

Comparative and International Perspectives on Special Education

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CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS

Special education has been fundamentally affected by societal and educational change. At the same time, these systems and their participants, from students and parents to teachers and professionals, have also transformed societies, especially with regard to understandings of dis/ability and ab/normality. This influence has been visible from the original special schools and classes, established several hundred years ago; often preceding compulsory schooling. Today, widespread recognition of the impact of education for a host of private and public goods – as well as of institutionalized discrimination that people with disabilities face – galvanizes contemporary debates. If special education successfully provided learning opportunities to children previously excluded, in many countries the goal has shifted to inclusive education. In these settings, all children, regardless of their characteristics, attend neighborhood schools and are supported to reach their individual learning goals in heterogeneous classrooms. Yet in much of the world, even the most basic supports and services for students with learning difficulties or children with disabilities are completely lacking, with impairment, poverty, and educational and social exclusion intertwined. Universally, there are children and youth with disabilities and those in need of support in achieving their learning goals; these groups are not conterminous. Traditionally, special education has provided additional support for the diverse group of learners perceived as having ‘special educational needs’ or

labeled and grouped in other categories defined by the clinical and teaching professions.

Global ideals, such as 'education for all' and inclusive education, continue to be prominently discussed, especially as 132 countries have (as of June 2013) ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (United Nations, 2006, 2013). The Convention's Article 24 extends far beyond schooling, as it mandates inclusive education throughout the life course, challenging all educators and levels of education systems to embrace the diversity of (potential) learners: to 'ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access . . . education . . . without discrimination and on an equal basis with others' (Section 5). The UNCRPD's provisions specify necessary changes to facilitate access and meaningful educational opportunities for disadvantaged and disabled learners. Such transformations to enhance equity and overall education system performance affect the political and social contexts in which special education programs seek to offer support, but have considerable implications for all learners.

However, the tremendous variance found in nearly every indicator relating to special (and inclusive) education and disability, even among developed democracies, underscores the legacy of different, path-dependent developmental trajectories of education and social systems. Often benevolent, educational and social policies nevertheless have not yet achieved full inclusion, whether in education or other societal realms. Rhetorically, many programs worldwide are being euphemistically renamed from 'special' to 'integrative' or 'inclusive' without significant reform of curricular contents or organizational structures. Conversely, diversity agendas are sometimes narrowed to focus on certain categories of impairment instead of more general characteristics of learners. The unintended consequences of such explicit and implicit developments underscore the importance of in-depth comparative cultural and historical analysis to explain continuity and change in education – and obstinate oppression of people with disabilities and disadvantages.

Attempting to make sense of global growth as well as persistent cross-national and intercultural differences in special and inclusive education requires both qualitative and quantitative approaches; ideally longitudinal studies and multiple levels of analysis. Education research, more than ever, will need to take on the challenge of explaining variation within and between national and regional contexts – and the resulting effects on students and social groups (e.g., Artiles, Kozleski & Waitoller, 2011; Booth & Ainscow, 1998). However, most existing research on special and inclusive education has not utilized international and comparative approaches. Similarly, students participating in special education programs are often excluded from large-scale assessments, challenging comparative analyses.

Thus, this chapter begins with a brief overview of why comparative studies are vital for an understanding of the worldwide expansion of special and inclusive education as well as specific rights and resources or disadvantages and stigmatization, in particular places, that have accompanied this rise. Next,

central dimensions of comparison across space and time, from classification and categories to learning opportunities and outputs as well as outcomes are discussed. Then, selected contemporary findings, mainly from countries in North America and Europe with long special education traditions, exemplify relevant indicators and emphasize research and policy implications of contrasting school cultures and structures. Identifying contemporary tensions and dilemmas of special education, the next section raises questions that challenge contemporary stakeholders, advocates, and policymakers. Finally, research gaps that demand attention are discussed, as is the future of (comparative) research on special and inclusive education.

WHY COMPARATIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION?

