



education review // reseñas educativas

editors: gene v glass gustavo e. fischman melissa cast-brede

a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

May 23, 2012

ISSN 1094-5296

Education Review/Reseñas Educativas is a project of the National Education Policy Center <http://nepc.colorado.edu>

Follow Education Review on Facebook



Armstrong, Ann Cheryl; Armstrong, Derrick and Spandagou, Ilektra. (2010) *Inclusive Education: International Policy and Practice*. London: SAGE

Pp. 162 ISBN 978-1-84787-940-0

Reviewed by Alisha Brown

Michigan State University

Inclusive education has been gaining momentum and popularity internationally, and the book *Inclusive Education: International Policy and Practice* is a testament to that. Ann Cheryl Armstrong, Derrick Armstrong and Ilektra Spandagou situate their book within this global context by opening their prologue with the attention grabbing statement, “Inclusive education has become fashionable” (p. vi). The authors’ use of the fashion analogy is a clever way to introduce the topic of inclusive education because it illustrates the global popularity of inclusive education. Additionally, the fashion analogy goes deeper as the authors explain how high fashion is unwearable and unaffordable for most people, but it nonetheless finds its way into wardrobes across the world through translation and adaptation. This brings up issues of policy transformation or adaptation,

Citation: Brown, Alisha. (2012 May 23) Review of *Inclusive Education: International Policy and Practice* by Ann Cheryl Armstrong, Derrick Armstrong and Ilektra Spandagou. *Education Review*, 15. Retrieved [Date] from <http://www.edrev.info/reviews/rev1170.pdf>

policy appropriateness or suitability in different contexts, and policy sharing or borrowing on an international level – all of which resurface throughout the book.

Each of the book's authors is a faculty member at the University of Sydney, Australia. Ann Cheryl Armstrong is the Director of the Division of Professional Learning, Derrick Armstrong is the Deputy Vice Chancellor and Professor of Education, and Ilektra Spandagou is a Lecturer in Inclusive Education. Collectively, the authors bring with them a wealth of professional and academic experience in inclusive education from the Caribbean, England, Greece, and Australia. The authors are distinguished scholars in the area of inclusive education, with Spandagou being the most junior of the three. The Epilogue serves a valuable role in the book by describing each of the author's personal journeys in the field of inclusive education. These personal descriptions help situate and ground the various viewpoints and arguments that are expressed throughout the book and give a greater understanding of the book as a whole.

In terms of the structure of the book, *Inclusive Education: International Policy and Practice* is comprised of ten chapters in addition to a preface and epilogue. The main chapters are divided into four sections: (1) History, Social Context and Key Ideas, (2) Policy Case Studies, (3) From Policy to Practice, and (4) Conclusions and Reflections. Chapter one introduces the key themes that are discussed in the book, such as politics, colonialism, and the role of international organizations. Chapter two explores the history of special education, with particular focus on the systems developed in Europe and North America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Chapter three considers many different definitions of the term inclusive education to ultimately illustrate the dilemma that inclusive education can mean all things to all people but can equally mean nothing, causing a loss of policy focus.

Chapter four describes the policy case study of Education for All (EFA), chapter five describes that of the United Nations' policy interventions, and chapter six the European Union. The policy case studies in these three chapters collectively highlight the political and international tensions introduced in the first section of the book. In the next section on moving from policy to

practice, chapter seven critiques England for clothing policy in inclusive education rhetoric to maintain a more traditional special education practice, chapter eight explores the challenges involved at the school level, and chapter nine discusses how inclusive education models are being exported to the developing world. Lastly, chapter ten concludes the book by drawing the main themes of the book together and reflecting on how the field can use the present challenges as a starting point for the future.

An overall strength of the book is that it takes a developing world perspective on the study of inclusive education. This developing world perspective is made evident from the outset of the book, beginning with chapter one's mention of colonialism and the role of international development and loan organizations. Such a perspective is commonly disregarded in much literature on inclusive education. This is likely due to the fact that most of the work on inclusive education comes from the developed world. Of work that makes note of the globalizing discourse of inclusion, there is often reference to international policy documents created by large international organizations like the United Nations (e.g., the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted in 2006). However, deep analysis of how these international policy pressures coupled with the complex political and economic power dynamics created by the history of colonization is an area lacking in previous literature. Thus, the unique developing world perspective that is taken in the book is an important one to consider and incorporate in future work on inclusive education, especially given the increasing global spread of inclusive education across both developed and developing nations.

