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2009

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Kozleski, E.B., Artiles, A.J., Fletcher, T., & Engelbrecht, P. (2009). Understanding the dialectics of the local and the global in Education for All: A comparative case study. *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies Journal*, 2, 15-29. Retrieved from the web: <http://journals.sfu.ca/iccps/index.php/childhoods/index>

Published Version: <http://journals.sfu.ca/iccps/index.php/childhoods/article/view/7>

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# Understanding the Dialectics of the Local and the Global in Education for All: A Comparative Case Study<sup>i</sup>

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## Introduction

*Education for All* (EFA) is a prominent international movement that has influenced significant reforms in educational systems around the globe. A critical component of EFA is the emphasis on inclusive education, as reflected in international declarations and projects sponsored by international agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (UNESCO). Defined broadly, inclusive education focuses on ensuring that a variety of groups who have been traditionally excluded from formal schooling are able to access a variety of opportunities to learn in schools (Peters, 2004). Many policy makers, researchers, and practitioners have lauded the EFA movement and hold high expectations for what it can do to enhance educational access and participation for children and youngsters from all layers of society (Artiles & Dyson, 2005). Aligned with this optimism is a rapidly growing knowledge base on inclusive education (Artiles, Kozleski, Dorn, & Christensen, 2007).

While there may be political consensus on the need to embrace a global inclusive education agenda, how it is accomplished and the degree to which a deep and sustained commitment to inclusiveness exists in policy and practice remains unexplored. Indeed, although there is growing consensus on a broad definition of inclusive education, this concept has complex local meanings that are shaped by historical, cultural, political, and economic forces. At the most fundamental level, the notion of universal education for all suggests monolithic notions about what is to be taught, by whom and how. As Dyer (2001) points out, marketing formal education can have unexpected impacts on local communities. Dyer describes how the education mandate in India has

*International Critical Childhood Policy Studies* (2009), 2(1). Published with permission from the International Journal of Educational Policy, Research, & Practice which was to have been published in 2007 by Caddo Gap Press.

complicated the lives and well being of nomadic farmers who, for generations, have constructed their lives in relationship to their herds of sheep, connecting livelihood, spirituality, skilled knowledge of herbal medicines, and family life. Without written language, the Rabaris of India have skillfully lived on arid lands in ecological harmony with their surroundings. As the Indian government has become more effective in promoting literacy through formal education, the Rabaris have begun to reconstruct their notions of sheep herding as a way of life. Rather than incorporating literacy into their nomadic lifestyle, Dyer reports that new generations of Rabaris are turning away from their nomadic life style to pursue lives anchored to towns and villages where livelihood depends on paid labor. As the national push for formal education disrupts the social fabric of communities such as the Rabaris, it also calls into question roles organized by gender, age, ability, and family status. EFA/inclusive education runs the same risks. Who and how these roles and relationships should be constructed and reconstructed must be examined from multiple perspectives that take into account tensions between local and global scales.

Despite growing consensus around definitions, inclusive education models and practices have little similarity from context to context beyond surface markers (Artiles & Dyson, 2005; Peters, Johnstone, & Ferguson, 2005). This is shaped in part by the significant heterogeneity of national sociocultural contexts in which the idea of inclusive education is enacted. For instance, in the U.S., the right to an education was packaged with a complex system of disability categorization predicated on the assumption that disability resided within individuals. As Harry and Klingner (2006) detail, this system of categorization has had lasting impact on students from minority backgrounds who continue to be segregated from mainstream classrooms and schools on the basis of professional judgment. Other Western nations developed their own inclusive education agendas that varied in terms of the student populations for which they were intended, the funding mechanisms used to support expanded educational services, the intended outcomes, and the processes with which these agendas were implemented (Artiles & Dyson, 2005). In spite of the differences in national policies, the international discussion of inclusive education proceeded with little discourse about the impact of these differences on principles, policies, or practices. Further, the impact of these universal mandates on how families and children from indigenous and minority cultures and experiences negotiated schooling remained unexamined.

