

## **Book Review**

**Access to Academies for All Students:  
Critical Approaches to Inclusive  
Curriculum, Instruction, and Policy  
P. Kluth, D. Straut, & D. Biklen (Editors)  
Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003**

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This text is a compilation of chapters edited by Paula Kluth, Diana Straut, and Douglas Biklen addressing the central theme of inclusion within different curricular and topical areas in education. The authors move beyond the basic approach of simply congregating diverse learners in one classroom. They challenge educators to embrace diverse learners and teach creatively through the strengths and needs of all the students in the classroom, promoting excellence in academic learning. The text examines teachers' assumptions about their students, provides vignettes and interviews from teachers and students, and stresses the need for familial context and understanding within the educational process.

In essence, the text challenges traditional participatory notions of inclusion and encourages active engaged learning. It urges educators to examine their own expectations of students and to be fully aware of the political and cultural aspects of schooling. "By adopting democratic and critical ways of thinking about teaching and learning; considering ways to build safe, peaceful, and supportive school culture; and using classroom practices that allow for the active participation and active academic engagement of all, educators can create a context that allows every student to grow intellectually and find academic success" (Kluth, Strout, & Biklin, 2003, p. 28).

Looking through the lens of Paulo Freire at Kluth, Strout, and Biklin's work is useful. Freire, of course, advocates education for all. He contends that education is the key to empowerment, equipping the oppressed with a voice and critical consciousness. He opposes the top-down "banking

approach” to education in which the teacher “deposits” knowledge into students (Freire, 2005a). Instead, he encourages educators to actively engage learners in a democratically relevant curriculum within a supportive educational environment (Freire, 2005a, 2005b). The editors of *Access to Academics for All Students* echo Freire’s assertions and emphasize the need for critical access to education for all students in the classroom. They give support to the idea of democracy and relevancy of curriculum in a supportive, caring environment in which to learn. For example, in the chapter concerning mathematics instruction, the author suggests this style of teaching “requires a change in teachers’ deepest beliefs about mathematics as a collection of facts and procedures, and learning as memorizing facts and applying procedures. Teachers must move toward a view of mathematics as a dynamic, culturally-related field, and learning as construction of knowledge” (Kluth et al., p. 105).

Additionally, Freire sees dialogue as being critical to the teaching and learning process (Freire, 2005a, 2005b). When teachers take the time to listen and learn from their students, true dialogue and, thus, learning, can occur. The editors state, “Students’ voices must be central to work in the classroom. They must take part in shaping school structures and policies, providing leadership, constructing curriculum, and designing curriculum” (Kluth et al., p. 25). Children enter our schools with much knowledge, many life experiences and a wide variety of skills and understandings gleaned from their families. These understandings are far more complex than anything taught within the classroom (Kluth et al., chap. 3). It behooves the competent teacher to discover and build upon this knowledge, and it is through careful observation and dialogue with students that teachers make this discovery. Many times teachers begin a new unit of study without taking the time to determine their students’ current understandings of the subject matter (Kluth et al., chap. 7). To understand the needs of students, “teachers must seek to understand, accept, and appreciate all children and all that is *of* children” (Kluth et al., p. 49).

In addition, Freire urges teachers to love their students, but to not be “coddling mothers.” According to Freire, students should be taught in love but with the high expectations of hard work on the part of the student (Freire, 2005b). The authors maintain the same philosophy of high expectations centered in respect for all students. In Chapter Five of the text, the authors argue that for true inclusion within the classroom, educators must provide more than simply access to the classroom for diverse learners, they must also maintain “challenging academic opportunities” for each student’s learning.

The authors and editors cover a wide range of educational topics

centered on a common theme of inclusion for all learners. They purport not only to discuss issues of special education or learning disabled, but also to address the needs of any child who carries a label. However, the issues of race and ethnicity, among others, are only given a nod. This book mainly advocates fair and equal access to academics for learning challenged students. Although the teaching methods and philosophies suggested in this text do apply quite well, the authors fail to address the needs of other “outlying” learners such as gifted and talented students as well as students of diverse social class and ethnic backgrounds.

The text provides few concrete examples of how educators could transform their lessons and classrooms into those that reflect the theories and understandings presented. The chapters are empowering in theory; however, many teachers might be left wondering what to do next to best meet the needs of all their learners. A plan of action or first steps would be an invaluable tool to help not only beginning teachers start off with inclusive teaching, but also provide guidance to any veteran teachers who struggle with inclusion issues. These specific suggestions would serve to assist teachers in transforming their understandings of inclusion to truly enacting the theory of effectively educating all students.

The text is positive in nature, interesting, and easy to read. The editors did an admirable job of including chapters from a wide range of educational topics, all addressing the concept of academic access for students. The back cover of the text suggests this book would be appropriate for both undergraduate and graduate programs of study. However, the articles more appropriately address in-service teachers who have seen and experienced first-hand issues concerning meeting diverse learning needs within the classroom. Thus, this book would make an excellent text to use in professional development book studies as well as in graduate programs.

### References

- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare to teach*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press
- Kluth, P., Straut, D.M., & Biklen, D.P. (Eds.). (2003). *Access to academics for all students: Critical approaches to inclusive curriculum, instruction, and policy*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.