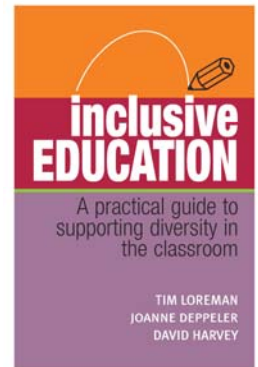


Book Review

Loreman, T., Deppeler, J.M., and Harvey, D.H.P., (2005) *Inclusive Education: A practical guide to supporting diversity in the classroom*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin

Reviewed by Chris Forlin



Since the normalisation movement in the early 1970s teachers have progressively been asked to accept more children with a range of diverse needs, including those with support needs for intellectual disabilities to those with advanced talents, into their same regular classrooms. As teachers struggle with this they continually seek out practical ways to cater for the needs of these learners; yet they are usually rewarded with philosophically and theoretically rich texts geared far too heavily towards a scholar than the practicing teacher. The delight of this text, then, is that it is a highly readable, well-structured and extremely comprehensive book focussing clearly on the practical aspects of inclusivity in an easily accessible form for busy teachers. The authors advocate that a good school is one that includes all children in learning well together. The practical approaches suggested, while developed from a research background are, therefore, firmly embedded in the general education classroom and regular curriculum. The text is based on the whole schooling model of practice that aims to ensure equity and excellence for the whole school community.

The 12 chapters in the text are woven around key issues for supporting inclusive education rather than a more traditional categorically based approach. This perspective is really important as it firmly places disability and ability within a social context. The text persistently considers the needs of potentially marginalised students to enable them to engage with the curriculum rather than a focus on their own specific disabilities or abilities that invariably do not directly relate to their capacity to access an appropriate program.

The book particularly emphasises the need to consider the process of inclusion. The authors posit that if the process is clearly understood then this can transcend across the diverse needs of all learners regardless of individual diagnosis or categorisation and can be applied across all learning areas. A relatively brief discussion on the categorisation of diverse learners in Chapter 2 helps to frame the rest of the text rather than distracting from the process approach. Consequently, the ideas and suggestions promoted throughout are equally applicable across all learning domains, thus helping to promote an inclusive curriculum as well as inclusive educational practices.

The authors have underpinned the book with their philosophy: “Teachers already have the skills they need to successfully include diverse learners”. It is refreshing to find authors that treat the reader as a capable and knowledgeable person who is actively seeking direction to recognise and use their skills to produce a more inclusive environment for all learners. Acknowledging the existing strengths of teachers encourages them to enthusiastically select relevant, useful and appropriate ideas from the text without feeling that they need to re train in order to move forward. The authors concede that inclusion will be different for every teacher and school. While they continually promote the better outcomes achieved when inclusion is a whole school approach the authors are realistic in their ideals; accepting that some teachers will need to begin by working to establish inclusivity within their own classrooms as a first step towards an inclusive school community.

The book commences with a brief yet essential discussion of the philosophy of inclusion and aims to dispel a range of myths by providing a succinct summary of the benefits for both the child with and for the child without a disability. As occurs frequently throughout the text this chapter concludes

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'Inclusive Education' is published by RoutledgeFalmer in the USA, UK, and Canada

with a case study supported by a summary of the particular issues that were apparent for the nominated learner. This contextualising of the material within an authentic situation continues to help structure the process for the reader. Each chapter also concludes with a definition of key terms and suggestions for further reading.

I was delighted to find that the authors dedicate a whole chapter to considering the attitudes, beliefs and values of teachers in regards to how they help construct inclusive classrooms and schools. It is my strong belief that the key to establishing truly inclusive practices is to be found in the beliefs, values and ideologies of educators. To participate completely in any shifting paradigm one has first to believe that change is necessary, appropriate and right. Educators who do not sincerely believe in the move towards inclusive practices are unlikely to fully engage in the transformation required to enable it to be entirely realised. I would, therefore, suggest that Chapter 3 be compulsory reading for all preservice and inservice educators!

Having decisively established the foundation for this book in the first three chapters, the rest of the text focuses on how teachers can energetically move towards creating more inclusive practices in their classrooms and schools. An extremely comprehensive discussion on both psychological and teacher based testing is presented. A useful explanation of how to interpret commonly used IQ tests such as the Weschler scales is included. Collecting, recording and analysing teacher based authentic assessments are also covered with appropriate data collection sheets printed ready for teachers to use.

With the focus of support now moving strongly from a remedial withdrawal model to one of using peripatetic staff to assist regular class teachers with planning for their learners, the need for increased collaboration between colleagues is paramount. Working with paraprofessionals and parents is treated from the perspective that a shared understanding must be negotiated and clearly defined to ensure all participants are cognizant of their proposed roles and are able to work collegially to enable appropriate outcomes to be achieved. The range of opportunities recommended for engaging support staff and parents in establishing inclusive practices is extremely valuable for teachers who are increasingly finding they are being required to coordinate large teams of personnel when providing for challenging support needs.

The remaining chapters in the book provide a wealth of strategies and programs suitable for engaging learners with diverse needs across primary and secondary classes. The development and management of an IEP, inclusive instructional design, and collaborative instruction to promote inclusion all provide a collection of ideas and practices for teachers to use. Each program is very clearly explained and the process plainly articulated. Practical and manageable suggestions are provided on how to organise an inclusive classroom and positive ways of dealing with challenging behaviour and promoting positive social interactions among all students is discussed.

The final chapter provides an opportunity for the reader to reflect on two major themes that transcend this text ie that inclusive classrooms can work and that teachers, who believe this, can make this happen. The importance of taking time to reflect on practice in a systematic and continuous way is supported by the proposal to use a reflective diary approach.

This text fills a need to provide a practical yet structured, logical and clear approach for preservice and inservice teachers to establish inclusive practices in their classrooms and schools. The emphasis on a social model of diversity considers the need to cater for all learners regardless of any label that they may bring with them. This is more than adequately achieved by concentrating on proven practical approaches for engaging diverse learners in inclusive classrooms.

The use of realistic case studies supports this excellent text in providing a highly relevant and extremely functional resource document for all teachers. The 23 Useful Forms included may be modified to suit any teacher's specific context and are also downloadable from the accompanying web site, thus making access to them very easy.

This is not a text that will be dutifully filed once read, but one that will soon become a very handy support document for the busy teacher who wants to locate and implement appropriate and manageable strategies that will help support a move towards providing a more effective and inclusive learning environment for all learners. I highly recommend this as a practical and very helpful reference resource for teachers.

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