Artiles and Dyson (2005) note that inclusive education can be seen as part of the economic zeitgeist of globalization: an attempt to install neoliberal educational policies world-wide to ensure access to efficient labor markets. As scholars have begun to document, local communities pay a high cost for globalization since social investment and equitable distribution of wealth are declining (Arnové & Torres, 1999). These realities collide with the global rhetoric of inclusion and

compel many communities to transcend the laudable goal of EFA to ask, *education for what and for whom?* That is, if education is seen as a human right, then what kinds of educational opportunity should all children have access to? How do local and global contingencies shape the meanings of inclusive education across national contexts? Are issues of access, capacity, and the fundamental purpose of education contested and if so, in what ways?

We argue the development of inclusive education must be studied within a comparative framework so that we can generate a knowledge base that sheds light on the issues and tensions raised above. Using a cultural historical lens, we propose to explore how cultural practices, history, and context mediate the ways that families, teachers, and administrators negotiate their views of *Education for All*. As an agenda, *Education for All* cannot ignore the country-specific contexts in which gender, race, class, and privilege are constructed and reified in notions of schooling and learning.

### **A Cultural-Historical Comparative Framework**

We use a cultural historical framework, proposed by Artiles and Dyson (2005), grounded in cultural historical activity theory (e.g., Cole, 1996; Gallego et. al, 2001) to conduct comparative analyses of inclusive education. Our goal is to understand how inclusive education is realized within local contexts—i.e., how local need is constructed within each national context, who should receive services based on those needs, and how systems of support are constructed to address the needs of those individuals or groups.

Both Mexico and South Africa have focused on the education of children with disabilities more recently than the U.S. It was not until the end of apartheid in 1994 that South Africa underwent a significant policy shift from privileging white-only schools in terms of access to highly skilled teachers, curriculum materials, school buildings thoughtfully designed for instructional environments, and accomplished local leadership (Engelbrecht, Oswald, & Forlin, 2006). Under the new constitution and newly minted national education policy, schools were to be open to all students regardless of race, language, and ability (Kozleski et al., in press). A white paper released in 2001 outlined the processes for achieving inclusive education (National Department of Education, 2001), defined broadly as access for all children rather than a disability specific initiative. Unlike the U.S. policy that mandates all schools provide a free and appropriate education for students identified as having a disability; the South African policy mandates the rights of the individual to receive an education. The South African human rights approach has its own implementation conundrums. Parents often find themselves having to advocate on behalf of their children with disabilities in order for them to be admitted to schools where children without disabilities are served (Swart, Engelbrecht, Eloff, Pettipher, & Oswald, 2005).

In Mexico, special education began to undergo significant reforms in the 1990s. Guajardo and Fletcher (1998) observed that the educational integration of students with special educational needs was not the sole objective of reform efforts but rather one strategy among others to improve the whole educational system and insure that a high quality of basic education was provided to all students. However, little attention was paid to the local context in which families and community needs were addressed by local schooling practices. The rhetoric of inclusive education was used in local communities to critique local practice; it did not progress past recognition that inclusive education was a part of the national reform agenda. Students with disabilities remained excluded from school or poorly accommodated if they were allowed to enroll because the purpose of educating children with disabilities was not understood. In communities where families are knit together generationally, education for emancipation and adult independence for persons with disabilities has little meaning.

At a very fundamental level, when an *Education for All* agenda is discussed, it can refer to very different populations of children, depending on the country being referenced. We examine the contexts of three local education systems using the four dimensions proposed by Artiles and Dyson (2005). They argue comparative cultural historical analyses should entail attention to the participants, cultural forces, a temporal dimension, and an examination of outcomes. The *participant* dimension is concerned with the actors involved in the local inclusive education system. The *cultural* dimension is concerned with the regulative, interpretive, and instrumental aspects of culture. People occupy different positions within communities and use perspectives that are more or less valued, which in turn, gives them access to more or less power over others. The *regulative* aspect of culture emphasizes the rules, codes, principles, and roles that regulate a community's culture. Because of the interplay between power differentials and regulative functions, community cultures fluctuate between friction and cohesion. The *interpretive* dimension of culture engages researchers in understanding how participants in the inclusive education system make meaning from their work. The *instrumental* aspect of culture reminds us people do not merely follow their cultural communities' regulations and prescriptions. Indeed, people use their agency to navigate situations and interactions doing both, applying the regulative rules of their cultural communities, but also improvising or using their cultural toolkits in innovative ways. Finally, the last dimension is concerned with *outcomes*. Inclusive education analyses should document both the intended and actual outcomes of these efforts.

