

Editorial

All educators know that there is much to be learned about teaching from learners. While reading through the excellent submissions for this issue on inclusion, two poignant memories of my own classroom teaching came to mind. The first was of Carla, a six year-old who was a year young for grade two. She was quiet, conscientious, academically adept, and frequently alone. Her conversations with me were deep. She wondered about the meaning of God, for example. And when she completed the novel *Oliver Twist*, she marvelled at how the title character could have survived. She taught me that by going to play with her at her house after school, by casting her as the fortune teller for the class carnival where she used her crystal ball to enthral her classmates, and by encouraging her to make “Dutch skaters soup” on a small burner in the corner of the room, she was able to make inroads into a circle of friends.

The second was Kenny, about whom I have written before (Butler-Kisber, 1997). He was nine and in grade two; the other students were six and seven years old. Kenny was outgoing, friendly, and cooperative, but had serious literacy and numeracy difficulties that challenged me as a beginning teacher. Luckily, I stumbled upon his artistic ability. He used his drawing to build a sight-word vocabulary, he explored with a small group of boys the travel of Vikings, and became the lead on the construction of a six-foot Viking ship equipped with sails, shields, and swords. His confidence soared when, as the illustrator for a co-authored picture book entitled, *Clifford Falls in Love*, he was able to read it aloud to his peers from cover to cover, including when Clifford got “infatuated.”

I have carried these and many other lessons with me throughout my career. I have learned from students that to achieve social justice, inclusion is a daily, pedagogical responsibility of the teacher, and that the labels and other deficit notions about students that educators use have huge consequences for students and fly in the face of celebrating diversity, and ensuring access and inclusion for all.

Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007) argue that

... social justice is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure... The process for attaining the goal of social justice ... should also be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacity for working collaboratively to create change. (pp. 1–2)

Invited Commentaries

In a compelling commentary, **Frederic Fovet**, Director of the Office for Student Disabilities at McGill University, discusses how even though inclusion is recognized as a right enshrined in the law, it is seldom implemented in everyday practices. He laments the medical, remedial model that is based on referring students to experts which then segregates them into a parallel educational system. He suggests teaching should be based on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which is a concept that,

... was borrowed from the world of architecture and product design ... if you design a building ... in a way that is accessible to all from the outset, it will end up being more elegant, more efficient, and more useful while being less expensive than if you have to go back in and add features after the fact. (Bacon, 2014, p. 23)

The UDL approach embraces three basic pedagogical principles, those being to provide: 1) multiple means of representation; 2) multiple means of action and expression; 3) and multiple means of engagement (Rose & Meyer, 2002). Fovet argues that it is only when access and inclusion are linked that classrooms can become truly inclusionary.

Karen Hulme, a retired teacher who worked for 42 years at the Mackay Centre in Montreal, discusses in our interview the rewards she had in working with physically challenged students. She shares how she knew from a very young age that this was the work for her, and why she never looked back. She traces the history of Mackay Centre and how she and a dedicated staff there worked, whenever possible, to integrate these students into the “regular” school system, and the successes they enjoyed when they initiated “reverse integration,” which brought students from the school system into Mackay Centre. Karen underscored that when a Mackay student left there to be integrated into another school, the success of the transition depended greatly upon having a friend, and that she spent many hours helping to cultivate friendships for her students in these new settings. Here is a teacher that truly made a difference.

The final commentary is a poignant discussion with 12-year-old **Wren Kauffman** and his mother. Wren is a transgender boy from Edmonton who, born physically as a girl, always felt that he was a boy, and transitioned at age nine. This conversation highlights the hurdles, large and small, that Wren and his family encountered during this journey, and also underscores with examples how individual people—family members, friends, teachers, and other professionals—were invaluable in helping to make this inspiring story the success that it is. The courage and openness of this young man as he continues to advocate for LGBTQ issues are truly admirable. The world needs to hear his story.

As usual, the articles in this issue are presented in alphabetical order by author. In this editorial, I discuss them thematically.

Deficit Notions About Learners That Defy Inclusion

It is appropriate to frame the submissions in this issue with the article by **Gilham**, who is an assistant professor at St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia. He begins with a significant story of Danielle, and her struggles to gain full access to learning in her classroom in spite of an excellent inquiry curriculum approach and a team of very good teachers. In order to help Danielle, he shares how it became necessary to persuade the educators in this school to shift their thinking from the medical referral model mentioned above, to a more inclusive way of teaching. He follows this story with a history of education in Alberta, pointing out along the way the exclusionary practices that remain entangled within the current system of inclusion. What he relates here is probably quite similar to the history in many other provinces and beyond. Building on the work of Gadamer, he argues for using the principles of hermeneutics to help illuminate present knowledge and practices which are always a product of their historical past.

