

**Purpose, Process and Future Direction
of Disability Research**

STUDIES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Volume 24

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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.

Purpose, Process and Future Direction of Disability Research

Edited by

Simoni Symeonidou

University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus

and

Karen Beauchamp-Pryor

Swansea University, Wales, UK



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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Karen Beauchamp-Pryor is an honorary research fellow at Swansea University, Wales, UK. Following the completion of her BSc in Social Policy, she received a full university scholarship to undertake a PhD, which explored the experiences of disabled students in higher education. Subsequently, Karen was awarded an Economic and Social Research Council postdoctoral fellowship which she used to disseminate her research findings through publication and presentation of papers. Karen recently completed her monograph *Disabled students in Welsh higher education: A framework for equality and inclusion*, with the aim of generating discussion about those barriers that work to exclude disabled students.

Simona D'Alessio is a researcher and a teacher in the area of inclusive education, policy analysis and disability studies in education. Since 2006 she has been working for the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education specifically focusing upon research and policy analysis activities. In 2008 she completed her PhD in Inclusive Education at the Institute of Education, University of London, UK. In 2011 Simona's findings were published in her monograph *Inclusive education in Italy: A critical analysis of the policy of integrazione scolastica*. She has conducted research in the area of policy analysis, inclusive education and disability studies at national and international levels. As a former specialized secondary school teacher, she has a wide experience in school practice. Simona is the co-founder and editor of the *Italian Journal of Disability Studies*. She is also a visiting fellow at the Institute of Education.

Eleni Gavrielidou-Tsielepi is an associate lecturer of the School of Education at the University of Nicosia and a teacher appointed within special education in Cyprus. She studied at the University of Cyprus (BEd in Pre-primary Education), the University of Bristol (MEd in Education, specializing in Special Education) and the Institute of Education, University of London (PhD in Education). In the past she has served in the position of a pre-primary school teacher, as well as a teacher in special units in primary and pre-primary schools in Cyprus. Eleni has participated in a number of European funded projects and presented her work at national and international conferences. Her research interests include the historical development of special education, the process of policy formulation and policy implementation in Cyprus and the development of inclusive education. Eleni is an active member of associations connected with the promotion of inclusion in the educational context of Cyprus and is currently working towards the co-authoring of an edited book about the pedagogies of inclusion.

Carmel Kelly completed a PhD in Sociology at the Institute of Education, University of London, UK, in 2008. She is also a graduate of the University College, Galway (BA Hons.), the University of Warwick (MA in Applied Social Sciences) and the

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

University of Westminster (MA in Women's Studies). Her professional background is in social work. Carmel is a disability activist who has also been a welfare rights officer and a lecturer/consultant on social care policies and practices. Her key interests are disability studies, historical patterns and contemporary themes in welfare provision and delivery in the UK. A central focus of her research is everyday welfare practices with particular reference to their power effects and disciplinary character.

Marion Reichart is a lecturer in Law and the Social Sciences at the Open University, a member of Lawyers with Disabilities Division Law Society, and an Associate of the British Institute of Human Rights (BIHR). Shaped by personal and professional experience of disability, Marion seeks to promote respectful inclusion, anti-discrimination and human rights approaches to grass-root, business, government and public sector clients. She has disseminated best practice strategies for the former Disability Rights Commission, given keynotes on the UN Convention on the human rights of disabled people, and presented at Disability Intergroup, European Parliament in Brussels. Originally Marion qualified as an ergotherapist in 1982 in Heidelberg (Germany). She holds a First Class Honours Degree in Law (Thames Valley University, London) and in 2007 completed her PhD *Connecting disability equality and citizenship education* at the University of Greenwich, UK.

Ilektra Spandagou is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney, Australia. She has been involved in teacher education in special and inclusive education both in Greece and Australia. She has experience of working with general and special education teachers in the area of theories of inclusive education, and the nexus of policy and school practice. Ilektra's research interests include inclusion, disability, comparative education and classroom diversity. Her publications include the recently published book *Inclusive education: International policy & practice* (co-authored with A. C. Armstrong and D. Armstrong).

Simoni Symeonidou is a lecturer in Inclusive Education at the Department of Education of the University of Cyprus. She holds degrees from the University of Cyprus (BEd in Primary Education), the University of Manchester (MEd in Special Needs and Development) and the University of Cambridge (PhD in Education). Her research interests include the history, policy and practice of inclusive education in Cyprus and in other countries, inclusive education curriculum and pedagogy, teacher education for inclusion, disability studies and disability studies in education. She is actively involved in networks and associations which promote inclusive education issues and she has published widely in international journals. Her publications include a book in Greek entitled *Teacher education for inclusion: From research to praxis* (co-authored with H. Phtiaka). Simoni is the scientific co-ordinator of the website *Tesserae of Knowledge* (www.ucy.ac.cy/psifides-gnosis).

FOREWORD

This is an important, original set of papers addressing a selection of significant issues, conceptions, policies, intentions and experiences, relating to cross-cultural research approaches to disability studies and inclusion.

