

STUDIES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Reimagining Research for Reclaiming the Academy in Iraq: Identities and Participation in Post-Conflict Enquiry

The Iraq Research Fellowship Programme

Heather Brunskell Evans and Michele Moore (Eds.)

THE PAST IS OUR
CULTURE
REMEMBER THE
FUTURE

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**Reimagining Research for Reclaiming the
Academy in Iraq: Identities and Participation in
Post-Conflict Enquiry**

STUDIES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Volume 15

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Scope

This series addresses the many different forms of exclusion that occur in schooling across a range of international contexts and considers strategies for increasing the inclusion and success of all students. In many school jurisdictions the most reliable predictors of educational failure include poverty, Aboriginality and disability. Traditionally schools have not been pressed to deal with exclusion and failure. Failing students were blamed for their lack of attainment and were either placed in segregated educational settings or encouraged to leave and enter the unskilled labour market. The crisis in the labor market and the call by parents for the inclusion of their children in their neighborhood school has made visible the failure of schools to include all children.

Drawing from a range of researchers and educators from around the world, *Studies in Inclusive Education* will demonstrate the ways in which schools contribute to the failure of different student identities on the basis of gender, race, language, sexuality, disability, socio-economic status and geographic isolation. This series differs from existing work in inclusive education by expanding the focus from a narrow consideration of what has been traditionally referred to as special educational needs to understand school failure and exclusion in all its forms. Moreover, the series will consider exclusion and inclusion across all sectors of education: early years, elementary and secondary schooling, and higher education.

**Reimagining Research for Reclaiming the
Academy in Iraq: Identities and Participation in
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The Iraq Research Fellowship Programme

*Celebrating the 80th anniversary of The Council for Assisting Refugee
Academics (CARA)*

Edited by

Heather Brunskell-Evans and Michele Moore



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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all those academics, their friends and families, who are in need or in exile, wherever they find themselves in the process of reimagining the world in which we live.

It is also dedicated to the young generation of our own families – to Charley and to Eve, and to baby Hugo – with the hope that they will be blessed with the aspiration to help forge a more peaceful future.

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SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

Let me declare my interest. Writing a series editor's preface is typically a task performed at a tangible distance. One reads the book or collection of people's chapters and then composes a series of unifying and summarising statements that are often unread as the book travels through the world. My task here is different. I was the *academic coordinator* for the Iraq Research Fellowship Programme (IRFP) and worked closely with the editors and contributors to this text on the programme. So, though I write sitting at a table in a front room of a house in far-away Melbourne, the words are not disinterested nor is there a distance from this project that the geography may suggest.

The IRFP was not just another academic assignment; it was quite different. While engaged on the familiar territory of research infrastructure and productivity, the principal goal was to assist people whose lives and academic work had been wrenched from them by wars, international embargo, ongoing conflict and the relentless struggle of trying to deal with a deep poverty born of the destructive forces of war. Moreover my nationality, for what that is worth these days, is Australian. That fact connects me to Iraq in a relationship of international culpability. The effect of this project was and remains deeply visceral.

The chronology of my involvement with IRFP is interesting. A colleague at the Institute of Education asked me if I would be interested in a project looking at school curriculum in Iraq. Having been responsible for curriculum reform in a large Ministry of Education in Australia, I was interested. That the context was Iraq was intriguing. A meeting was arranged with Kate Robertson from The Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA). Kate brought to the meeting a world of which I had no knowledge beyond highly mediated and inadequate media representations. Dr. Yahya Al-Kubaisi presents the curriculum project in chapter three of this text. The Iraq Research Fellowship Programme provides a mechanism for directing and sustaining support to Iraqi academics, living in Iraq and displaced, to build collaborative projects that are of strategic importance to rebuilding Iraq. This work is fundamental to rebuilding the higher education sector in Iraq.

The logistical challenges were significant as people travelled across sensitive borders to meet and work on the trans-disciplinary projects. For us who travelled from the safety of homes and universities in England, the risks taken by our colleagues from Iraq were breath taking and humbling. This proscribed the relationships that needed to be formed in this work. It was necessary to create a process where external expertise was available to support the work of Iraqi academics and to give them access to recent international developments in their field. As the editors observe this is problematic in a context of enduring post-colonial struggle. Working in different languages further complicates research relationships. Touraine's (2000:195) reflection on working across these tensions is useful:

In a world of intense cultural exchanges, there can be no democracy unless we recognize the diversity of cultures and the relations of domination that exist between them. The two elements are equally important: we must

SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

recognize the diversity of cultures, but also the existence of cultural domination. ... The struggle for the liberation of cultural minorities can lead to their communitarianization, or in other words their subordination to an authoritarian cultural power.

The programme and workshop processes were profoundly important. At the heart of the work was a need to build sustainable relationships. Moreover the task for those of us coming from outside of the Iraq experience was to offer our knowledge, skills and networks to build the quality and profile of the research. This had to be done in a context where cultural distances and oppressions had been at the heart of the destruction of the Iraqi academy and those who worked therein. The process was iterative and highly contestable. Meetings at the end, very end, of the workshop days were sometimes volatile and the organising group would divide and reform over strategy and points of organisation. Notwithstanding the struggles around strategy and programme, there was an acknowledgement that we were engaged in a project that was much more important and significant than ourselves and we quickly regrouped. The commitment of all participants to the programme was remarkable, as was the sense of collegiality and good will.

This text is an important inclusion in the Studies in Inclusive Education series. The chapters collectively represent a vital response to the destruction of the higher education sector in Iraq and to rebuilding the academy and educational opportunities. This is the heartland of inclusive education.

REFERENCE

Touraine, A. (2000). *Can we live together? Equality and difference*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Roger Slee

Series Editor

The Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning.