

Book Review

Title: *Handbook of Inclusive Education for Educators, Administrators, and Planners: Within Walls, Without Boundaries*

Editors: Madhumita Puri and George Abraham

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Reviewer: Christine Su

The *Handbook of Inclusive Education for Educators, Administrators, and Planners: Within Walls, Without Boundaries*, is a noteworthy addition to the growing library of materials on inclusion of persons with disabilities in the educational process. While the *Handbook's* target audience is educators and administrators in India, most of the discussions and recommendations are general enough to appeal to an international readership. Its contributors include special educators, psychologists, attorneys, and governmental officials, all of whom are involved with disability and education in one way or another.

Divided into three large units, the *Handbook* begins with a brief description of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, and the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons, adopted in 1975. Above all, the authors assert, education is a human rights issue, and persons with disabilities should not be excluded from universal human rights initiatives, regardless of nationality or state residence. Thus, from the beginning of the text, the global significance of education for persons with disabilities, and in particular, inclusive education of persons with disabilities, is emphasized. The authors do discuss national programs, such as the provisions of specific sections of India's Persons with Disabilities Act (1995), but this adds to rather than detracts from the readers' connection to the authors, as many of the struggles and successes within India are likely similar to those in the readers' home countries, and make for interesting comparisons.

The second unit of the *Handbook*, "Innovations in Implementation," is the most useful part of the work. This section describes in detail approaches to inclusive education for persons with hearing impairment, vision impairment, orthopedic impairment, learning disabilities, cerebral palsy, intellectual impairment, and autism. Each of these is addressed separately, beginning with discussions of what inclusion means for children with each type of disability in school settings. For children with hearing impairment, for example, inclusion means that "children must have full and uninhibited language and communication access to all facets of the program and personnel" (p. 49). The authors offer suggestions for instruction, classroom support, coping with conflict, assignments, and other classroom elements, as well as suggestions for administrators in addressing parental concerns, handling peer issues, and so forth, at both individual and systematic levels.

Each chapter provides guidelines for optimum learning environments, including both the physical environment (e.g., managing reverberation for hearing impaired students, or installing

warning blocks in front of entrances, staircases, sinks, etc. for students with vision impairment) and the social environment (e.g., ensuring that teachers do not assume that persons with disabilities are necessarily incapable of making decisions about their learning needs, or teaching other students about a student with a hearing impairment's different concept of personal space). Interspersed throughout each chapter are vignettes detailing tangible methods that have helped actual students with disabilities to thrive in their classrooms. While some of these methods are culturally-connected—such as the use of yoga *asanas* (postures) to help a student with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and other cognitive impairments—they are certainly not confined to persons who live in that culture. Many are broadly, if not universally, applicable.

The *Handbook* is best suited for teachers and other educators who work with students with disabilities. Some of the chapters in this section end with a series of fact sheets, which encapsulate indicators/characteristics of the impairment and strategies for teaching students with various disabilities. These fact sheets could easily be used as handouts for training sessions.

The third and final unit, “The Way Forward,” returns to suggestions for modifications and amendments in law and policy to facilitate inclusive education. While the target audience here is policymakers in India, the suggestions are general enough for an international readership. Included in the appendices are a glossary of terms, and a series of frequently asked questions, which could serve as an excellent resource for discussion groups. (One example from this section is as follows: “Are advocates of inclusion primarily concerned with socialization? Are academics being sacrificed?” (p. 259). The subsequent discussion emphasizes the interconnectedness of social, emotional, and academic development). Finally, the unit concludes with a model of a “real school,” a school where “LEARNING is for ALL” (p. 252). The model reiterates that inclusive schooling should be viewed as a continuous process that involves extensive planning, goal-setting, implementation of ideas, and program review by a team which includes policymakers, administrators, educators, family members, social workers, and others.

The *Handbook* is a worthwhile read for all who have an interest in inclusive education. While somewhat expensive, it is full of excellent suggestions, and moreover, many of the concepts pertaining to students with disabilities are also relevant for students of color and other students who have been marginalized in the education process. The editors note that “special schools continue to have a definite role and responsibility in the inclusive scheme,” but stress that inclusivity in the mainstream education system is a “logical step forward in the evolution of education of persons with disability” (p. 246). The inclusive process can be summed up by the final sentence of the text: “It is only fair!” (p. 254).

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