Identity Marginalization in Educational Contexts

Daniels describes how she had to unlearn mainstream discriminatory educational practices that she acquired as a student herself in order to help a young male Indigenous student in her classroom. She was able to call on the qualities of respect, love, and caring for others that were instilled in her by her grandparents during her childhood on the Reserves, and to concentrate on building relationships which is the cornerstone of good teaching practice. **Fiss** shares her personal experiences to illustrate the pain and discrimination that one can experience when dealing with binary identities. She advocates embracing both, rather than sacrificing one identity in favour of another. **Swanson** relates how in graduate school she was able to use narrative inquiry and reflection to reclaim her familial identity as a Métis, and to envision ways that she could give voice to students struggling with similar tensions. **McCullum Baldasaro, Maldonado, and Baltes**, as others (Bruner, 1986), believe in the power of story to awaken metaphorical understanding and critical reflection. They describe in some detail the “Blanket Exercise Kit” which they have used to initiate storytelling that moves participants in profound ways, and helps outsiders to understand Aboriginal experiences. **Arnett** posits that young adult immigrants, who are at an age when work becomes a necessity, have to deal with different language identities and the inherent tensions as they attempt to acquire English. They are penalized further by the costs

incurred in acquiring the necessary language competencies needed to become part of the work force. She suggests that local initiatives have potential, but that far more needs to be done.

Classroom Approaches for Access and Inclusion

Baurhoo and **Asghar** take the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach into the science classroom. They propose that UDL, which is based on neuroscience and cognitive considerations, helps to create inclusive classrooms by building self-confidence in the students, and reducing stigmatization and isolation. **Reeve** and **Sharkawy** are also interested in science. They describe the Knowledge-Building Communities (KBC) approach for teaching in science classrooms. Grounded in constructivism and based on the Funds of Knowledge theory (Moll, Ananti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), KBC uses the students' knowledge and understanding as the starting place for learning, and places high value on the experiences that they bring to the classroom. They suggest that KBC not only makes science more accessible to all learners, but also helps students to envision a socially just and environmentally sustainable world. **Reisinger** suggests that teachers frequently resort to global behaviour-management strategies which are not sufficiently tailored to meet the far-ranging needs of the diverse nature of students in today's classrooms. She argues that a biopsychosocial approach is needed, one that examines biological, psychological, and social/environmental factors of each child. She shares a helpful example what a multimodal profile might look like for a particular student. **Hollands'** area of expertise is with Highly Sensitive Children (HSC). In her article she shares her own experiences with her son to help sensitize and inspire teachers to create caring and safe environments, which of course are needed by all children, but even more so in cases of those who are highly sensitive. **Gibbons** makes innovative and practical suggestions for an inclusive pedagogy for girls in physical education. She contends that more of this work is needed to keep girls engaged in physical education during the high school years. **Millard** recounts how a workshop approach that she used with grade four language arts students allowed one student in particular, who might otherwise have been relegated to a special class, to have meaningful experiences with literature. She emphasizes the need to move away from deficit notions about students, and to encourage them to be teachers of each other in an atmosphere of trust and encouragement.

Engaging Pre-Service Teachers in Inclusionary Practices

A number of contributions that we received suggest the importance of working extensively with pre-service teachers on issues of diversity, access, inclusion, and social justice. **Peebles** and **Mendaglio** describe a strategy they use with teacher candidates (TCs) called the Individual Direct Experience Approach (IDEA). It is arranged during their practica that these novice teachers follow and work with a student with particular needs within the classroom context. They are required to find the ways to scaffold the student and adjust their teaching to ensure that the student is included in all aspects of the classroom learning. **Cho** and **Tersigni** work extensively with TCs on strategies to ensure anti-oppression, that they then try out in their practica. These researchers analyzed student perceptions and concluded that fear, convenient excuses, and a preconceived notion of the neutrality of education were what created a resistance to an anti-oppression framework among some of the TCs. They suggest that ongoing work on teacher identities, collaboration with peers, and extensive discussions and workshops are necessary to sustain anti-oppression thinking and teaching when these candidates move into their own classrooms. **Kulnieks** and **Young** outline how they use an “eco-justice” pedagogy to identify ways of understanding inclusion both theoretically and in practice. They emphasize the need for TCs to be connected to the arts and natural world to understand social justice. They do this by implementing an arts-informed curriculum using poetry to broaden the TCs’ understanding of inclusive education, as well as through an alternative practicum called “the learning garden” that grounds these candidates in a sense of place. In what these authors call “environmental autobiography,” the TCs explore their intergenerational connections and connections to nature through their garden experience and poetic inquiry. The authors conclude that this experience helps TCs to link social justice and ecological sustainability with the development of an inclusive curriculum.

Changing the Landscape of Research to Honour Diverse Participants

Three of our submissions focused on the important topic of ensuring that research practices are inclusive and just. **Saleh**, **Menon**, and **Clandinin** share how they work alongside and with participants in ways that honour both their stories and those of research participants. Their ethics of being and doing research breeds trust and allows an openness to flourish in the context of the work. In turn, this allows multiple stories to emerge that challenge the stereotypes about both teachers and researchers and, in so doing, celebrates human diversity. **Corona**, **Hannum**, and **Davidson** discuss their research approach with adults who have intellectual challenges. They work on creating a relationship with the participants prior to the interviews, and then use strategies such as repeating participants’ contributions to help clarify the discussion.

Finally, they produce self-advocacy videos with the participants that are meaningful and empowering. They provide links to these within the article for reader follow-up. Last but not least, **Macia** and **Lalas** ground their research in the Funds of Knowledge theory mentioned earlier. Their study focused on the forms of capital that contribute to academic success in order to challenge prevailing deficit notions about students from Latino backgrounds. Their study shows how, by using multiple ways of gathering data such as journaling and photovoice, these researchers were able to elicit and value the knowledge and skills that these students develop in their homes and communities, tangibles such as dance, culinary skills, and computer literacy. This awareness brought renewed respect from teachers and underscored how important it is for them to really know their students in order to create inclusive learning contexts.

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