### **The Comparative Case Studies**

Our data sets have varying levels of specificity based on the research study designs and data collection patterns. Here, we have provided as much

information as we could to help readers understand the various contexts in which these data were collected. These studies were completed independently and brought together for the comparative purpose of this manuscript.

### **The U.S. Data**

The U.S. data were collected in the fall of 2006 from two school districts in the same state in the northeast. One district served about 4,200 students in seven schools. The other had about 7,000 students in 10 schools. Three researchers visited both districts twice, once in the spring and again in the fall of 2005. The researchers were there to learn more about how the districts had begun to reduce the numbers of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds referred to and served in special education. To protect the study participants, we have given fictitious names to these districts: Oak School District and Birch School District. The researchers interviewed a variety of people, either individually or in focus groups. District leaders, including the chief executive officer of both districts, and directors of various programs were included in the interview process. We also interviewed classroom teachers, teacher supervisors, and building principals. Students were not formally interviewed although we spoke with students randomly as we observed in classrooms. Over 12 days, we interviewed a total of 65 individuals and visited 60 classrooms between the two districts. All interviews were taped and transcribed. Codes were constructed independently by the researchers. We defined our codes, shared them across the researchers, tested each other's coding categories, and then, developed a shared list that were applied across all the transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once all transcripts were coded, we developed categories and, from those categories, themes.

Here, we have sorted our categories and themes to look for patterns across the four perspectives included in Artiles and Dyson's 2005 model. This analysis was done post hoc specifically for this article so that we could begin to look at an inclusive education comparative analysis that would help us deepen our understanding of the complexities of creating a global mandate for inclusive education that is implemented in the highly contextualized spaces of community schools. It must also be clear that the data analysis from these two cases of U.S. school districts make no claim for transportability to other school districts inside this one state nor can they be mistaken for exemplars of the way that inclusive education is enacted across the United States.

### **The South Africa Data**

The South Africa data came from a longer study of three schools on the Western Cape that agreed to participate in self-studies around their inclusive practices (Engelbrecht, Oswald, & Forlin, 2006). The three schools represented local

communities that were impacted by high rates of poverty, overcrowded schools with as many as 50 students per class, high levels of Xhosa-only speaking students in schools that taught in combinations of English only, Afrikaans only, or both languages. The schools had agreed to accomplish self-studies to understand better how to become more inclusive schools. Two researchers from a local university spent time in each school on a frequent basis, as often as once a week, observing team meetings, helping to collect and organize data from school surveys and interviews. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected using interviews, observations, and questionnaires. Data from each school were analyzed independently first, and then, a cross-case analysis was completed to identify major themes.

### **The Mexican Evidence**

Over a series of three years, teachers in local schools in Mexico were interviewed in Spanish and their classrooms observed. Transcriptions of the interviews and compilations of the observations formed the basis of a study designed to understand how teachers in Mexico viewed their responsibilities towards teaching students with special needs and the kinds of supports they needed to feel competent in meeting student needs. The researchers organized four focus groups in Mexico City and Guanajuato (a city in the central region of Mexico) over a period of two years. The purpose of the focus groups was to elicit responses from educational personnel regarding the changing roles of teachers based on the adoption of an inclusive education policy that directed schools to include children with disabilities to the degree possible into regular classroom settings. Participants in the study included regular and special education teachers, speech and language pathologists, psychologists, and a director of an elementary school and a Multiple Attention Center.

