Book review: *Approaches to Educational and Social Inclusion*

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In *Approaches to Educational and Social Inclusion: International perspectives on theory, policy and key challenges*, Gajendra K. Verma and Deborah Kalekin-Fishman provide an insightful overview of exclusion within the field of education. This book explores the theoretical framework supporting inclusion while presenting the diverse array of approaches towards addressing inefficiencies and inequities in education. For the most part, marginalized populations or those facing a variety of obstacles are the ones that are most excluded. Exclusion is described as not attending school, being segregated based on social, economic or disability measures, or lacking appropriate instruction to address a student's particular needs. This book aims to understand these challenges, describe specific educational policies, and illuminate the challenges faced in their implementation.

The conference that birthed this publication had two major themes: certain groups are unable to participate in the education or social arena, and marginalized youths are not able to access quality education. Throughout the spectrum of ideas and approaches presented, all participants agreed that "Education is the birthright of all" and inclusive policies should aim to improve access (Verma & Kalekin-Fishman, 2017, p. 1). These themes and ideas were collected in the formation of this book.

In the selection of texts, the editors aimed to introduce a number of broad questions regarding inclusive education. These questions covered the underlying theory of inclusion, challenges of both participants and providers of education, examples of inclusive education approaches and theoretical solutions as recommendations. Taking an international approach, examples are provided from a number of countries and levels of national development. The challenges range from country to country and are unique to the specific cultural context and education approach being used. Rather than providing definitive solutions to exclusion, the authors aim to contribute to the larger debate and provides a theoretical base for improving inclusiveness in education. The curation of texts in this book provide a variety of different approaches and contexts giving substantial depth to the topic being presented. Examples, such as the Indian and Greek education

systems, are returned to repeatedly providing different understandings and interpretations of related inclusive education challenges.

Verma and Kalekin-Fishman organise this book within three broad themes. The first part, *Theoretical and Conceptual Issues*, begins by presenting a number of motivations for promoting educational inclusion. A primary motivation is argued to be the moral obligation of the state to provide opportunities for its citizens. Yet simple inclusion is sometimes not sufficient, with cultural representation providing greater opportunities for both the marginalized and more advantaged groups. Particularly in times of social turmoil, such as the Arab Spring, an emphasis on citizenship education enabled inclusion across age, class, ethnic, and religious lines. In recent decades though, education priorities have moved further towards individualized measures of success and away from pluralism. Even an established inclusive plan may have failings when equality in policy is prioritized over equity in outputs. Successful approaches recognize the different learning needs and styles across the spectrum of abilities and development.

Part two, *Perspectives on Policy and Practice*, examines specific policies to better understand the realities of inclusive education internationally. In developing nations such as India and Bangladesh, inclusive education has different challenges than the developed world, with those most disadvantaged socially, economically, based on gender, or with disabilities being the most excluded. While attempts are made to address these issues, cognitive disabilities are largely ignored causing a high degree of exclusion. New Zealand has a history of education reforms aimed at improving inclusion but minority groups such as the Moari have been excluded at a far higher rate. An ability to adapt policy to changing educational realities provides an opportunity to build a much stronger inclusive education policy. A growing challenge in education, a prevalence of neo-liberal policies and rapidly changing production methods, have made lifelong learning (LLL) an essential priority of modern education policy. In the European Union, where countries face growing achievement discrepancies across identified groups, an education policy that prioritises LLL is shown to benefit the disadvantaged proportionally more. To successfully reform these education systems, the reforms must be introduced to education practitioners through professional development. In Greece, attitudes were influenced by cultural norms and preconceptions, limiting the effectiveness of professional development.

Finally, Part three *Challenges and Possible Responses to Inclusive Education*, explores some of the approaches and barriers towards implementing inclusive education. In India, enrolment has improved dramatically, yet improvements in quality have not been uniform across socio-economic groups. Learning disabilities, such as dyslexia are poorly understood by teachers, who do not have the training or knowledge to support students, particularly in poorer regions. While the most common practice of support for these students include segregation, their inclusion in a conventional classroom leads to a higher quality education for all students. Policy makers have begun to look at alternative schooling methods and to consider the dress and mannerisms of teachers to combat entrenched class imbalances.

To tie each of these sections together, the final conclusions of the book reference Marx in the reproduction of societal norms within education policies. Identifiable groups of disadvantaged students are facing an effective barrier to their inclusion in schools. This can come from a lack of suitable resources to meet student needs and the inability or unwillingness of educators to take the necessary steps to adjust teaching to help these students. As exclusion continues in school, so does the reproduction of traditional norms.

These exclusions at an early stage can prevent students from obtaining opportunities to learn or participate in society as adults. Inclusive education and active social participation provide the access and tools for social mobility. Their absence reinforces a reality where marginalized students remain on the margins of society. The book presents a final hopeful message saying that the failings of inclusion policies provide opportunities for improvement. As inefficiency and misguided policies are better understood, alternative approaches can be created and introduced. At the same time, successful policies can be celebrated and learned from for adaptation elsewhere. Through study and comparison, exclusion in education can be reduced, creating more equal societies.