or prepared.

My response to these objections is "yes, yes, yes, yes." Attending to school and classroom climate, curriculum, pedagogy and teacher preparation and support are essential to successful inclusion. And these are things we should be doing on an on-going basis for ALL students. But sometimes it is only when we see a sharp or dramatic discrepancy between "school as it is" and the needs of a particular child that we realize that there are inadequacies, limitations and flaws in how we "do school." The child who is being "included" can become the "revealing tablet" of the classroom/school, showing us clearly areas that require more work! Sadly, rather than thanking that child or those parents for presenting us with a rich opportunity to examine our current practices and make them better, schools often seek to exclude or segregate the child who is "different" so as to remove the challenges presented.

The objections to inclusion cited above are often raised regarding students with disabilities, but they are also directed at students with "other differences". The school is a hostile place for students who identify as "queer," so we attempt to either regulate the student's behavior to make the difference disappear, or we advise removing the child to a school for queer youth; we realize that our curriculum isn't culturally relevant to students of color in our school, so we propose that they attend a school that focuses on diversity. These "solutions" have in common that they leave intact (and unimproved) the current classroom/school practices, policies and procedures, to say nothing about limited and damaging messages about diversity and inclusion that such "solutions" model.

There is good news, however. While the changes required for schools to be fully and genuinely inclusive are massive, it is not a zero-sum game. That is, making things better for a child with Asperger's syndrome who has limited social skills and needs friends, will not make things worse for other children, and, in fact, may introduce practices and changes that will benefit many more children. Implementing more culturally relevant pedagogy --- even if the impulse for this originates because there are many Hispanic kids in the class -- - will result in a richer, fuller curriculum for all. Accommodations made originally for "marginalized" students are generally beneficial to other students as well. Asking everyone to be "the same," that is, to assimilate, deprives everyone of these benefits and of the strengths that emerge in children and educators from supporting all students. Although some highly competent, mainstream students may be able to survive or even succeed in environments that do not differentiate or attend positive to differences, these are not ideal classrooms for anyone. Good inclusive education is good education (Lawrence-Brown & Sapon-Shevin, 2013; Sapon-Shevin, 2007; Sapon-Shevin, 2010).

This article details what I see as four major impediments to the implementation of fully inclusive education and how each of these must be addressed to make inclusion more than a slogan:

1. Conceptions of "normality" and lack of connection between inclusion and other liberation/diversity movements.
2. School climates and cultures which are hostile to diversity and do not support inclusion of all students.
3. Narrow conceptions of curriculum and limited forms of pedagogy; lack of differentiation; high-stakes testing, corporate control of education and increasing privatization of schools.
4. Teacher education which does not support inclusive education.

2. CONCEPTIONS OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION; LINKING LIBERATION MOVEMENT

How we define normality and "abnormality" will affect how we look at human variation; it is critical to actively resist the medical model which sees disability and difference as something to be "cured" or obliterated and explore multiple, positive, more accepting response to differences. It is also crucial to link movement towards full inclusion with other attempts to deconstruct "normality" and extend our understanding of diversity.

The ways in which we use "normality" as a way of judging and policing others' behavior are often limiting and sometimes oppressive. In order to unpack the concept of normality, it is important to understand the following:

- Normality is a social construct and there are not clear or universal definitions or boundaries.
- People use the concept of "normality" to regulate others' behavior and to control the variation.
- We are all multi-faceted human beings who exist and act along many continua.
- Cultural differences (big and small) radically affect our definitions of what is "normal".
- Our attitudes towards "difference" are the big problem, rarely the differences themselves.
- Some responses to diversity are positive and enriching; others can be dangerous and even deadly.
- Expanding our understanding of "normality" and "variation" will enrich our lives, deepen our relationships and improve our communities. Diversity is not a "problem" to be solved, but a natural and enriching facet of our lives.

