

FOREWORD

Comparative Studies in Special Education is an attempt to fill a void in the literature available to students and scholars in both special education and comparative education. That void is the result of the direction scholarship in education has taken recently.

Over the last two decades, academic work in almost all areas has exhibited a trend toward ever-increasing specialization. The consequence is a fragmentation of scholarship and publishing that has witnessed remarkable progress in extending the *depth* of investigation in narrow and precisely defined subfields while, simultaneously, resulting in a pronounced lack of integrative studies and publications that serve to keep both scholars and students abreast of the evolving *scope* of their general fields of study. The results for both special educators and comparative educators have been unfortunate in that there are fewer and fewer sources available offering a general overview and synthesis of developments around the globe.

One consequence of this state of affairs is that educational scholars, students, practitioners, and policy makers have to access a wide variety of books and journals to try to piece together a coherent picture of the ongoing research, social experiments, relevant legislation, in-place structures and processes, accepted professional practices, and educational goals and objectives in nations around the world. The practical reality of this situation is that, all too often, not only individual scholars and teachers but, indeed, entire national educational systems are formulating and pursuing objectives without the benefit of knowing the experiences, successes, and failures of their colleagues around the world.

Comparative Studies in Special Education seeks to remedy this negative consequence of the fragmentation of study and publication by looking at twenty-six case studies which, taken together, examine special education provisions for the majority of children alive in the world today. The text, written by distinguished special educators from around the globe, is a series of reports and analyses that focus on (a) the current state of special education in selected nations, (b) major issues and controversies in the field of special education within those nations, and (c) emerging and future trends in the field of special education.

To facilitate comparisons and to stimulate creative ideas for meeting the special needs of the world's children, each case study addresses the following categories and themes.

- *Prevalence of Exceptional Conditions*: Prevalence of handicapping conditions among the general population and among the school-age population; conditions that have unusually high numbers: etiologies for handicapping conditions that are specific to a particular region.
- *Identification of Exceptionalities*: Medical and psychoeducational identification of handicapping conditions; medical identification of handicaps prenatally, in infancy, in preschool, and in the childhood years; medical use of screening and high risk registers; psychoeducational assessment of students with handicapping conditions; differences in identification procedures for severely as opposed to mildly handicapped individuals; the role of psychological services.
- *Labeling the Handicapped Population*: Provisions for labeling children; use of categorical and noncategorical (generic) approaches to the labeling of students with exceptionalities.
- *The Social Context of Special Education*: The changing nature of views of exceptionality; recent changes in views of disability and perceptions of handicapped people in society; major factors accounting for the preceding changes; political, economic, and other factors influencing educational policy and practice in special education; foreign influences on the theoretical bases, policy formation, and practice of special education.
- *The Legal and Bureaucratic Structure of Special Education*: Mandatory and permissive legislation in place for children with exceptionalities; policies in place for the education of children with exceptionalities.
- *Teachers, Schools, Curriculum, and Pedagogy for Special Education*: The education of special education teachers; settings for the instruction of children with exceptionalities (institutions, segregated classrooms, integrated settings); teaching and instruction for children with various handicapping conditions.
- *Major Controversies and Issues in Special Education*: The controversy over mainstreaming; integrated *versus* segregated educational settings; deinstitutionalization; funding; who should receive services; the rights of parents *versus* children *versus* the state.
- *Emerging and Future Trends in Special Education*: Evolving directions in the theory and practice of special education.

The organization of the text along the above parameters thus makes *Comparative Studies in Special Education* both an encyclopedic resource and an analytical treatise. That is, the contributors first present clear, concrete,

and comprehensive data on essential aspects of special education in nations around the globe, and second, they provide an analysis in the form of discussions on major issues, future trends, etc. Thus, within the covers of a single text, are gathered data and analyses that, as a group, provide an overview of special education as it affects the majority of children with special needs in today's world.