The delineated significant rise of (special) education worldwide and the extraordinary heterogeneity found – from national to regional to local levels – demands explanation. The persistent diversity provides ample justification for comparative studies of special education (in English, see, e.g., Carrier, 1984; Mazurek & Winzer, 1994; McLaughlin & Rouse, 2000; Peters, 1993; Powell, 2009; Winzer & Mazurek 2011; Richardson & Powell, 2011). Diverse rationales have motivated the comparative analysis of special education.

Understanding the origins of educational systems

Especially when explicitly historical, comparative studies provide insights into the origins and evolution of educational systems. In those countries in which special education was first conceived, the founding of influential organizations, usually devoted to serving members of one impairment category, such as blindness or deafness, preceded compulsory schooling (Richardson & Powell 2011, Ch. 1). Taking Margaret Archer's (1979) exhortation to examine educational *systems* seriously, engagement with the development of special education and other attempts to provide learning opportunities to increasingly diverse student bodies sheds light on the original nation-state principles undergirding the provided right – and duty – to participate in schooling. Where these original schools and institutions still exist, they testify to the durability of special education, the universality of impairment and disability, and different understandings of and provisions for students 'with special educational needs'.

Evaluation of the status quo

Studies in comparative and international education, by providing new frames of reference and relativizing taken-for-granted national narratives, also enable us to evaluate the existing situation in any given space. Often, such comparisons guide policy reforms, either as sources of inspiration or as concrete good or best practices

used in policymaking or implementation. Across the globe, but also within regions, education systems and their varying forms of organization to promote learning and provide individualized support differ. For example, in some European systems, almost all students are taught together, such as in Italy and Norway. By contrast, the spatial separation of regular and special education in ‘binary’ systems of special and regular schools, such as in Belgium, France, Germany, and The Netherlands has been largely retained. Many nation-states in Europe and North America, however, have reformed their systems so that a ‘continuum’ exists – from segregated to fully inclusive settings (see EADSNE, 2011). Change in most places has been gradual: from complete exclusion to full inclusion along a continuum from segregation (separation between buildings) to separation (separation within a building) to integration (mainstreaming; most of the school day in regular classes) up to fully inclusive classrooms all students may access (Powell, 2011). Even the most segregated systems are moving gradually in this direction – mandated by international charters and regional laws (such as those within the European Union) and encouraged by the naming and shaming of global benchmarks and league tables. Such persistent heterogeneity calls upon comparative and international education to explore differences and explain why these continue to exist in the face of on-going expansion as well as global mandates for inclusive education.

Providing case studies of social constructions of ‘dis/ability’ and ‘ab/normality’

Comparative studies often implicitly or explicitly provide case studies of the social construction of dis/ability (see, e.g., Hacking, 1999). Over the past several decades, the multidisciplinary field of disability studies has grown in many countries to explore the social, cultural, and political conditions and contexts that define impairments and illnesses and disable people (e.g., Albrecht, Seelman & Bury, 2001). Especially at the beginning of the life course, schooling is the primary societal institution that identifies, defines, and reifies differences in particularly-valued abilities (Powell, 2011). As Erving Goffman (1961) and Michel Foucault (1988) have emphasized, examining ‘abnormality’ is an advantageous strategy to better understand ‘normality’. Similarly, if we wish to investigate how ‘ability’ has been constructed, then studies of ‘learning disability,’ ‘learning difficulties,’ and ‘special education needs’ are useful.

Because we think through institutions and classifications (Douglas, 1986), comparisons of these foundations of social life facilitate the unmasking of taken-for-granted assumptions about schooling and citizenship. The moral imperative to do so derives from the location of special education programs and their clientele: at the nexus of human rights, disadvantages, and stigmatization. Thrown into stark relief by the human rights revolution, teachers and schools are confronted with dilemmas of difference, disability, and inclusion (see Norwich, 2008). Educational decision-making must adjudicate whether to classify students as

having special educational needs, how to prioritize provision of additional resources to access certain curricular offerings, and in which settings to educate students – in general or special schools and classes. Students receiving special education support often suffer stigmatization and low status. At the interactional level, such dilemmas confront individuals, while at the societal level we see the result of aggregated choices about the options provided by various forms of schooling. Comparative approaches facilitate such analyses, yet which aspects and dimensions of special education can usefully be compared internationally and interculturally?

COMPARATIVE DIMENSIONS

Categories and classification

To investigate special and inclusive education and their institutionalization across time and space, first the categories – their definitions and meanings – applied to students must be analyzed. Which social differences are perceived as relevant? In special education, considerable cultural differences and change in dis/ability classification emphasizes the importance of historical analysis. Categorical boundaries between groups of students are continuously being redrawn, given shifting paradigms of normality within education and society (see Davis, 1995), the invention and careers of particular diagnoses and therapies (like attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, see Malacrida, 2003), and the global diffusion of particular categories, such as the three cross-national categories used by the OECD (2007) in its comparative studies: students with disabilities, with learning difficulties, and with disadvantages.

Categorical boundaries give rise to new groups of students, yet the meanings ascribed to these labels are relative, depending on local contexts. Interculturally, even such a category as ‘learning disability’ varies dramatically in its relevance and size, from the largest category in the United States or Germany to an unknown category in Japan (Powell, 2011). Moreover, where the US definition refers mainly to a discrepancy between tested IQ and school performance, in Germany, ‘learning disability’ has little connection to psychometric diagnosis; it has developed as a more legitimate, profession-based label than referring to students’ social and cultural disadvantages and it justifies the receipt of additional or specialized resources, but also results in stigmatization and, often, schooling in segregated settings (Pfahl & Powell, 2011).

Over the past century, developments in clinical science and special education as well as the ‘medicalization of society’ (Conrad, 2005) have led to further specification and differentiation. However, these categories and the elaborate classification systems that they make up have been resolutely critiqued as stigmatizing, as ignoring the contingency and complexity of human diversity, and as hardly beneficial to those so classified (Florian et al., 2006). Ambivalent and often contentious, classification as ‘having special educational needs’ requires

extensive mediation between positive and negative consequences: provision of additional resources and rights, on the one hand, but prevalent stigmatization, even institutionalized discrimination, frequently lasting throughout the life course, on the other. Nevertheless, analyzing these categories is a precondition for grasping the relative power of professional groups and disciplines and for understanding cultural priorities and policies relating to dis/ability in a particular context. Informed by disciplinary knowledge, classification systems and groupings or tracks based on 'ability' have been organizational, pedagogic, and political responses to the increasing heterogeneity of student bodies.

Learning opportunities, services and supports

Second, in which settings are learning opportunities provided, and with what kinds of services and supports? Once outright exclusion from schooling has been overcome, the question turns to how students are allocated within differentiated educational systems and thus which opportunities to learn they enjoy. Such structures can be grouped in a tripartite typology of dual, multiple, and unitary: countries with two parallel tracks (general schools and legally or organizationally separate special schools); countries providing multiple tracks along a continuum of settings and services; and countries with one school with the goal of educating (almost) all students in inclusive classrooms (EADSNE, 2011). Ranging from segregation and separation to integration and inclusion, these learning opportunity structures have been built to foster learning. Yet they have been shown to both facilitate and hinder learning, especially when participation is (highly) stigmatizing and associated with low expectations, less peer interaction, and reduced curricula. The types of educational organizations and chances to participate meaningfully provided in them greatly affect achievement levels and the resulting attainment, measured in the form of certificates.

While individual characteristics are crucial to educational performance and attainment, the cross-national differences in constructions of and organizational responses to recognized learning support needs emphasize that institutional, not solely individual-based, explanations are required to make sense of group differences across time and space (Powell, 2011). Indeed, large-scale cross-national studies of school performance from TIMSS to PISA repeatedly present immense cross-national variation that calls for more attention to historical, political, and social factors, from principles and values, via curricula and standards, to regulations and rights in educational systems (Baker & LeTendre, 2005). Contextual analyses are needed to explain why these differences developed.