In a book chapter entitled "Beyond Benevolence: Friendship and the Politics of Help" Emma Van Der Klift and Norman Kunc (1994) created a table that shows the various ways in which people respond to differences [on the left] and the consequences of that response [on the right]:

MARGINALIZATION	Segregation Avoidance Aggression
REFORM	Assimilation Rehabilitation
TOLERANCE	Resignation Benevolence
VALUING (Diversity as Normal)	Equal Worth Mutual Benefit Belonging

Table 1: Responses to difference (Van Der Klift and Norman Kunc, 1994)

They explain:

We live in a society that tells us there is only one "right" way to be. At times all of us feel measured against an unfairly strict standard: white, able bodied, young, intelligent, successful, attractive, thin and preferably male. Normalcy is a tight bell-curve, allowing little deviance without societal repercussion. Even those of us who find ourselves encompassed well within the confines of the curve feel pressure to conform to the middle, while those who fall outside its range feel that they are seen not only as deviant, but deficient.

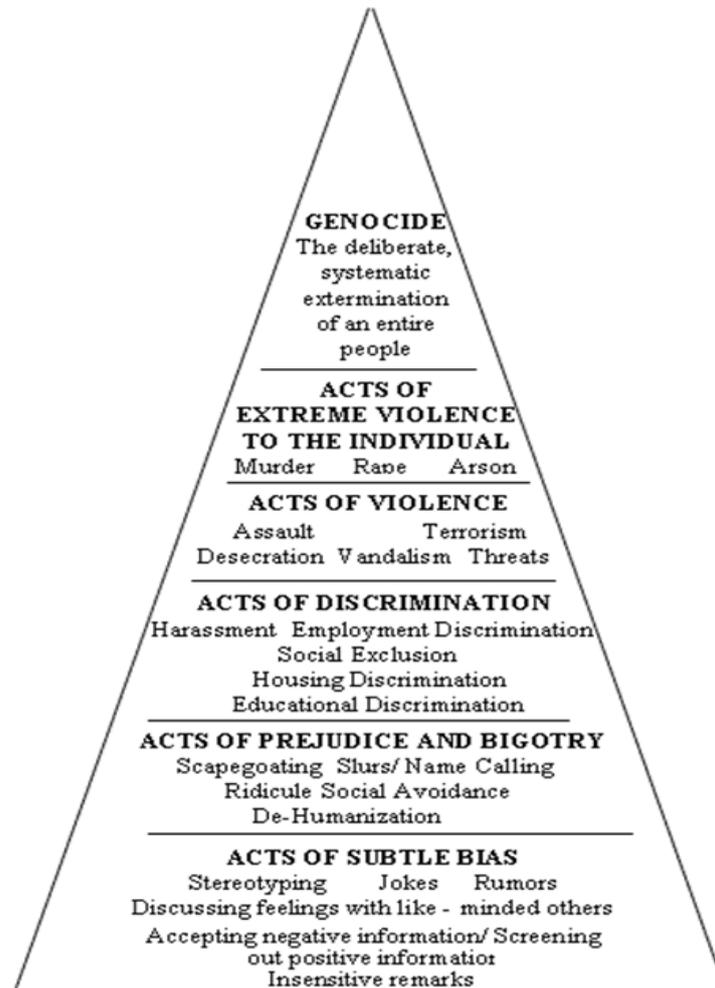
It is puzzling that this standard of normalcy includes so few of us. We know that diversity, not uniformity, is the real societal norm. After all, the human community consists of great variety; race, gender, language, color, religion, ability and sexual orientation. People of color make up most of the world's population. Women comprise fifty one percent of the global population. Most of the world does not live in a state of affluence." (Van Der Klift & Kunc, 1994: 396).

The consequences of how we view difference can go beyond the response of "marginalization" shared above. The Anti-Defamation League uses the following graphic, The Pyramid of Hate, to

discuss the escalating ways in which negative responses to difference have been played out in the world.

