From Exclusion to Excellence: Building Restorative Relationships to Create Inclusive Schools

IBE ON CURRICULUM, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT
Volume 1

Series Editor

Mmantsetsa Marope, *IBE UNESCO, Switzerland*

Managing Editor

Simona Popa, *IBE UNESCO, Switzerland*

Scope

This series of research-based monographs and edited volumes provides comparative and international perspectives on key current issues in curriculum, learning and assessment. The principal features of the series are the innovative and critical insights it offers into the equitable provision of quality and relevant education for all; and the cross-disciplinary perspectives it engages, drawing on a range of domains that include peace, ethics, sociology, economics, politics, culture, gender, sustainability, inclusion, development and education. *IBE on Curriculum, Learning, and Assessment* aims to influence a wide range of actors in the field of education and development, whether academics, policy-makers, curriculum-developers, assessors, teachers or students. The series thus comprises innovative empirical research, case studies of policy and practice, conceptual analyses and policy evaluations, as well as critical analyses of published research and existing policy. With this series, IBE UNESCO builds on a long tradition of publishing research on relevant education topics, within an international perspective. Its predecessor, *Studies in Comparative Education*, initiated by the IBE in 1971, was among the most well-established series in the field.

From Exclusion to Excellence

Building Restorative Relationships to Create Inclusive Schools

Michal Razer and Victor J. Friedman

All chapters in this book have undergone peer review.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IBE UNESCO.

Printed on acid-free paper

We dedicate this book to three inspirational teachers:
Chris Argyris (1923–2013), Donald Schön (1930–1997),
and Jona Rosenfeld

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

This book comes at a pivotal time: The year 2015 saw the end of the term for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) agenda—critical challenges for the global community, which encouraged governments and their partners in various sectors to make remarkable progress in the realm of basic education. The goal of universal access to primary education received the most attention worldwide, and countries made substantive gains in this area. Meanwhile, the focus on universal primary enrolment resulted in less attention to other crucial areas, such as quality education and learning, early childhood care and education, and adult literacy. Ultimately, the EFA movement was declared a "qualified success" (UNESCO, 2015a)—however, there is yet more work to be done to develop effective, adaptive, and resilient education systems globally.

The momentum generated by the MDGs and the EFA was carried into a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), formally adopted by the United Nations in September 2015. The 17 SDGs are both more comprehensive and more ambitious than their millennial counterparts. An overarching drive of the sustainable development framework is to ensure that, by 2030, no one has been left behind. From an education perspective, this ambition is expected to be achieved both in terms of getting all children into school, and ensuring they are learning once they are there. This determined vision for education is clearly expressed in SDG 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all".

Inclusion is at the forefront of the International Bureau of Education (IBE)'s work, which focuses on strengthening the capacity of education systems to equitably provide high-quality education and effective learning opportunities. Inclusion and excellence are not incompatible. However, achieving both means developing policies and practices that are specifically aimed at inclusion. As their implications become increasingly recognized by policy makers, the interest in inclusive education will certainly grow, but so will the gap between inclusive policy and inclusive practice.

The IBE's work underlines UNESCO's broadened concept of "inclusion", which is about "putting the right to education into action by reaching out to all learners, respecting their diverse needs, abilities and characteristics and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the learning environment. It should guide education policies and practices, starting from the fact that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society" (UNESCO, 2015b). Indeed, "schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions" (UNESCO, 1994).

This broadened definition of "inclusion", however, necessarily implies a broadening of its policies and practices, and it is here that the IBE has taken the lead. The IBE defines inclusion as a process, concerned with the identification and removal of barriers. It is about the presence, participation, and achievement of all students and it involves a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion, or underachievement (UNESCO IBE, 2016).

Promoting inclusive, equitable learning also requires providing teachers with the necessary tools to translate the goals and objectives of education systems into learning outcomes. These tools include curricula that package the essential and desirable knowledge, skills, affects, and technology savvy—and the application of these elements—that children should acquire through education. In giving effect to learning and in ensuring consistent alignment of learning with social aspirations and development goals, the teacher and the curriculum together are key to improved quality and equity in education. Effective reforms that promote equitable learning will require policymakers and educators to identify teachers themselves as part of the solution and to consult them on the design of reforms. When systems engage teachers, they help develop successful strategies to address the problems that some children face in the classroom, and which hold back their learning.