Qualifications, transitions, life courses

Thirdly, focusing on individual educational careers and life courses, what qualifications are earned and how are individuals' transitions structured? Is access to and support within vocational training or higher education given, and with what

consequences for labor market integration? What will the future participation and life chances of graduates of these types of educational programs be? These different systems have significant impacts on transitions into training and into labor markets as well as on other outcomes, from health and well-being to political and social participation (e.g., OECD, 2003; Tomlinson 2013). Access to post-secondary education and training has increased not only in developed countries, but around the world (Schofer & Meyer, 2005). With expansion has come the rise in expected educational qualifications, which, in turn, disadvantages less-educated individuals (Solga, 2002). For example, the comparison of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland shows that prevalent segregation and numerous barriers result in limited access to vocational training and higher education for those who participate in special education programs (Powell, Felkendorff, & Hollenweger, 2008). In these countries, most tertiary-level students with disabilities and chronic illness have attended regular schools, in part because access, even for graduates of special schools, is limited by law. As rights and obligations change from secondary to post-secondary education, those professionals providing supports must collaborate to ensure successful transitions. Addressing these issues beyond schooling, the UNCRPD emphasizes that not only is *desegregation* necessary, but more generally the elimination of discrimination (Article 5) and the enhancement of accessibility (Article 9) – if people with disabilities are to maximize their capabilities throughout the life course.

SELECT FINDINGS FROM COMPARATIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION

In comparing special education around the world today, debates are on-going about how best to organize schooling, to deal with deviant behavior, and to address social disadvantage. We find continuity in the settings in which supports are offered, with segregation and separation still prevalent. At the same time, we find changes, with the gradual strengthening of human rights, ‘education for all’, and inclusive education becoming transformative in many places. Here, some key developments are sketched, all of which would benefit from further in-depth comparative research.

Firstly, the global and regional variance and change over time demonstrate that the current situation in any given locale does not have to remain so – and there is no clinically-defined necessity for certain school structures or settings in which to provide individualized educational supports. While in many societies, children with disabilities and disadvantages continue to be excluded, in others, nearly all children participate in their local (school) communities, receiving support and services to succeed. Around the world, we find contrasting models that have been implemented. This calls for further exploration of the principles, standards, and policies in these areas – to understand the values and choices undergirding these systems.

Secondly, the continuing rise of education standards, together with recognition of the human right to (inclusive) education, has shown a number of

paradoxical consequences. In many countries, despite the laudable expansion of education, we find the increasing stigmatization and labor market marginalization of less-educated young adults (Solga, 2002). The institutional linkages between education and employment systems and interactions between special and inclusive education challenge comprehensive reform agendas like that of the UNCRPD. Indeed, 'resistance to inclusive education stems not only from a web of ideological positions, entrenched interests, and education and social policies, but also from the organizational location of special education: at the nexus of education and social policies, a row ahead of social assistance and labor market programs for disadvantaged youth and young adults with disabilities, and parallel to the juvenile justice system' (Richardson & Powell, 2011, p. 280). Thus, reforms of special and inclusive education imply significant changes in other fields and organizations. Given the lack of societal engagement with or policy-makers' attention even to educational transformations of such magnitude, sustained efforts are needed to analyze these institutional complementarities – and to gauge the foreseen and unintended consequences of such reforms.

Thirdly, the vulnerable 'Achilles heel' of special education – disproportionality in participation rates of certain social groups – endures. Worldwide, we find persistent overrepresentation of some groups of migrant and ethnic minority youth, children from families with low socioeconomic status, and boys in special education (see, e.g., Artiles & Bal, 2008; Dyson & Gallannaugh, 2008; Gabel, Curcic, Powell, Kader, & Albee, 2009; Losen & Orfield, 2002). On the one hand, this exemplifies the significant additional resources and supports offered through special education programs as well as special education's considerable authority. Often, the resources are only available to those students officially classified. On the other hand, classification as 'having special educational needs' may serve to legitimate differentiation into stigmatized categories and the allocation to low-status tracks, when such placements on the basis of other characteristics could be and regularly are considered discriminatory treatment. Certainly, the awareness, recognition, and appreciation of diversity and equalized participation, as envisioned in international charters and best practice models, looks very different from contemporary realities in many places.

Fourthly, both returns to education and the costs of educational exclusion and segregation over the life course have thus far not been sufficiently calculated. The enormous costs resulting from the lack of education in the resulting labor market marginalization (and the ensuing social assistance transfer payments) must be estimated (Tomlinson, 2013). Yet the vital benefits of education and training are not only economical, but reflect fundamental social and individual values, such as citizenship and societal participation. While few would dispute that investments in education are significant for both the enhancement of individual capabilities and the amelioration of social problems, often education reforms have been blocked with reference to lacking finances. Yet violations of human rights – including the right to inclusive education – cannot be justified by such arguments.