The Pyramid of Hate (Graphic 1) can be seen as a way of describing various responses to diversity ----- racial, linguistic, size, religious, and sexual orientation. It forces us to consider where we learned how to respond to differences and the consequences of that education or lack thereof. This model is very powerful in looking at how what may seem like "innocent" behavior at first ----- exclusion, jokes and name calling --- can quickly escalate. The bullying of today can become the hate crime of tomorrow. The recent attention to the spate of bullying suicides has provided ample evidence of the deadly consequences of intolerance and hatred towards those perceived as different. Marginalized groups have not all been oppressed by the same methods, at the same times, and to the same degree. But each has been treated unjustly and can connect in mutually beneficial ways around civil rights and social justice concerns.

When examining the history of oppression and discrimination against various groups of people throughout time, there are some similarities in what discrimination "looks like".



Graphic 1. The Pyramid of Hate (Anti-Defamation League, 2003)

- **Stereotypes:** Generalizations are made about the group and assumptions are made about individuals based on that belief (Black men are dangerous; Chinese people are good at math; women aren't mechanical; people with disabilities aren't sexual beings).
- **Stigmatizing/limiting labels:** People in marginalized and oppressed groups often experience labels (single words) that are generally negative and prejudicial ("Faggot," "Fatty," "retard," "Slut," "Wetback").
- **Limited and/or Mis-representation:** People in various categories are often either invisible (in the media, for example) or are represented in extremely limited or prejudicial ways. For example, commercials for products rarely include people who are not thin and attractive; children's books rarely include non-Christians in stories.
- **Segregation:** Based on some characteristic or putative characteristic, people are often forced or encouraged to participate in separate schooling, employment, recreation, etc.
- **Unequal opportunities/loss of rights:** People may be denied opportunities based on their identities: gay parents who lose custody of their children upon the death of their partner; women who are not allowed to participate in certain sports; people with disabilities who are denied access to higher education.

When a young man was harassed and bullied in his high school for being “gay” (although he had never, in fact, embraced that label himself), he was told that if he would only “straighten up” and not be so engaged in the arts, and not be so gentle and “soft,” then the problem would be solved. The principal was unwilling to examine the underlying homophobia in the school culture or to discipline the students who had tied the young man up in a volley ball net and thrown him in the garbage can. The onus of change was placed on the student who was experiencing harassment. The existence of programs (known as “conversion therapy” or “reparative therapy” which may include electric shock) designed to “re-program” or cure (defined as embracing heterosexuality) people who identify as gay/lesbian/transgendered, is clear evidence of how deep the oppression runs and where it can lead us.

Some parents have chosen to have their children with Down syndrome undergo surgery in order to change their facial appearance, arguing that since society discriminates against people with this syndrome, they can increase their child’s future success and broaden his/her possibilities by decreasing the chances that their child will be “read” as having Down syndrome. While changing attitudes is far slower work and one must assume that parents making this choice have their child’s best interests at heart, it is very troubling that we want to “fix” the object of ill-treatment rather than address our own and others’ limited, dangerous and damaging responses.

But despite the commonalities among various oppressions --- racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, classism ---- there are salient differences as well. Identities and characteristics which are sources of oppression vary in their visibility, contexts, permanence, and histories. Learning to become good allies to those experiencing oppression requires understanding distinctions and recognizing that support and activism to redress discrimination may be different; i.e. we cannot assume that how one advocates for a person with a physical disability provides a model for how to advocate for someone in a religious minority.

But various marginalized groups may share a vision for a strength-based educational system

based on a view of human difference as essentially valuable, not deficient. Ball & Harry (1993) describe the following goal of multicultural and social reconstructionist education:

... to reform the school program so that all students experience success, social equity, and cultural pluralism...[and are prepared] to use political analysis of inequities inside and outside of school and to use collective social action to redress inequality. (432)

Unfortunately, liberation and civil rights’ movements directed at challenging oppression and discrimination against a particular group have not always been inclusive of all people, nor have they recognized the ways in which various oppressions are linked. The Civil Rights’ movement of the 1960’s in the United States struggled with the homophobia of the time; Martin Luther King Jr. separated himself from Bayard Rustin (a gay man) who had been active as an organizer and speech writer. The women’s movement did not embrace lesbians, fearing that it would damage their image and power. The disability organization ADAPT¹ at first did not want to include people with cognitive disabilities. It is also not true that someone who has been oppressed themselves will automatically be thoughtful, sensitive and active about combatting other oppressions.