It comes naturally that the first book published in the IBE's rebranded series, *IBE on Curriculum, Learning, and Assessment*, tackles exactly this crucial issue: the role of the teachers in developing inclusive practices.

Michal Razer and Victor Friedman argue that achieving inclusive and equitable quality education depends on the development of innovative teaching practices in order to meet the needs of young people who are not only diverse, but often feel abandoned by the system. Teaching for inclusion is fundamentally different than the normative teaching practice as it has evolved over the past 150 years. Simply "more of the same", such as adding hours or individualizing instruction, is not sufficient to close this gap. Rather, educators increasingly need specific inclusive education knowledge, skills, and methods that enable them to reach and teach excluded students.

Based on case studies drawn from over twenty-five years of action research carried out in cooperation with schools that have attempted to be more responsive to the needs of their students, this book addresses the need for an inclusive teaching practice that reconnects students with the educational process while at the same time promoting teacher well-being.

The book is intended to provide teachers and policymakers with a practical guide for working more effectively with excluded/at risk students in their schools. These students typically develop a relationship with school characterized by failure, behaviour problems, and alienation. Working with these students takes a heavy emotional toll on teachers, making it difficult for them to meet their students' needs.

The authors also advocate for an expansion of the teaching role to include a psycho-social element as a critical approach to inclusive education. There is already growing interest in psycho-social education, leading to the opening of new academic

programs in schools of education. As this trend spreads internationally, it is also creating a sizeable appetite for innovative, practical texts in the field.

This outstanding book raises the bar, bringing a range of evidence, engaging detail, and surprising emotional power to bear on the issue, arguing convincingly for the important role of teachers, teacher training, and teacher well-being in successful inclusive education and thereby in the ultimate achievement of equitable and quality education for all.

REFERENCES

UNESCO (1994, June 7–10). *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*. World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, Salamanca, Spain. unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000984/098427eo.pdf

UNESCO (2015a). *Education for All 2000–2015: Achievements and challenges*. Education for All Global Monitoring Report. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2015b, May 19–22). *World Education Forum 2015: Equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030*. Transforming lives through education, Incheon, Republic of Korea. http://en.unesco.org/world-education-forum-2015/5-key-themes/inclusive-education

UNESCO IBE (2016). *Reaching out to all learners: A resource pack for supporting inclusive education* (Training Tools for Curriculum Development Series). Geneva: UNESCO IBE.

Mmantsetsa Marope, Director
UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE)
Geneva, Switzerland

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

I came into class and began following up on our activity of three days earlier. One student interrupted me. "Yuck!", he said. "It was disgusting". "The activity?", I asked. "Yes", he said. I was insulted, because our teaching team had invested time and thought in designing the activity. I told the student to leave the classroom at once. He refused, saying, "I'll say what I like, and I'll do what I like". I am an adult and his teacher. He should be ashamed of himself for talking to me like that. It was humiliating. He spoke to me like that in front of everyone.

We wrote this book for teachers like the ninth-grade teacher quoted above. In mainstream schools and classrooms, such teachers struggle every day to teach students who exhibit disruptive behavior and the effects of chronic failure. Terms such as *at risk* and *excluded* are often used interchangeably to describe these students. For 25 years we have listened to, and worked with, teachers of these young people to help them find more effective ways of teaching.

We have learned that one key is to broaden in a fundamental way the contemporary notion of a teacher's role. For the past hundred years, teaching has focused strictly on children's cognitive and moral development. This focus leaves teachers unprepared to adequately respond to their students' wider needs—emotional, developmental, and social. It may have worked well when schools served mostly elite or relatively homogeneous student populations. Then, students who fell behind or did not fit in usually dropped out or found help with specialists such as guidance counselors or school psychologists. Today, however, the growing global commitment to inclusive education—as reflected in the 2009 UNESCO World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 2009)—requires teaching approaches that meet the needs of very diverse populations. The Declaration defines "inclusive education" as "a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners" (p. 8) especially those who experience exclusion because of socioeconomic level, race, ethnicity, immigration status, health problems, physical handicaps, and other such factors.

In this book we used term "excluded" to refer to children who, for whatever reason, fall behind and experience emotional distress that gets expressed in disruptive behaviors. They develop a relationship with school characterized by failure, disruptive behavior, and alienation—putting them at risk and making instruction difficult.

