

Guest Editor's Introduction: Inclusive Education as Literacy Pedagogy for Historically Marginalized Learners

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Abstract: This work is the result of a group of University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate students committed to creating more inclusive schools for historically marginalized youth by advancing understandings of the intersection of ability and cultural differences through the Wisconsin Idea.

Wisconsin literacy teachers experience diversity across many markers of differences (e.g., ability, language, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, language), and are tasked with ensuring that all students develop as readers and writers. This special section of *Wisconsin English Journal* presents an inclusive education framework as literacy tool for redistributing opportunities for historically marginalized youth--non-dominant students that have experienced systematic forms of oppression resulting in lower academic achievement--to learn within literacy communities.

The inclusive education as literacy pedagogy framework we present moves beyond notions of inclusive education as the physical inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education classroom. Instead, we conceptualize inclusive education in line with Waitoller and Kozleski (2013) as:

[A] continuous struggle toward (a) the redistribution of quality opportunities to learn and participate in educational programs, (b) the recognition and value of differences as reflected in content, pedagogy, and assessment tools, and (c) the opportunities for marginalized groups to represent themselves in decision-making processes that advance and define claims of exclusion and the respective solutions that affect their children's educational futures. (p. 35)

Inclusive education as literacy pedagogy redistributes opportunities for all historically marginalized students (including but not limited to students with disabilities) to learn by first *recognizing* what students are being included into and then *redistributing* opportunities to learn, largely through literacy pedagogy that *represents* (or speaks to) the diversity in the classroom and society. In this issue we draw from the works of scholars that take interdisciplinary approaches to framing inclusive education beyond the single dimension of disability and instead think about how multiple forms of historical oppression interact in ways that afford and constrain opportunities to learn and participate (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007; Artiles, Kozleski, & Gonzalez, 2011; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013). For example, Waitoller and Thorius (2016) call for a cross pollination of universal design for learning (UDL) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) as a framework for this redistribution work that opens opportunities for students with disabilities, students of color, and other historically marginalized students to participate and learn within literacy communities by designing supports into the physical and curricular environment and by centering cultural differences as assets in learning.

Wisconsin, a former traditional gateway for White immigrants, is experiencing broad (e.g., race, ethnicity, language, class) and intersecting (e.g., English language learners *with* learning disabilities) forms of diversity at rapid rates. Supporting diverse learners in their literacy development is no small task, yet there are theories and frameworks that teachers can use as tools for reflecting on their own practice and for thinking about how to be increasingly responsive to the diversity represented in their schools while providing support for diverse learners. Improving literacy outcomes requires continuous attention to this notion of what counts as inclusive education, and for whom it is inclusive. The articles included in this issue open up opportunities for literacy teachers to reflect on how diversity (in ability, language, and culture) intersects with literacy instruction and how they can better respond to diverse learners in the classroom.

The five articles that follow bring the inclusive education as literacy instruction framework to life by illustrating how attending to disability *and* cultural differences has the potential to improve historically marginalized students' opportunity to learn and develop as literate beings. The first article, "Sweet Home Wisconsin: Discovering Rural

Diversity through Literacy,” McCabe highlights rurality as an often-overlooked form of diversity. Now more than ever, literacy teachers need tools to support rural students while simultaneously disrupting caricatures that perpetuate stereotypes of individuals from rural locales. McCabe highlights the power of literacy as a tool to create more inclusive schools for rural learners, while demystifying rural life for non-rural youth.

The second article, McQueston’s “‘Those Kids Down the Hall’ Are Now in My Elementary Classroom: Now What?,” helps teachers to explore their own beliefs about who has the right to literacy. McQueston presents peer-mediated instruction as a flexible tool for supporting all students, in particular those significant disabilities, in literacy learning. In “‘Bitch, Don’t Kill My Vibe!’: Navigating the Tension between Empowering Youth through Hip-Hop Literacies and Existing School Behavioral Norms,” Dahl pushes on the limits and potential of hip hop pedagogies as a potentially robust instructional tool used to engage historically marginalized youth in literacy instruction. He settles his pleasure and discomfort with this instructional method in the murky zone between cultural responsiveness and cultural appropriation.

The next article, Johnson and Love’s “Literacy, Culture & Language: A Vision for Cultural Literacy Practices through Black American Sign Language,” calls for a pedagogical imagination to envision literacy without limits. In their manuscript, the authors use Black American Sign Language (ASL) to draw attention to the current limits of this thing we call literacy, which often result in categorizations such as illiterate, disabled, unmotivated, language deficient. They call for a vision of inclusive education that disrupts these limited views of literacy by asking *whose cultural literacies matter in this literacy community?*

The final article, Mawene and Cakir’s “Re-Envisioning School Literacy Practices that Engage Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families,” draws attention to the important work schools do to engage families in school literacy programs. The authors argue that over-reliance on text-based literacies can marginalize culturally non-dominant families that may have rich oral literacy traditions. They further present examples of literacy projects that tap into the rich oral literacies evident in many homes as means to increase family engagement.

Together, this set of manuscripts speaks to literacy instructors experiencing Wisconsin's rich diversity of language, ability differences, races, ethnicities, and locales. They invite educators to consider inclusive education as an equity tool for the many students that face barriers to fully representing themselves as capable and cultural beings at school and within literacy communities. Inclusive education can be a belief system, but it can also serve as a robust literacy pedagogy that results in more equitable opportunities for historically marginalized youth to engage in literacy while representing themselves historically and in their educational futures (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013).

References

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