Ferri (2010) warns that assuming that coalition work will be straightforward fails to acknowledge the differences in the struggles and the ways in which “success” might be constituted differently. She explains that we must also acknowledge and account for differences in political and economic power between ourselves and any potential ally. Finally, we must determine a mutually beneficial goal that we both stand to benefit from the alliance. It is from this position of shared self-interest that fuels a sustainable coalition (147-148).

How do we get better as allies? What gets in our way? How do structural constraints keep us

¹ ADAPT is a national grass-roots community that organizes disability rights activists to engage in nonviolent direct action, including civil disobedience, to assure the civil and human rights of people with disabilities to live in freedom.

separate and who benefits from that separation? Robin Smith and I (Smith & Sapon-Shevin, ongoing) have led a workshop activity for many years that, first, asks people to describe a time that they either: (1) interrupted oppression of some kind (or attempted to) or (2) failed to interrupt oppressive behavior or language. After participants

share with a partner, we construct a chart that asks the following questions: If you tried to interrupt the oppressive behavior, what made that possible for you? If you didn't try to interrupt the behavior, what got in your way?

The following is a typical set of responses:

MADE IT POSSIBLE	GOT IN THE WAY
Had strong feelings Was in a position of power Had a relationship with the person Knew what to say Had the "facts" that helped me Had practiced doing this It hit me at a personal level It was my role as teacher/adult	Had strong feelings Didn't have any power in situation Had a relationship with the person Didn't know what to say Knew it was wrong, but didn't have enough information Tired/ gave up It hit me at a personal level Fear of retribution, loss of job, safety

Discussions after the activity often center on the ways in which our ability to be good allies is impacted by our lack of knowledge (times when we are so unaware of how prejudice is being enacted that we don't even see it) and our lack of strategies for challenging oppression. It is always interesting that sometimes having a personal relationship with someone makes it easier to challenge the oppression ("I couldn't hear that kind of language from my best friend"), and sometimes makes it harder ("He's my Uncle, so I didn't want to say anything"). Similarly, being a member of the "oppressed" group sometimes allows us to speak up strongly since we have more information and more vested interests, but sometimes membership in the targeted group immobilizes us and renders us less effective.

In addition to the need for more "courage" in becoming "upstanders" rather than bystanders², there is also a knowledge base that is missing. If we have little familiarity with African-American culture, for example, it might not dawn on us that a dessert reception that features only cheesecake

might be a problem for the large number of African Americans who are lactose intolerant. If we are ourselves heterosexual, then the party invitation that says "For you and your wife" may not strike us as problematic. Our ability to challenge behaviors and policies hinges on our knowledge about diverse populations. Lifetimes of segregation and interaction with only a small range of people impede our ability to be thoughtful, informed and powerful allies. This is another strong argument for the importance of inclusive education ---- so that we can be smarter about diversity issues and increase the likelihood that we will have personal connections to those who are mistreated.

There are some common needs in achieving fully inclusive education across many forms of difference. Recognition of these similarities can help us move towards collaborative advocacy in creating a world that is just.