The term "social exclusion" was coined by Father Joseph Wresinksi, a Jesuit priest in France in the 1960s, in reference to people experiencing extreme poverty in the midst of an affluent society (Rosenfeld & Tardieu, 2000; Sykes & Goldman, 2000). We first encountered the term in the writings of Jona Rosenfeld (1997),

who described excluded people as "people or groups at the margins of society, or who have fallen along the way, those who are out of sight and out of mind, those whom are easy to forget, and those who are doomed to live without the benefits that society offers. They are people who have been made to feel that they have nothing to contribute to society. Their lives are characterized by discourse only among people like themselves. They have nothing besides memories and cumulative experiences of failure". These words resonated with us because they captured the experience of the students we encountered more precisely than any other term.

Teachers are rarely trained to teach these students and often do not know how to respond appropriately to the complex challenges they present. Furthermore, *teachers who work with excluded populations often experience exclusion themselves*—at least in their professional lives. Working with excluded children exacts an emotional toll. They feel abandoned by a system that offers no real support but blames them for failures. Hence, both teachers and students become caught up in a "cycle of exclusion" that creates intense feelings of alienation and despair on both sides.

A measure such as adding hours or individualizing instruction, or in other words, relying on "more of the same", is not sufficient to undo the cycle of exclusion. Instead, to reach and teach excluded students, educators increasingly need specific knowledge, skills, and methods of *inclusive* education. Achieving UNESCO's goal of Education for All depends upon developing innovative teaching practices that meet the needs of young people who not only represent great diversity, but who also often feel abandoned by the education system. The UNESCO Declaration acknowledges that responding to the broadened understanding of inclusion requires rethinking the fundamental assumptions, the norms that dominate teaching practice.

In the literature on education, however, this demand for fresh practices has only begun to be addressed. In this book we fill this gap. We present a practical theory of inclusive education. We base it on two fundamental messages. First, *a key to inclusive education is the ability of teachers to build "restorative relationships" with students who experience exclusion*. Building restorative relationships involves expanding the traditional teaching role beyond that of imparting knowledge so as to address students' emotional, behavioral, developmental, and social needs.

Second, *teacher well-being is an essential precondition for building restorative relationships with excluded students*. Understandably, in the literature on inclusion, the focus so far has been on the needs of students, the factors that put them at risk, and their experience of exclusion. Researchers rarely address the needs of teachers. However, teachers cannot help their students overcome exclusion if they themselves do not deal with the distress and emotions they experience in working with these young people. Most schools lack frameworks in which teachers can openly and constructively deal with their emotions.

In this book, we translate the idea of building restorative relationships into a set of concrete methods for working effectively with excluded students. We also provide guidelines on meeting teachers' emotional needs and maintaining their well-being as they put inclusive education into practice.

The ideas we present here reflect a "psychosocial" approach to education that draws from various disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and organizational behavior (Mor, 2006; Razer, Friedman, & Veronese, 2009). We maintain that teachers play a vital role in the lives of excluded children and can provide them with the natural, everyday nurturing and guidance they need. Building restorative relationships with excluded students can function as an integral part of teaching and learning in school. It can contribute to the children's healthy academic, emotional, and social development.

Expanding the teaching role and building restorative relationships does not necessarily increase the burden on teachers. When working with excluded students, often much of teachers' energy goes into survival—getting through the day in one piece—and their efforts to actually teach go to waste. The heavy emotional burden involved saps teacher energy. Addressing the emotional aspect of the work helps relieve this burden and free energy for the teaching task.

An inclusive approach to education does not mean giving up on excellence. On the contrary, the evidence shows that the road to excellence begins with inclusion. It is generally believed that the lower the socioeconomic level of a school's student population, the poorer the academic achievement of the school as a whole. Since 2010, however, the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) studies show that countries that emphasize inclusion tend to perform better than countries that do not (OECD, 2013). Not only that, but the academic achievements of their students do not necessarily correspond to their socioeconomic standing. The education systems in these countries have created approaches that enable all students to achieve academically, regardless of socioeconomic disadvantage. In that spirit, we offer ideas and practical guidelines for helping teachers everywhere integrate inclusion with excellence.