Furthermore, the wealth of knowledge and experience of the authors is reflected by the impressive depth of the book. Each chapter is full of rich, thought provoking information that leaves the reader pondering the numerous and complex issues of inclusive education that the book brings to light. On the one hand, the great depth of the material included in the book is of great value to the reader from an informational standpoint and provides a lot of food for thought. On the other hand, the book is challenging to read and get through because each sentence is full of information and insight. As I read the book I found myself stopping to re-read many sentences and

sections not due to a lack of clarity on the part of the writers, but instead due to the immense amount of material that I had to digest.

A related critique is that because so much information was covered by the book, I could see great value in further explanation and analysis in some instances. The authors of *Inclusive Education: International Policy and Practice* did a commendable job providing readers with an overall state of the field from an international scope and brought up important questions that should be considered, but that in some regards they were only getting at the surface of very complex issues. For example, in chapter four there was a brief comment made in passing about how inclusive education must compete with other international policy agendas like the accountability and choice movements. That is a very interesting topic to explore and a whole book could be devoted to such a discussion. In this sense, perhaps the authors were trying to accomplish too much within a single book and an unfortunate consequence is that each of their insights were not given ample attention.

Another limitation of the book is the lack of content specific to the North American context. Although the book has a wide international scope, there is a notable lack of examples from the United States, Canada and Mexico and this may be disappointing to readers from these countries. This is especially surprising given the wealth of literature on inclusive education policy in the United States, which has a relatively long track record of inclusive legislation beginning in 1975 with the passing of Public Law 94-192. Instead, there seems to be a focus of case examples from England, which is reflective of the backgrounds of the authors. To illustrate, in chapter two there is a case study on post-war reform in England, the entire chapter seven is devoted to the case study of inclusive education policy in England, and in other chapters throughout the book England is mentioned frequently as an example. While Greece, the Eastern Caribbean, European Union, Australia, Kenya, and Tanzania are also featured in case studies, a greater diversity of the nations featured in case studies would give a more holistic representation of inclusive education internationally across multiple continents.

A final critique concerns the evidence base that the book draws from to formulate and support its arguments. The book is highly theoretical in its approach, and there is a notable lack of evidence or research used to complement the theoretical arguments that are presented. This was somewhat disappointing, considering that the back cover of the book claims, “Bringing together issues of theory, research, policy and practice from South and the North, this ground-breaking book provides a critical discussion of recent developments in the field of inclusive education” (emphasis added). Theory, policy and practice were all present in *Inclusive Education: International Policy and Practice*, but research was lacking. References to research were made but the specific details were largely absent. For example, when discussing instructive practices in chapter eight the authors state, “existing research in this area shows that what works for students identified with special education needs works with all students” (p. 111) but no citations or further explanation regarding what literature they are referring to is included. This detracts from the utility of the book for an academic audience.

Inclusive Education: International Policy and Practice is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the theories and issues of inclusive education from an international standpoint. It is written in an accessible style, making it appropriate for academics, students, educators, and parents alike. The book seems especially appropriate for undergraduate college students, given that it has excellent chapter summaries, discussion questions, points for reflection, and further reading recommendations. However, readers should be aware of the great depth of the book and should not expect to read it in one sitting, allowing time for processing and reflection.

The book does a good job summarizing the history of inclusive education, mapping the process of how inclusive education has moved to the international spotlight. More importantly, the book brings to light numerous issues that have surfaced on the road to inclusion for scholars and policymakers to consider, stressing the importance for continued debate and consideration of the complexities involved in inclusive education. Furthermore, the authors offer a unique developing world perspective, bringing another viewpoint to the conversation that will be increasingly important as more developing nations are

influenced by international policy pressures to adopt inclusive policies and practices.

About the Reviewer

Alisha Brown is a doctoral student in Educational Policy at Michigan State University. She holds an M.A. in School Psychology from Michigan State University and B.A. in Psychology from the University of Calgary, and has worked with children and adults with disabilities in a variety of school and community settings. Her research interests include inclusive education policy and practice in domestic and international contexts.

Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*.

Education Review/Reseñas Educativas is a project of the National Education Policy Center <http://nepc.colorado.edu>



Editors

Gene V Glass

glass@edrev.info

Gustavo Fischman

fischman@edrev.info

Melissa Cast-Brede

cast-brede@edrev.info