² See www.glsen.org

PROBLEM	WHAT WOULD HELP?
Categories and identities seen as “real”, immutable and permanent.	Understanding the social construction of differences; re-examination of idea of “normative” or “normal” in describing people.
Seeing differences as deficits, problems or characteristics which need to be changed.	Engaging in thoughtful and critical analysis of various kinds of “differences” --- those that should be celebrated, those that should be embraced and those that might (with the expressed desire and collaboration of the person in question) be changed or remediated.
Strong reliance on stereotypes, generalizations and assumptions about the “other”.	Seeing as people as individuals, avoiding over-generalization across groups, stereotypes, assumptions.
Differences seen as justification for removal for special services and differential treatment.	Differences as the occasion for thoughtful analysis and responsiveness within a broader context.
Fairness seen as getting the “right” people into the right groups or categories; belief that certain children do deserve or need a different education.	Critical examination of access to educational opportunities and the ways these intersect with identities, power, privilege and prevailing social and cultural norms and expectations.
Belief in the fairness of testing procedures, and the ability to justify segregation, tacking, differentiation based on labels.	Critiques of the politics of evaluation and rejection of high-stakes, standardized tests to determine future access to instruction, learning opportunities.
Justification of segregated practices based on the differential “needs” of individuals.	Ability to distinguish forced segregation from voluntary differentiation.
Reliance on the voice, experience and expertise of professionals outside the group that is subject to discrimination.	Understanding the importance of voice and autobiography, hearing people’s stories, knowing that the people with the label are in the best place to talk about their own lives and futures. Serious attention to issues of agency and choice, control and power.
Defining “success” as assimilation, elimination of differences and common expectations and experiences.	Focus on advocacy and self-advocacy, not “cure”. Acknowledgement of need to empower others to take control over their own lives, communities, destinies.

Sapon-Shevin and Zollers (1999)

Achieving a just, equitable society is not just about schools, but schools can be important sites of struggle and reform. Only when we recognize our common humanity can we begin to create real and lasting change. Inclusive education is not likely to be fully achieved unless we form close connections with many other people, recognize the ways in which our liberation movements intersect and

depend on one another, and learn to be better allies across differences.

3. CHANGING SCHOOL CLIMATES AND CULTURES

Inclusive education demands close attention to creating classroom and school communities that are warm and welcoming for all. I have identified six

key components of such a welcoming community: (1) A classroom marked by **cooperation** rather than competition; (2) **Inclusion** of all students; no one has to “earn” their way into the community; (3) An atmosphere in which differences are **valued** and addressed openly; (4) A place that values the **integrity** of each person, that is, each person is valued in their wholeness and multiple identities; (5) A climate in which people are encouraged to display the **courage** to challenge oppression and exclusion; (6) A setting which offers not just physical **safety**, but also emotional and relational safety for all its members; they can feel secure in their belonging. (Sapon-Shevin, 2007; 2010). In such a culture, differences are openly addressed and discussed, and exclusion and marginalization are challenged directly. Combating racism, homophobia, classism, sexism, religious oppression, language privilege, ableism and other forms of difference are seen as essential learning for all.

Some years ago I served as an expert witness in a due process hearing for a young man whom I will call John. John was 12 years old, loved mysteries, was an exceptional golfer ---- and had Down syndrome. John had been well supported in the elementary school he attended, but when he reached sixth grade, all supports were withdrawn and he was required to match the performance of all the other students who were his chronological peers. Although John and his family tried very hard, he was unable to achieve “at grade level,” and teachers returned failing paper after failing paper to him, resulting in a downward spiral of performance. The school district sought to have him sent to another school that had a program for students with disabilities and his parents resisted. They wanted John to remain in his home school, which he attended with his brother and his neighbors. The struggle over John’s educational placement reached an impasse and resulted in a legal hearing.

I spent some time with John, going golfing with him and meeting his family. Another colleague who was working on the case went to John’s school and observed the following scene in the cafeteria.

John went through the lunch line completely appropriately, taking his food and his beverage. He approached a table of classmates and asked whether he could sit there; he was told, “no,” the seat was saved. He tried another table and was similarly rebuffed. He found a third table, put down his tray, remembered he had forgotten his straw and returned to the lunch line. When he came back to the table where he had left his food, his tray had been moved.