Editing a collection of papers is a challenging, complex and time-consuming task. Deciding on the themes of the book, providing significant, critical, constructive feedback to the authors, is an essential responsibility of such editorial work. Keeping authors involved in the project, getting deadlines met, making decisions relating to the order of the papers, are also examples of their tasks. Good editing can enhance the overall quality of a book.

This is the first time these two colleagues have worked together as editors of a book. They have taken on their responsibilities in an enthusiastic and serious manner. Each paper has benefitted from their perceptive, detailed comments and support. The overall quality of the book is partly a reflection of the painstaking efforts of their work.

The contributors have provided a refreshingly open, honest, self-critical approach covering a range of features relating to their doctoral research experiences. Their accounts evidence a serious, passionate, sustained commitment to the struggles involved in attempting to increase their knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a researcher in a specific context, investigating chosen topics. Research is viewed as a complex learning process, which involves exciting, developmental aspects of engagements and outcomes as well as those elements of uncertainty, doubt and frustration. Hence, there is an element of messiness to this whole process.

In various ways, the contributors view research practice as a continual process of learning and re-learning. Taken-for-granted assumptions, conceptions and practices, are increasingly subject to critical examination. Change is foregrounded in the pursuit of providing more enabling, liberating, research intentions, relations and outcomes.

Overall, a range of important factors are identified and discussed in relation to the complex challenges that the authors encountered throughout their research endeavours, including: establishing an acceptable focus of the research; constructing the research questions; choosing and engaging with specific methods and methodological concerns; developing an heightened awareness of issues relating to the positionality of the researcher; working through the complex and contentious issues relating to conceptual clarity and theoretical frameworks; social model thinking and its implications for research; learning to think, read and write critically; making sense of the findings; various ethical concerns; relationships with participants and the position and role of the supervisor. The overall impact of these carefully focused and analysed accounts, vividly confirms the quality and degree of the time, emotional and intellectual labour that has been involved on the part of the authors.

FOREWORD

This collection of papers provides a rich source of perceptive, thoughtful, thought-provoking ideas, insights, challenging questions and relevant literature. The editors hope that this volume will inspire and encourage readers to pursue high quality research. I welcome the publication of this volume and believe it should be widely read and seriously discussed, especially by students and supervisors engaged in inclusive education and disability studies, for whom it should be essential reading.

Professor Emeritus Len Barton
Institute of Education
University of London

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We are indebted to those who provided valuable guidance and support (whether as a supervisor, mentor or friend) in our early steps of researching disability. As detailed in our chapters we are appreciative of those academics, researchers and activists who introduced groundbreaking debates about doing disability research, which impacted on our way of thinking about our own research.

The idea of forming a network of early career researchers resulted from the encouragement of Professor Len Barton, and enabled a sharing of views about our experiences of the research process. It was at the suggestion of Len that we decided to develop these ideas and to put together a collection of our papers. We are grateful to Len for his advice and support, and his ongoing encouragement and commitment to our work.

We would like to thank Professor Roger Slee and his editorial board for including our volume as part of the series *Studies in Inclusive Education*.

KAREN BEAUCHAMP-PRYOR & SIMONI SYMEONIDOU

1. INTRODUCTION

The content of this volume stems from the experiences of a network of early career researchers with an interest in researching disability. Each of us had recently completed doctoral research and following the encouragement of Professor Len Barton, we formed an international network to share our experiences about researching disability and to contemplate on the purpose, process and future direction of disability research.

Following the initial exchange of details about our doctoral studies it was evident that whilst our approaches differed and our experiences were varied in researching disability across countries and contexts, we were unified by an underpinning desire to explore ideas about researching disability. We were further unified by being a network of female researchers, although the significance of gender on our research varied. As a network of newly qualified researchers we had much to offer, and to say, about our experiences of researching disability.

We present an open and honest reflection on our experiences as postgraduate students, with each of us considering the factors that influenced the direction of our research and the decisions we reached. We sought to identify our interests, motives and values which underpinned our work and to question whether our beliefs were subsequently substantiated, validated, challenged or changed. Our decisions were driven by a range and combination of personal experience of impairment and disability, and professional experience of working with disabled people. The influence of personal and professional approaches within our research is addressed, along with the dilemmas that this might have caused. As newcomers to the research process we discuss our apprehensions about embarking on doctoral research, together with the anxieties experienced along the way, and importantly the motivation that drove us to complete our projects.

Whilst our research focus varied, the purpose of our research was united in furthering debate and understanding about power relationships and the inequality and marginalization experienced by disabled people. Discussion reflects on barriers of power within politics, policy and practice, and the struggle by disabled people in challenging their exclusion. Therefore, many of the chapters discuss the lack of voice experienced by disabled people and the research purpose being one of enabling unheard voices to be heard in the struggle to inform legislation, policy and practice.

We reflect on theoretical discussions within disability studies and inclusive education research and examine the way in which debates about the meaning of