However, there are many and profound limitations and potential dangers in attempting to provide a coherent picture of special education around the globe. In the interest of clarifying the nature and thrust of this text, we bring but three of the major problems to the attention of readers.

First, whether implicitly or explicitly, an organizational model must be employed. While facilitating obvious functional and heuristic goals, models also tend to be value-loaded, and they subtly but surely influence the direction of data gathering, analysis, discussion, and conclusions in predetermined directions. Therefore, while this text necessarily has an organizational framework, that framework both is explicit and is formulated on the least intrusive principles the editors could conceive. Accordingly, the sections into which the represented nations are grouped do not in any manner imply a hierarchy of less or more desirable special education principles or practices. All the sections are meant to convey are the structures for providing special education in the represented nations.

Therefore, the reader is cautioned that while *Comparative Studies in Special Education* serves the functions of being an encyclopedic resource and analytical treatise, as has been noted earlier, every attempt has been made to avoid being prescriptive. Data are presented, but the editors are not selectively employing them in advocacy of any particular special educational model. Similarly, analyses are offered, solutions proposed, and ideals advocated by each contributor in the context of his or her nation, but the debates remain open-ended. They must ultimately be resolved by, and to the satisfaction of, our readers; the editors avoid imposing any resolutions or advocating specific directions/resolutions. That is why the editors expressly rejected the temptation to write a summative concluding chapter. While the data and analyses for gleaning a coherent picture of special education around the world are to be found within this text, it is up to the individual reader to put together that picture from the case studies presented.

Second, the question of *who* shall speak for the nations represented must be answered. The editors chose to let the nations speak for themselves rather than having someone speak about them. The choice, however, is really a no-win scenario. The argument for having experts from outside a nation report upon and analyze special education is that the contribution can be said to come from someone who is objective because he or she is impervious to any ideological/social/professional/political constraints with which nationals or residents may have to contend. The argument against

using outsiders is twofold: first is the question of whether any outsider can have truly intimate knowledge of a social system; second is the charge of cultural bias in the investigator because he or she, by definition, is observing and interpreting from the world-view of another cultural perspective.

The editors chose to solicit contributions only from experts in special education who were themselves residents of and active professionals within the educational systems of the nations they wrote about. Deeming it crucial to allow the inherent perspectives and cultural uniquenesses of contributors and nations to come through to readers, editing was kept to a minimum. The editors therefore consider any unevenness in tone and expression found in the essays to be a strength of the text. Every attempt was made to allow the contributors to speak in their own voices as residents of the nations represented.

Third, changes are occurring so rapidly in today's world that it is difficult for comparative studies texts to be current. Indeed, a glance at the list of nations represented illustrates how profoundly and quickly events can transform nations around the world. Since this text has been compiled, official apartheid has finally been abolished in South Africa, an historic agreement has been forged between Israel and the Palestinian peoples, Russia continues to undergo fundamental political and economic transitions, and Czechoslovakia has peacefully divided into two autonomous nations.

Such changes will always plague any text that attempts to report on and analyze contemporary realities. To minimize this, the contributors have done more than merely use the most recent data available in their nations. Care has been taken to examine the newest developments relevant for special education, and proposals and initiatives still in the embryonic stages of development also are reported. And, most importantly, many of the key elements found in each contribution (i.e., the debate over segregated *versus* integrated special education, appropriate training for special education teachers, etc.) really are timeless in the sense that they are part of an ongoing discussion among special educators.

Therefore, *Comparative Studies in Special Education* is as much a part of the worldwide debate over how educators may best meet the needs of children with exceptionalities, as it is a source of insight into the nature of that debate and a base of information on special education practices around the world. As we emphasize in the following introduction, much can be learned from the varied experiences and approaches of the nations represented. Around the world, starting from differing philosophical bases and employing differing practices in sometimes radically different cultural and social contexts, dedicated and caring professionals are working tirelessly to improve the educational services, vocational opportunities, and social experiences of the many millions of children with exceptionalities in our midst. Some of those dedicated individuals are represented as contributors in the following chapters.