Fifthly, the implementation of inclusive education programs implies, to varying extents, the *deinstitutionalization* of special educational systems (e.g., Powell, 2011; Skrtic, 1991; Tomlinson, 2013). The struggle for control over the interpretation of the global norms relating to inclusive education and implementation processes must acknowledge special education's embeddedness in the overall education system. Reforms of this magnitude call forth resistance of powerful groups, such as administrators and special educators invested in the status quo, that mobilize to counter such changes.

Finally, the fundamental transformation required to realize inclusive education systems is justified by the belief that development of an inclusive society requires an inclusive education system. Core educational goals of democratic society are not compatible with on-going stigmatization or segregation of particular groups. In sum, persistent disparities and disproportionality, rising standards alongside recognized human rights, the long-term individual and societal costs of exclusion and discrimination as well as needed investments in schooling and individualized supports set the stage for continued tensions as societies negotiate the complex relationship between special and inclusive education.

TENSIONS AND DILEMMAS OF SPECIAL AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

A lasting dilemma of special education, and a source of ambivalence, is that its professional and institutional practices, contrary to popular belief, have hardly been shown to be conducive to either educational excellence or equity. Instead, as Skrtic (1991, 1995) has persuasively argued, an 'adhocracy' that stresses collaboration and problem-solving in responding to individual learners would be far more beneficial to reach both of these fundamental goals of schooling. Similarly, international charters from UNESCO's Salamanca statement (1994) to the UNCRDP, discussed above, have called into question the taken-for-grantedness of special education settings. If organizational forms that segregate or separate students are losing legitimacy, they nevertheless remain ubiquitous in most nations where elaborated special education systems exist. Thus far, fully inclusive education systems – going beyond the focus on impairments, difficulties, or disabilities to embrace and learn from diversity – have been realized in few countries. Yet the UNCRPD emphasizes accessibility and a range of other measures to ensure students' educational and social participation, regardless of their dis/ability status, thus including children, youth, and adults of different social and educational, ethnic, or migration backgrounds and of different genders. In mandating inclusive education for all, including vocational training, higher education, and lifelong learning, the UNCRPD challenges the legitimacy of segregated schooling even as it demands that policymakers address myriad structural and cultural barriers to inclusion.

This shift towards inclusive education occurs at the same time that rising common academic standards and output measures of achievement and

attainment place pressure on general education to increase school performance levels and accountability (Baker & LeTendre, 2005). Not only the cross-nationally comparative OECD-PISA studies (OECD, 2000) have led to the exclusion of learners who do not test well or require additional support to reach their learning goals. The rising popularity of benchmarks, league tables, and rankings of all kinds often reduces comparisons to descriptions that cannot address, much less answer, the questions of *why* these differences came to be. Further, such exclusions from large-scale assessments make comparisons across countries more challenging, highlighting the need for culturally and historically sensitive studies that address contextual factors instead of seeking answers only from aggregated individual-level data.

These forces in different directions have led to a seeming paradox: the simultaneous rise in rates of both segregated schooling and inclusive education (Richardson & Powell, 2011). These contrary developments are embedded in the larger phenomenon of education's growth everywhere and at all levels. Increasing participation in formal schooling has led to ever-higher attainment rates in secondary and tertiary education and ever-longer careers in schooling. Rising standards reveal starkly those who do not achieve (much) school success. With ever more students classified as 'having special educational needs' and the diffusion of the global norms of 'education for all' and inclusive education, the rates of segregated and inclusive schooling rise at the same time.