### **The Analysis**

#### **Cultural Dimension**

*The U.S. Cultural Dimension.* The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2005) which provides the framework for how states and local school systems educate students with disabilities, sets forth a set of principles. States must create a set of policies and procedures that instantiate these principles in state law. Then, local school systems composed of sets of schools create their own policies and procedures that incorporate all of the state policies and procedures. District administrators ensure that those policies and procedures are carried out uniformly throughout their district schools. States generally provide onsite review once every five years and the federal government visits states on about the same timeline. However, these compliance cycles rarely produce robust demands for change at the local or state levels. Instead, court systems have

leveraged most substantial changes in how special education policy plays out locally. In the state where Oak and Birch are located, a court order mandated that students with disabilities be placed in general education classrooms and schools. Our visits coincided with implementation of this statewide mandate. The Oak District's special education director commented, "We should be doing this anyway (003, p. 4)." On the other hand, the Birch special education director said, "...a letter from the state in terms of racial balance has been a driving force (008, p. 2)." In Oak, a key district official used a combination of the power conferred by her office and the court order to install changes in the special education services that were more in line with her values and beliefs about inclusive education. The Birch director saw the state mandate as less urgent and perhaps, given local politics, something to be resisted.

The instrumental component of the cultural dimension plays out the tensions between the regulatory and interpretative dimensions of culture. In one middle level classroom in Oak District a lesson on interpreting text and developing an argument was observed. The classroom teacher selected a chapter from the autobiography of the U.S. comedian, Dick Gregory. In his autobiography, Gregory traces the roots of his commitment to civil rights. One anecdote is devoted to his first conscious experience of racism. Students in the class we observed had read the excerpt from Gregory's autobiography and were engaged in small groups about the room, answering a set of questions on a handout the teacher had prepared. Students in the small groups were supporting their interpretation of the text by reading aloud specific passages. Other students were note-taking for a later discussion. There was dialogue, contention, and resolution occurring among the students. The teacher coached the small groups to organize their evidence. Periodically, the teacher checked on the group as a whole. The groups were engaged in the task with obvious intensity and focus. As we left the classroom our guide identified the students with disabilities in that classroom. Later, we interviewed the teacher. She told us that she enjoyed having students with different learning abilities and skill levels in the room:

I actually teach an inclusion class so I have special ed children within my classroom but I don't even look at it that way. .... they're all children and they all learn the way they learn and I have to try to reach every one of these children. (p. 3, A004)

There were perhaps 10 Oak District teachers who skillfully managed these learning levels and learning interests. However, in Oak District and everywhere in Birch district, we also saw the opposite scenario. Teachers with similar numbers of students in their classroom, who, when interviewed knew that they should be able to teach students at varying levels but struggled individually and as a group to make it work. The enactment of the *regulatory* and the *interpretive* in practice was characterized by interpretations of who students were supposed to be and what the law required. For instance, this Birch district teacher said,



I think the fact that we're sensitive to the data that's been out there, administrators in particular, they don't always please the teachers when they don't give a certain person of color a certain amount of days suspension because he broke this rule and so and so broke this rule and they were white. I mean, this is talked about in team level, and we say this kid did this and he was white and he only got, you know, he got 5 days, but this kid, he's of color and he only got 2, and he did the same thing wrong so why would they do that? (p. 6, A0011)

Thus, the two districts' cultures were substantially different even though they both worked under the same, state-level regulatory systems.