The above is a descriptive narrative of what happened. The interpretations, however, were radically different. The hearing officer, upon hearing this story, declared unilaterally that “This proves that John can’t be included in the sixth grade”. I, as a person with a lot of experience with middle-school, thought that we had indeed learned a lot from this interaction, but my conclusion was very different. I thought that what we had learned was that something was deeply, disturbingly hostile about that school environment, and that the school climate was in definite need of attention. I didn’t think it said anything about John’s ability to be a part of the class. Furthermore, I really doubted that the sixth graders were nasty and excluding of John but really welcoming of the overweight girl, the boy with bad acne, the student from Vietnam who had limited English or the student with two mothers. And I was quite positive that removing John to another school would not “fix” the school climate at all, but, rather, would leave some very objectionable behavior completely unchecked.

Referencing the earlier metaphor of the “revealing tablet,” in the story above, John was truly serving that function for the school --- making it abundantly clear that there was lots of work needed to make the school inclusive and accepting for all students.

As discussed in the previous section, creating school climates that are welcoming and accepting is not a zero-sum game. That is, any changes made to benefit John’s acceptance in the school social environment will likely also make things better for the child who struggles with communication, who is smaller/shorter/less athletic/not typically gender conforming, etc.

There has been increasing attention paid in the last few years to issues of school climate in general and bullying specifically. Although not all students who are marginalized and excluded become school shooters or commit suicide, enough of those situations have prompted serious attention to what students experience in school **outside** the academic curriculum. There is recognition that it is very difficult for students to succeed academically if they are scared, worried, fearful and insecure about their position and treatment in the school environment.

Advances in technology have also made bullying far worse. The main sites of such negative behavior are in the bathroom, in the cafeteria, on the bus, at recess and in the halls --- all places with limited adult supervision and presence. Now, bullying can (and does) occur in cyberspace through text messages, Facebook pages, websites and email --- many of which allow students to torment and target their classmates without ever seeing their faces or, sometimes, without being identified and caught. When teachers say “Don’t let me catch you teasing Jose anymore,” students often comply by meeting that demand exactly --- they will engage in negative interpersonal social behavior in ways that they will not, in fact, “get caught.”

Until issues of school and classroom climate are seriously addressed, inclusion is unlikely to be anything more than an administrative arrangement. Merely placing bodies in the same physical space is not guarantee of positive interaction, support, welcome, and belonging.

Again, there have also been unfortunate separations between classroom climate activities designed to address “disabilities” and those that address more general issues; these efforts need to be brought together in a coherent, cohesive way.

Let me illustrate with a story. A third-grade teacher approached me after a workshop I gave on teaching social skills and related the following story. She had a very diverse class that included some students in the “gifted” program and a student (Maria) who had Down syndrome. The teacher asked for my help about “what to do” about the following incident. The teacher was returning a

paper to Maria and was praising her expansively for the incredible job she had done on the test and her huge improvement over the previous attempt. One of the students in the gifted program wandered by, listened to the elaborative praise being heaped on Maria, and said, dismissively, “Big deal. I got a hundred.”

The teacher asked me what she should explain about Down syndrome to the little boy. I know I shocked her when I responded “Nothing.” This situation does not call for an explanation of chromosomal differences, but rather a more basic, generic lesson about how we treat other human beings. In other words, when someone has accomplished something, we are happy for them and we don’t dismiss their accomplishment even if that same accomplishment would not be a big deal for us. Period. The lesson is about being a good human being, not about “how to treat people with Down syndrome.”

Programs about character development and multicultural education and disability awareness must all be united in lessons, policies and practices which are supportive of differences. We cannot simply add on such programs to classrooms which are competitive and which single out high and low achievers, pit students against one another in teams, or provide radically different educational opportunities and activities to students based on their putative intelligence or capabilities. We must re-examine the classroom and school culture and ask more basic questions about how we teach about and respond to difference:

1. How do students learn about differences and what language are they given to describe themselves and their classmates?
2. What happens when students are excluded in the classroom? Are such issues discussed, or are they swept under the carpet because of “lack of time” or lack of teacher skill in addressing such concerns?
3. What happens to students who are struggling either academically or socially? What kinds of peer support, peer teaching and peer advocacy are part of the school program?

These questions clearly transcend one particular form of difference, and thus will involve

extensive attention to multiple forms of marginalization and exclusion.

4. CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGICAL FRAMES

When curriculum and pedagogy are narrow and rigid, particularly when they are framed and evaluated by high stakes, standardized testing, then failure is inevitable for a large number of students and differences become liabilities. In the United States, a policy known as “No Child Left Behind” evaluated student (and teacher) success so narrowly that, in fact, many students were literally and figuratively “left behind.” Teachers, whose employment and raises centered on student achievement on high stakes, standardized tests were therefore actively discouraged from being responsive to individual children; teachers’ abilities to use their own best thinking to plan and teach students was significantly curtailed. And, this narrow, often punitive, evaluation made many teachers reluctant to accept students whose educational challenges or experiences might be seen as reflective of their teaching skill.

A recent book, *Educational Courage: Resisting the Ambush of Public Education* (Schniedewind and Sapon-Shevin, 2012) details ways in which corporate-controlled, market-driven educational policies are bad for students and teachers. Perhaps one of the most damaging features of these “reforms” is that they decrease the flexibility of teachers to respond to students’ individual needs, whether those stem from racial, linguistic ability or other differences. Similarly, decisions about public education are no longer made by local communities but are standardized by those who often have little or no experience with the families or students being educated.

Curriculum in inclusive settings is rich, interactive, acknowledges multiple intelligences and has many points of entry. Good curriculum design begins with knowing who the students are, in all their complexities and making sure that what is taught is meaningful and culturally relevant. Moving away from lock-step, skill-driven deficit models of reading and language, for example, towards more balanced approaches to language arts instruction that includes real literature lets children

work at different skill levels. For example, a dinosaur reading unit might include books and print materials about dinosaurs at many different levels, in addition to non-print media, music, and movement activities. One teacher working in an inclusive classroom said, “Why would I want 25 copies of the same textbook?” and instead acquired many different materials (books, DVD’s, songs, posters, computer software, video clips) that could be accessed by different students.

When things are narrowly designed, we end up having to retrofit the lesson or exclude some students; when the initial design is inclusive, all students can find their “place” in the learning. When a fifth-grade teacher did a unit on “Living Green,” students were involved at various levels. LaDonna did research on carbon footprints and brought that information to the group; Matthew and Rosaria headed up a school recycling program that involved them making social connections (and practicing their social skills) with other students and teachers; Carlos, who used a voice-activated computer, produced an “infomercial” about saving the planet and presented it to various groups; Three students developed the ad campaign and used their math skills selling space in the school newsletter to local businesses.

The development of more interactive, participatory curriculum projects is also conducive to both cooperative learning approaches and the inclusion of children working at many levels and bringing various strengths and histories to the classroom.

Pedagogy

Similarly, all students benefit when teaching is not designed only for students who learn best by listening, speaking, reading or writing. Udvari-Solner and Kluth (2007) in their book *Joyful Learning: Active and Collaborative Learning in Inclusive Classrooms*, share a collection of teaching strategies that can be used with a wide range of learners. These are not identified as “teaching strategies for students with disabilities,” but simply as good teaching. What most inclusive strategies have in common is that they are engaging, interactive, constructivist (drawing on students’

prior knowledge) and encourage and promote peer support.

When students collaborate they not only bring their own individual experiences, cultures and strengths to their classmates' learning, but they are also positioned so that they can actively support and teach one another. Many teachers report that when they implemented pedagogy that was more interactive and hands-on, many students benefitted, not simply the student with a putative disability.

5. INCLUSIVE TEACHER EDUCATION

In order for inclusive education to be a reality, teachers must be prepared with the attitudes, skills and knowledge needed to teach all students. Traditional ways of preparing teachers which still preserve dual preparation (one track for "regular" teachers and one for "special education" teachers) are problematic for all. As discussed previously, our need to reconceptualize differences must be accompanied by changes in how we prepare teachers.