METHOD: ACTION LEARNING AND ACTION SCIENCE

We base our practical theory of inclusive education on 30 years' experience working with schools in Israel to reverse the cycle of exclusion and implement inclusive practice. Both of us were part of a series of programs beginning in the 1980s aimed at helping school dropouts reenter the education system and helping schools redefine their practices so as to prevent young people from dropping out.[1] These projects evolved into a program called the New Education Environment, which enabled schools to critically examine and change their practices from the bottom up. In the 1990s the Israeli Ministry of Education adopted this program and disseminated it to over two hundred primary and secondary schools. We used the knowledge we harvested from these programs to develop undergraduate and graduate programs in inclusive education at the Oranim College of Education in Israel. For 15 years, the Metarim Center at Oranim College has continued working directly with schools and developing knowledge about inclusive practice. A series of evaluation studies found that these programs helped schools recognize that change was possible and helped

them take responsibility for making it happen (Ben Rabi, Baruj-Kovarsky, Navot, & Konstantinov, 2014; Cohen-Navot, 2000; Cohen-Navot, 2003; Cohen-Navot & Lavenda, 2003; Fiurko & Katz, 2005; Friedman, Razer, & Sykes, 2004; Mor, 2006; Mor & Mendelson, 2006; Sulimani, 2006).

Our work with schools is based on iterative cycles of "action research". Action research has been broadly defined as "a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing" that "brings together action and reflection, theory and practice … in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 1). The heart of the process is creating learning teams comprised of the principal, teachers, guidance counselors, and other school staff. Outside intervenors or facilitators, experts in the psychosociological approach to education, facilitate these teams. These facilitators usually hold biweekly meetings with the learning teams in which members of the learning team present and discuss their difficult cases. The group analyzes these cases using the "action learning" cycle: action, evaluation, discovery, and the designing of new action (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Zuber-Skerritt, 2001). The learning teams provide school staff with the opportunity to inquire deeply into students' needs, as well as into staff practices, and to develop new, more effective ways of working.

Over the years, we built our theory gradually through systematic study and meta-analysis of cases from these learning teams. This meta-analysis was informed by "action science", a method of systematic inquiry into, and critical reflection on, practice that enables people to become aware of the individual and collective cognitive "frames" that guide their thinking, feeling, and action. Because these frames are often self-defeating, action science provides tools people can use to individually and collectively "reframe" so as to generate more effective action (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985; Friedman, 2001; Friedman et al., 2004; Friedman & Rogers, 2008; Razer, Friedman, & Warshofsky, 2012; Smith, 2011).

In order to understand the frames implicit in the thinking, feeling, and actions of teachers and administrators working with excluded students, we looked, over the years, at cases illustrating both successes and failures in a wide variety of situations. From cases of successful practice, we developed alternate frames that enable teachers and administrators to think, feel, and act in different and more effective ways with excluded students. These alternate frames provided teachers with action strategies for actually meeting their students' needs as well as maintaining their own well-being. *At each stage we tested out these frames with teachers and administrators in schools and in academic training programs to see if practitioners themselves thought they were valid and useful in actual practice*. We then used the feedback to refine and expand the frames.

We developed the ideas we present in this book almost entirely in the Israeli context. Although Israeli society is enormously diverse, we do not presume to establish a universal theory of inclusive education. Based on our experience in sharing these ideas with academics and teachers around the world, however, we believe that these ideas will resonate with teachers almost anywhere. Nevertheless,

they will have to be tested, refined, adapted, or rejected in each social, cultural, and political setting.

PREVIEW OF THE BOOK CONTENTS

In this book, we present what we have learned about inclusive practice from direct work with schools and from the meta-analysis of hundreds, if not thousands, of cases. In Chapter 1 we set the stage. We describe the "cycle of exclusion" and how it is sustained by two systemic frames, or ways of structuring information: "helplessness" and "false identity". These two frames seemingly enable teachers to make sense of teaching and to survive it, but they actually keep them and their students trapped in the cycle of exclusion and also damage relationships with all those involved in schools. We further describe the emotional world of teachers trapped inside this cycle, their feelings of failure, frustration, humiliation and fear, and the lack of any legitimacy or outlet for such feelings in schools.

In Chapter 2 we present the idea of building "restorative relationships" as a way of stepping out of the cycle of exclusion. Restorative relationships involve putting into practice a reframing—an alternate and inclusive perspective on the meaning and nature of teaching. We discuss how building these relationships requires that teachers (a) expand their roles so as to be "caregivers" and (b) rethink the definitions of success that guide their practice. We describe the kind of emotional work that promotes teachers' well-being and how schools can support it.