*The South African Cultural Dimension.* The interplay between regulatory, interpretive, and instrumental aspects of the cultural dimension was particularly evident in the transformation of school governance from an autocratic to a democratic decision-making process at one school. In this school, the principal had made this shift himself. He worked with his teachers to organize them into small, decision making teams responsible for curricula as well as scheduling the day. Faculty meetings in this school were characterized by open dialogue and dissent that led to group agreement about data, agenda setting for the school, and the implementation of innovative practices. As a result, the teachers in this building were able to discuss concerns about their skills and capacities to institute inclusive practices for all students. However, in the other two schools studied, the principals viewed themselves as chiefly responsible for all decision making. When the principals were present in faculty meetings, they tended to dominate the discourse and teachers rarely dissented from what the principals asserted. When the principals were absent, the teachers readily communicated but with the caveat that the ultimate decision-making would be left to the principals. More pernicious were the perceptions of staff that opportunities for advancement, assignments of duties, and decisions about salary were made unfairly. These perceptions about equity among staff meant that innovation in practice, extra effort needed to explore new ideas, and possible changes in school structure were not welcome since effort and competence were not rewarded. Thus, the regulatory environment of the schools themselves, interpreted by the faculty, led to distrust and inaction, although the school principals had agreed, in this study, to work on inclusive education.

*The Cultural Dimension in Mexico.* In Mexico, special education no longer subdivides its services by types of disabilities, but rather by the educational performance levels of students. Special education services are provided to children with low incidence disabilities (students whose disabilities have clear biological causes) and students experiencing learning difficulties for no particular reason and/or because of social and economic disadvantage. The posture adopted by the Mexican government aligns with the emergence of the

concept of Special Educational Needs as outlined by UNESCO (2002). It concerns itself primarily with providing appropriate responses to a broad spectrum of learning needs in formal and non-formal settings. It also signaled a monumental shift from a medical model of disability, which focused on individuals who need “fixing” in the form of therapy, medicine, or some other special type of treatment, to a social model of disablement that focuses on the environment. This shift is evident in the change in special education programs title in state departments of education throughout Mexico to “Atención a la Diversidad” (Attention to Diversity). Thus, diversity is much more broadly defined than merely the educational inclusion or integration of students with disabilities. The Mexican government has embraced inclusive policy and practice within special education that expands the notion of special needs from a disability specific construct to one that embraces other sources of disadvantage and marginalization such as gender, poverty, language, ethnicity, and geographic isolation and their intersection with each other and disability. The incorporation of this inclusive education policy by the Mexican government also serves as a cost-efficient economic approach to provide a program of educational equity for a broader spectrum of special needs in society.

### **Temporal Dimension**

*The U.S. Temporal Dimension.* In a focus group of the mayor, the director of the local chamber of commerce, two ministers of local churches, and the police chief, all but two individuals had graduated from the local high school. This generational connection between the school and local leaders created a powerful sense of ownership over the direction of the school district and a close scrutiny of the current superintendent of schools. We observed the same local bond in community member focus groups in the Birch district. Over a significant period of time, local residents remained and maintained their sense of concern and stewardship over the role of the public schools in their community.

As we explored the implementation of inclusive education in these two districts, the temporal dimension played out in practice. Careers were made and derailed because of timing. The highly popular Oak District superintendent remained so because of the work that she had done over time to establish a shared understanding of what inclusive education might mean. Hence, when the edict came from the state to include students with disabilities in their general education classrooms, teacher and administrator leaders were able to articulate a variety of reasons for doing and engage their practitioners in strategizing ways to make it work. On the other, the beleaguered Birch District superintendent who had struggled to bring her district out of financial difficulties created before her tenure had had no time to work on the cultural dimensions of exploring and learning more about inclusive educational practices. Her leaders were

unprepared for the mandate when it came from the state, and had difficulty building interest and engagement in the process of becoming inclusive.

*South Africa.* The temporal dimension in South Africa continues to be anchored in the repeal of apartheid in 1994 and the subsequent changes in national education policy. For the three schools on the Western Cape, 10 years after apartheid, implementation of inclusive practices remained illusive. Not until the implementation of a bottom-up strategy, provided in the form of the Inclusion Index used in the self-study, were schools able to organize their own learning in such a way as to examine their capacities and their limitations in relationship to launching an effective program of inclusive education.

*Mexico.* In Mexico, the temporal dimension was focused narrowly on the experiences of a small group of teachers attempting to respond to government mandate without the services and supports they needed to take an ideal not completely understood and attempt to install it in their own practice. We captured their thinking at a point in time where resources for implementation were not available and the teachers felt unskilled to accomplish the work they were being asked to do.