Increasing inclusive education rates do not automatically reduce segregation rates. For example, in Germany, where the UNCRPD took effect in 2009 and inclusive education has been developed and practiced in some states (*Länder*) for decades, attendance in special schools continues to grow, especially rapidly in Eastern Germany. In 2008, more students than ever before, 480,000, or 6% of all students of compulsory schooling age, received some special education support. Of those, 89,000 (18%) attended regular schools. With that, Germany is one of the European countries with the highest levels of school segregation (EADSNE, 2011; Powell, 2011). Thus far, in terms of schooling, Germany has made few and gradual changes toward meeting its commitment to the UNCRPD; this is so especially due to the institutionalization of special schools, professional interests, and federal governance. In another federal country, the United States, there is a long tradition of special classes within regular schools. Indeed, as one of the countries first committed to achieving inclusive education, the US has a much higher inclusion rate – over half of all students with special educational needs spend most of their school day in the regular classroom – and less than 4% of students with special educational needs attend special schools or residential institutions (Powell, 2011). Whereas Germany has a special education system built upon interschool segregation, the US system is organized around intraschool separation. Professions, parents' associations and social movements have proved successful, but not in transforming the 'institutional logic' of the education system: from separation (US) or segregation (Germany) to (full) inclusion (Powell, 2009). The UNCRPD strengthens the advocates of sustainable inclusive education, but implementation

is mostly an incremental, path-dependent process, not one of fundamental transformation. Especially in federal countries such as Germany and the US, there is a persistence of state and local disparities. Despite international objectives, standards, and treaties – and recent advances in inclusive education practices – neither country's education system is fully inclusive as the UNCRPD mandates.

Such dilemmas cannot be explained solely by analyzing inclusive *or* special education, whether conceptually or empirically. Rather, we must explore the drivers of change in these two fields jointly – and beyond them. The domain of special education stretches far beyond the boundaries of general education, as its organizational field includes health care systems, vocational training programs and transition planning, and labor markets (Richardson & Powell, 2011). Because special education serves many of the most disadvantaged youth, it also shares an organizational community with the juvenile justice system. Special education thus contributes to the functioning of these other systems and vice versa. This interconnectedness of special education to such a variety of neighboring institutions makes proposals for transformative change more difficult to achieve. Particular groups of teachers, administrators, and other professionals have little interest in systemic shifts that would limit their autonomy or require them to assume additional roles, especially when political support for financing such reforms is lacking. Thus, despite manifest good intentions and dedication to serve, considerable inequalities in learning opportunities and institutionalized discrimination persist.

In many countries, segregated settings are still among the dominant modes of providing special education support and services; however, such organizational forms have been called into question. Indeed, segregated schooling has become synonymous with limitations, exclusion, and low social status (e.g., Tomlinson, 2013). More than ever before, being disabled remains linked to being less educated than one's peers. Conversely, attaining less education leads to an increased risk of becoming disabled, of experiencing poverty, and of suffering social exclusion (see, e.g., OECD, 2003, 2004, 2007). Indeed, following educational expansion, youth with less education are increasingly identifiable and stigmatized, which leads employers, who more than ever believe that school performance is the most trustworthy indicator of future labor market success, to exclude them from the start (Pfahl & Powell, 2011; Solga, 2002). Recent increases in rates of classification into special education, for example in North America and Europe, will likely exacerbate labor market marginalization of youth with disabilities and disadvantages (see Tomlinson, 2013).

Yet international comparisons show that some countries successfully implement inclusive education reforms, even when this demands the transformation of their education systems. Within Europe or among the OECD countries, the rates of inclusive education vary from under 10% to more than 90% (EADSNE, 2011; OECD, 2007). This range emphasizes the gap between the global rhetoric of inclusive education and the realities of institutionalized organizational forms in special education, whether special schools, as found in Germany, or special

classrooms, prevalent in the United States. Such variation even among economically-dominant, democratic countries underscores the continuity in special education and the persistence of particular organizational forms, which results from interconnections with other institutions and cultural values, such as individualism or collectivism. Whereas many societies emphasize group belonging regardless of student characteristics, others have favored individual education rights and choices. Further, individuals and groups differ in whether they value the resources special education offers more than they fear the stigmatizing effects of its labels – or vice versa.

