Chapter 1
Ontologies of Inclusion and Teacher Education

Ben Whitburn
Deakin University, Australia

Tim Corcoran
Deakin University, Australia

ABSTRACT

In the complex of marginalizing theories, policies, and practices, both in the academy and education more broadly, the design of inclusive education scholarship is intentionally relational. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how theories affecting inclusion direct the remit of teacher educators. In particular, attention is directed at interdisciplinary scholarly practice arising from individual and institutional values that can and do go by uncritically questioned. The chapter describes the development of a program of inclusive education scholarship within teacher education that emphasizes ontological scrutiny. Learning outcomes are made explicit promoting advanced understandings about the application of theory, policy, curriculum design, resources, and pedagogy to differentiate teaching programs in ways that are accessible to learners with diverse interests, needs, and backgrounds. Graduates are anticipated to meet challenging conditions of resistance to inclusion and be able to work in and against these with conviction.

INTRODUCTION

In the complex of marginalising theories, policies and practices, both in the academy and education more broadly, the design of inclusive education scholarship ought to be intentionally relational. However, interdisciplinary scholarship arises from individual and institutional values that can and do go by uncritically questioned. This chapter describes the development of a program of inclusive education scholarship within teacher education that emphasises ontological scrutiny. Learning outcomes are made explicit whereby graduates are expected to have advanced understandings about the application of theory, policy, curriculum design, resources and pedagogy to differentiate their teaching programs in ways that are accessible to learners with diverse interests, needs and backgrounds. Graduates are anticipated to meet challenging conditions of resistance to inclusion and be able to work in and against these with conviction.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7703-4.ch001
The chapter comprises four sections. The first explores the socio-political mandates that set the context for developing programs of inclusive education in teacher training programs, noting in particular the somewhat circular motion of policy action in Australia that has influenced the field. The second explores academic traditions that have mirrored the policy context of technical rationality that pervades teacher education in particular. This section presents an argument for communities of practice—of social constructionism and the recognition of relationalities to enact inclusive design for learning. The third section describes the crafting of two units of study, in which a relational ontology is foregrounded to support student teacher development. Then, the final section distils theories affecting inclusion, resistance to divergent understandings and recommendations for application in teacher education programming.

CURRENT SOCIO-POLITICAL MANDATES

To give context to the development of inclusive education in teacher training in the Australian State of Victoria, it is important to consider the historical background from which it emerges. This section examines the human rights agenda that underpins Australia’s position on education, the Victorian context of inclusive schooling, and the associated impetus for teacher education to respond to these advances. On the whole these characterise transmutations to the field, discursively, materially, and in policy and practice. That they intentionally circle around identity groups and resourcing is evident of the contestations to sustainable inclusion that characterise the field (Slee, 2011).

Educational provision across Australia is situated as a human right—a democratic advance available to all, through which primacy is given to equity and excellence (MCEETYA, 2008). This approach is not unique to Australia: education was prioritised internationally post World War II via the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Australia was a founding member of the UN, and core to the Declaration’s development (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d). Though not legally binding, this declaration and subsequent treaties have been influential in the development of worldwide legislation and policy, in particular with regard to education and disability (Mittler, 2009). The implication of this globalised approach to policy development, as Artiles and Dyson (2009) point out, is that although individual countries may be well-informed about how policy responses are handled elsewhere, they are prevented from developing their own policies without reference to global trends. Australia’s approach to developing inclusive education systems is embedded in these prevailing conditions.

Education is specifically cited in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration (UN, 1948) in three paragraphs:

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. and
3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.