### **Participant Dimension**

These three research studies were carried out in very different contexts. The kinds of disabilities that students in the three countries had were very different. In Mexico and in South Africa, the students with disabilities seemed to have more visible physical or sensory impairments. Students with learning disabilities comprised the majority of students with disabilities in the two U.S. school districts. In the U.S., students with intellectual disabilities or emotional and behavioral difficulties were likely to be found in special classrooms or assigned to classroom aides. In Mexico, special and general education teachers in the focus groups were overwhelmed with their lack of skills, preparation, and training to teach students with disabilities in inclusive contexts. The adoption of an inclusive education policy in Mexico was perceived by teachers and their administrators as an ineffective approach to educational reform. The policy, made at the national level, did not address the skills of the constituents most intimate and fundamental to the change, the general education teachers. A list of barriers expressed by participants in the study included: (a) a lack of collaborative planning time between regular and special education teachers, (b) a lack of training to adequately assess and design appropriate education systems, (c) a lack of teamwork and trust among educators and administrators, (d) the limitations of the physical school facility and the large number of students in a classroom (between 45-55), (e) a lack of incentives to motivate and provide assistance particularly for teachers who have large numbers of students in their classrooms, (f) the non-participation of parents, (g) the lack of leadership

provided by the school director, (h) the negotiation of time and space, and (i) a lack of buy in and ownership by school personnel.

The teachers that we interviewed and observed varied. While the teachers in Mexico were all Spanish speakers, a few were conversant in English. In the U.S., the teachers were English dominant speakers with few if any teachers fluent in Spanish. In South Africa, the teachers were at least bilingual (English and Afrikaans). However, for the most part, the teachers did not speak the primary language of their students, Xhosa. While the teachers used two languages themselves, they felt ill equipped to provide linguistic scaffolds for their students who were learning in a second language. Xhosa speaking students often return home to parents who are unaware of the learning challenges posed by learning in a second language. As a result, families were unable to provide support around language learning.

### **Outcomes Dimension**

*The Outcomes Dimension in the U.S.* In the U.S. a student must be identified for special support services based on a finding of disability that impairs the student's ability to learn or receive an education. While the U.S. touts the increase in numbers of students with disabilities served in public schools, the over representation of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds suggests that cultural factors play into the process of determining who has a disability at the local level (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Harry & Klingner, 2006).

*The Outcomes Dimension in South Africa.* While data on the numbers and percent of students with disabilities served throughout South Africa were not available, the South Africa's National Department of Education provided some outcome measures. They reported repurposing 380 special schools for students with disabilities into resource centers, converting 30 primary schools into full-service schools, and developing 30 district support teams. It was also likely that many children with disabilities remain unserved by the public school system.

*The Outcomes Dimension in Mexico.* In Mexico, special education no longer subdivided its service by types of disabilities, but rather by educational performance levels of students. This practice was congruent with the emergence of the concept of special educational needs initiated by UNICEF. The successful integration of children with disabilities in the public schools may become more successful because of the government's mandate for one curriculum to be offered in all schools. However, there are many children with disabilities that are still not in school. As of 2002, according to governmental statistics special education programs in Mexico provide services to approximately 1% of those who require specialized attention and instruction. A report published in 2002 by

the Mexican government (in the publication, Programa Nacional de Fortalecimiento de la Educación Especial y de la Integración Educativa), concluded that only about 412,000 students receive special education services from a nation-wide school aged student population (K-9) of 25 million students. What does this mean in real and practical terms for those in need of special education services in Mexico? The World Health Organization reports that globally about 10% of all individuals have some type of disability. The 412,000 students being provided special education services in Mexico represents less than one half of one percent of the 10% who would require this type of attention. Using the 10% figure, Mexico should anticipate providing special education services to over two million students. These data demonstrate the significant lack of services and professionals trained to meet the educational needs of kids with disabilities in Mexico.