In Chapter 3 we present "non-abandonment", the first of four skills for building restorative relationships in schools. We look at "abandonment" as a central feature of social exclusion. Students feeling abandoned often protect themselves from further disappointment by pushing teachers away. Teachers, feeling rejected, protect themselves by distancing themselves and giving up on students, thus reinforcing students' experiences of abandonment. Non-abandonment involves educators' consciously choosing *not* to accept rejection, not to distance, and not to give up. It involves, instead, taking on responsibility for students as a major component of professional teaching practice. We describe in detail what teachers need to do—with students, themselves, and colleagues—to put non-abandonment into practice.

In Chapter 4, we present "reframing". This important skill helps teachers respond constructively to the difficult classroom situations that otherwise trigger in them such difficult feelings as helplessness, anger, frustration, and rejection. Reframing helps them sidestep certain almost-automatic responses that almost always make matters worse. We offer a seven-step model of the reframing process, providing examples of how teachers trapped in intractable dilemmas used reframing to get out of them. We also show how teachers can help students use reframing to overcome self-destructive patterns.

In order to build restorative relationships, teachers need to know how to reconnect with students who are often alienated and wary of teachers in general. This skill, which we call "connecting conversation", is our focus in Chapter 5. Connecting

conversation involves knowing how to talk with students about what really bothers them without judging, setting conditions, or making demands. Although teachers often feel that listening and understanding are not enough—that they do not constitute "doing"—listening is often constructive. We describe and illustrate the specific skills of connecting conversation, as well as some obstacles to be overcome.

In Chapter 6, we deal with the disciplinary role of teachers and how to integrate it into inclusive practice through "empathic limit-setting". We argue—without ever giving up on the idea that students *must* learn normative behavior and teachers *must* set limits—that excluded children also need teachers to set limits tailored to students' situations and to exercise "benevolent authority" based on something besides the power to punish. Benevolent authority flows from teachers' firmly adopting the view that, as teachers, they possess knowledge, ability, and skills to help their students grow, develop, and learn in healthy ways. We present cases that illustrate empathic limit-setting and benevolent authority, as well as clear behavioral guidelines for putting these ideas into actual practice under real-life school conditions.

In Chapters 7 and 8, we take a look at restorative relationships between parents and teachers. Parent-teacher relationships not only figure importantly in inclusive practice, but they are also fraught with difficulty. Chapter 7 presents the puzzling case of a teacher who became increasingly alienated from the parents of a student despite her caring for the child and her genuine desire to cooperate with his parents. We show how her difficulty stemmed from the operation of a framing that called for "mobilizing" parents. We describe this frame and its implications, especially how it leads to power struggles and mistrust between parents and teachers.

In Chapter 8 we offer an alternate framing, "obtaining parental authorization", that helps teachers restore relationships with parents. We describe the assumptions behind it and how teachers can concretely apply it. When teachers obtain authorization from parents, not only do both sides feel less frustrated and alone, but also the children tend to feel more secure in school and better able to concentrate.

In Chapter 9, we take a step back and look at inclusive practice and restorative relationships at the system level. We focus on the process through which these practices can be introduced into schools and on what principals need to do in order to nurture and support the shift from vicious cycles of exclusion to virtuous cycles of inclusion.

In the concluding chapter, Chapter 10, we argue that inclusive teaching practice should be regarded as a distinct professional specialty, requiring additional specialized training. Treated thus, inclusive practice provides schools with the means of achieving both inclusion and excellence. Given the challenges posed by increasing globalization, no society can afford to ignore either of these goals. The practical theory of inclusive education we present in this book points the way to achieving both goals.

If you are a teacher working with excluded children, what we say should speak directly to, and resonate with, your professional and emotional experience. It should also help you make sense of the difficulties you face every day and enable you to see

that inclusive education needs to go beyond improving children's cognitive skills. It should provide you with specific ways of expanding your educational practice and with methods for working more effectively with excluded students. If you are a principal or policymaker, our ideas should guide you in creating frameworks for enabling teachers to expand their role and ensure their emotional well-being. Finally, if you are a parent or simply a regular citizen, our views should help you appreciate teachers, especially when they work with excluded children, recognize the challenges they face, and become aware of how much their success in this important role depends upon their specializing in its particular skills.

NOTE

[1] These programs were the initiative of the Joint Distribution Committee-Israel (JDC-Israel) and later "Ashalim," a strategic partnership between JDC-Israel, the Israeli government, and the UJA-Federation of New York. Ashalim develops solutions and services for young at-risk populations, from birth to age 25, in order to improve their quality of life and enable them to integrate successfully into Israeli society.