Inclusive education promises to more fully utilize the diversity of interests and abilities found among all groups of children to develop each individual's intellectual and social competencies. Responding to these principles and global trends, supranational governments, nation-states and (non-)governmental organizations around the world – such as the European Union, UNESCO, The World Bank, or the Open Society Foundation – have committed themselves to 'education for all' and to inclusive education (e.g., Peters, 2003). Globally, inclusive education continues to broadly spread as an objective and as a norm. Locally, advocates and activists in the disability rights movement have succeeded in increasing access to integrated schools or even inclusive classrooms.

However, transformative education reforms that would do most to enable inclusive schooling have thus far been hindered by ideological, normative, and political resistance. This is partially because the paradigm shift toward inclusive education not only affects special education deeply, but also challenges the status quo, as elaborated in interconnected education, economic, and justice systems (Richardson & Powell, 2011). Thus, in many countries, battles continue at the nexus of education and social policy (Allmendinger & Leibfried, 2003). The results of these conflicts influence whether and when countries around the world will achieve their shared goal of inclusive education.

The concurrent growth of segregation and inclusion rates emphasizes not individual characteristics, but rather contrasting organizational forms that provide learning opportunities. The coexistence of school segregation and inclusion depends on continued expansion in the group of children and youth who are labeled and, once officially classified, receive additional resources to access the curriculum. However, the logic of segregation that posits separation as necessary to provide such individualized learning supports contradicts the powerful idea, codified in international human rights charters, that to strengthen democracy and enable active citizenship requires nothing less than inclusive education for all. Research in education and related fields has shown that inclusive education, when understood as a complete educational concept guided by established principles, has been shown to be beneficial in creating a community for all learners (e.g., Sapon-Shevin, 2007).

Interdependencies between special education, general education, and other institutions along with vested professional interests have thus far hindered the transformations needed to realize inclusive education for all. Yet the

considerable differences between and within nation-states also demonstrate that change is not only possible, but also that on-going education reforms and shifts in local practice have achieved inclusive schooling in many regions of the world.

RESEARCH GAPS AND THE FUTURE OF (COMPARATIVE) RESEARCH ON SPECIAL AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Transformative education reforms need broad societal support and expressions of political will, locally and nationally. Comparisons of the conditions and consequences of educational reforms are needed. Given the encompassing challenges brought about by the UNCRPD, monitoring its implementation must proceed on multiple levels of analysis, from the supranational and national to the regional and local, especially in countries with decentralized political control of educational policymaking, such as Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, or the United States. The perspectives of social groups and individuals most affected by reforms based on its principles deserve more attention than they have garnered. Such multilevel analyses are necessary, since supranational charters, objectives, and norms must be interpreted – and will lead to diverse results at lower levels.

Relevant disciplines should make connections between the macro, meso, and micro levels to draw a comprehensive picture of the on-going reforms of special education and inclusive education – and their consequences for educational achievement, equity, and attainment. Thus far, the division of labor between disciplines has led to too little synthesis and accumulation of scientific results. Discourse analyses, combined with examination of educational and social policies at international, national and local levels and with enquiries into institutions and organizations are needed to reveal the forces of persistence and change. Investigations of educational processes, whether in formal or informal learning environments, and interactions between members of different social groups can show how to improve supports and services. Research into selection mechanisms and, especially longitudinally, the consequences of participation in different learning environments are needed to understand the costs and benefits of contrasting educational settings.

The activities of the global disability movement and advocacy coalitions that mobilized to devise the UNCRPD and ensure its enactment ought to be further explored and brought up-to-date (see, e.g., Charlton, 1998; Quinn & Degener, 2002). Further, participatory research approaches – under the motto ‘nothing about us, without us’ – would ensure that the expertise and experiences of stakeholders in identifying and implementing needed improvements increases the relevance and potential of reforms. Estimates, both quantitative and qualitative, of the enormous long-term costs of exclusion, segregation and stigmatization and lack of education are urgently needed, as are legal studies of how the UNCRPD has been effectively implemented, even when confronting barriers in governance. As we continue to improve education systems and catalog the

numerous and complex barriers to inclusion, whether among more 'individualist' or 'collectivist' societies or among countries at different levels of development, we should also identify – via cross-national and cross-cultural studies – those factors most suitable to ameliorate exclusion and those which have contributed most to achieve educational and social inclusion.

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