### **Cross Case Commentary**

In the introduction, we proposed to explore how EFA policies that address inclusive education in Mexico, South Africa, and the U.S. impact specific schools. We looked at research from schools that adapting inclusive practices to guide our understanding of how national policies impact local practice. Using four dimensions, cultural, temporal, participant, and outcomes, we explored these three contexts. Three issues seemed to emerge from our information. First, inclusive education is complicated by notions of what constitutes difference, how difference becomes a disability, and how the disability label translates into lived experiences. In the U.S. the boundaries between difference and disability are constructed in specific categorical definitions used by the education system to qualify students for special education services. A well documented set of studies suggests that culture plays an important role in the process of determining difference and disability (Harry & Klingner, 2006). The current U.S. study suggests that when official regulation prevents the use of disability as a way of excluding students from the general education environment, the frequency of labeling students for special education diminish. Classroom teachers told us that they had little reason to identify students for special education since they had conceptualized that process as a way of moving students out of their classrooms. When the process no longer produced that kind of separation, the teachers were less likely to engage in the activity. So, the U.S. process of sorting, at least in these two systems, was also seen as a legitimized process of excluding.

In Mexico and South Africa, the process of sorting happens differently. In both systems, it is unclear if all or most of the children with disabilities attend school. Students who may have learning difficulties that are not physically apparent may not be identified as such within the school systems. So, categories of judgmental disabilities such as learning disability, so familiar in the U.S., are not

part of the practice discourse in the schools we studied Mexico and South Africa. Further, the schools themselves do not engage in sorting and classifying their students. Students may come with identifiable disability labels but these tend to have been conferred by other systems, such as the health care system.

In spite of these systems differences, some commonalities seemed to emerge. That is, teachers themselves in all three countries seem uncertain about what they need to know and do to support learners who have disability designations. Where learners have differences as in the language example in South Africa, they seem to engage in problem solving. Where students are identified as having disability, teachers are anxious about their skills and abilities to provide adequate support and learning opportunities. Where difference becomes disability, teacher discourse and practice seems to change.

A second issue that seems to emerge in all three cases is the role and purpose of policy making. Policy set at a national or international level is enacted and received locally. Broad agendas such as the inclusive education policies set in South Africa and Mexico create a framework for individual rights and access. Yet, without careful examination of the impact of such policies at the local level, they tend to erase local practice and knowledge and reify neo-liberal ideas of what is good for all. In the U.S., more prescriptive policy at the national level accelerates this homogenization. A third issue is linked to human resource development. The teachers in all three systems both feel the brunt of responsibility for carrying out the mission and also feel unskilled for implementation. National policies do not begin with the notion that local practitioners have particular and useful localized knowledge that can inform and shape practice so that universalized notions of what is good practice are tempered and honed in reciprocal iterative processes that bubble up the needs of local children and their families. Having a rights agenda must also be accompanied by robust cycles of inquiry and meaning making that extend teachers' knowledge bases and practices, helping them develop theories in action so that the learning opportunities they provide acknowledge the local contexts in which children and their families live.

We conclude by suggesting that *Education for All* must explicate the complexities of the cultural, temporal, historical, and outcomes dimensions of such an agenda so that the inequalities that continue to exist within countries can be better understood and addressed. Universalizing policies such as EFA deprivilege local knowledge and practice in favor of global agendas that may not benefit the ecologies of local communities. In communities where community learning is a community investment in building local alternatives, communities can counter the universal narrative as Oak District did but there may be a threshold of local capital needed to accomplish this. Understanding how these policies are interpreted and may suppress local innovation and situated

knowledge is critical especially given the socially constructed nature of the meaning of difference and disability.

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<sup>i</sup> The first two authors acknowledge the support of the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt) U. S. Department of Education. (2001), *Twenty-fourth annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, under grant # H326E020003 and the National Institute for Urban School Improvement (NIUSI), [www.urbanschools.org](http://www.urbanschools.org), under grant #H326B020002 awarded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. Funding agency endorsement of the ideas presented in this article should not be inferred. Address correspondence to [elizabeth.kozleski@asu.edu](mailto:elizabeth.kozleski@asu.edu)

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