Syracuse University was the first university in the United States to prepare teachers for inclusive education. In fact, it is not possible to do a teacher credentialing program in "just" regular education; all teachers are prepared for inclusion and graduate from the program with dual certification (regular and special education). Now, many teacher education programs in the U.S. share this inclusive philosophy and program design.

But preparation for inclusive teaching cannot simply merge general education and special education teacher preparation. It must also involve interrogating how we prepare teachers for all kinds of diversity. Given the commonalities between the difficulties associated with narrow, punitive and discriminatory responses to disability and to other marginalized differences, it is troublesome that "disability studies" and "multicultural education" remain largely separate in most teacher education programs.

In the introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Teacher Education* entitled *Unsettling Conversations: Diversity and Disability in Teacher Education*, Pugach, Blanton and Florian (2012)

note that "given the longstanding rhetoric of preparing teachers for diversity, there has been comparatively little discussion about the role of special education within the larger discourse of diversity of race, class, culture"(235). Indeed, the discourses around more general "multicultural education" and "special education" have remained oddly and significantly disconnected.

For both areas, there is a history of semi-inclusion or marginalization within teacher education programs. Disability issues get presented (if at all) to elementary teachers in a course called "Introduction to Exceptionality" or "Survey Course on Special Education." This course often entails learning a laundry list of disabilities, how to identify them, and how to refer them to the right "elsewhere". Rarely is it a political analysis of special education and rarely is it integrated into other course work.

Multicultural education is often similarly relegated to a separate course on "Multicultural Education" or "Teaching in a Diverse Society" which is often disconnected to the rest of the teacher preparation program. In many cases, this course consists of a list of different racial and ethnic groups and their contributions to society with some attention paid to how to teach correctly to/about each group. Rarely is it a political analysis of education, and how all aspects of education might be framed in socio-political ways (Sapon-Shevin & Zollers, 1999).

Although a re-examination of how these two topics are addressed is important, this must be done critically, or we risk false comparisons and distinctions, or, conflation of the two areas. The conflation of race with disability, for example, is extremely problematic. There is extensive evidence that students of color are routinely over-referred to special education, but this should force us to look at racial prejudice, poverty, and other societal issues, rather than to make assumptions about racial inferiority or causality (Ferri and Connor, 2005; 2006). The concern that traditional conceptions of disability could become conflated with race in particular are valid in a social and economic system built on assumptions of inferiority of non-whites (and people with disabilities) and in an educational system that routinely mis-identifies students of

color as having disabilities (Ball & Harry, 1993). It is vitally important for special educators to confront the intersection of special education with race, class, and culture, including how misinterpretation of no dominant cultural values and practices contributes to oppression of nondominant groups, even if inadvertently (Pugach & Seidl, 1998).

In a book chapter entitled *Dialogue We've Yet to Have: Race and Disability Studies*, Ferri (2010) discusses the challenges and potential gains of increasing the intersection between research on disability oppression and racism. Similarly, Erevelles, Kanga and Middleton (2006) write, scholars in "critical race theory and disability studies have rarely explored the critical connections between these two historically disenfranchised groups within educational contexts (p. 77).

What is the relationship between broader diversity issues and disability? What would we learn by looking at the intersections of different identity issues and how they are addressed in schools? Pugach, Blanton and Florian (2012) ask:

How can we work together to advance a more complete vision of diversity, one that does not merely attach "disability" to a long list of social markers of identity, but rather works from the assumption --- and indeed the fact --- that the children and youth for whom we prepare teachers do not have just one diversity identity, but rather multiple diversity identities that interact with and nest within one another in different and often complex ways? (p. 235).

6. TO FINISH

Inclusion is not simply an organizational structure, but rather a commitment to making classrooms, schools and the world places in which everyone is valued and belongs and diversity is seen as enriching and positive. Moving beyond narrow understandings of inclusion will involve a thorough unpacking of our societal beliefs about difference and connection. Until we truly value each human being, our attempts to implement inclusive school practices will be tinkering on the edges of real change. There is much to gain and the task can feel overwhelming, but a coherent vision,

loving support and clear communication will advance our efforts.

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