Book Reviews

*Special and Inclusive Education:
A Research Perspective*

Therese Day & Joseph Travers (ed)
Oxford: Peter Lang. Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles,
Frankfurt am Main, New York, Wien, 2012, XII, 437pp
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I really like this book, and the reason for this is that 'A Review of Special and Inclusive Education: A research perspective' is a shining example of an output that reflects the best of a collaborative and involved research community that values the work and perspectives of its practitioner–researcher students. It is rare to see the work of master's degree students foregrounded in an edited volume of this kind. It is particularly heartening to read, especially given the current climate in England, which has seen a decline in the number of students' taking master's degree courses in Education following changes in available funding.

Small-scale research of this kind is often neglected or by-passed in literature reviews, such as the recent Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) reviews in the UK, which favoured a review process that led to the acceptance of experimental designs and random control trials as being of quality. Practitioner research, especially small-scale practitioner research as a consequence of favoured review methodologies, becomes invisible research, and as such, is at risk of being un- or at best dis-valued. What the book succeeds very well in providing is diverse case study accounts of the implementation of special and inclusive education policy in Ireland. Precisely because these accounts reflect the standpoints and experiences of the teacher–researcher authors, there is an authenticity about the voices expressed that lends credibility to the volume; as I read across the cases, I get a flavour of the state of play of special education policy in Ireland as it plays out at the grass roots by the teachers who instantiate the policies and who are in a sense the true makers – or makers happeners – of the policy. This truly is a case of the whole being more than the sum of the parts.

The book is organised around responses to diversity, access to the curriculum and collaboration for inclusion. Part 1, Responding to Diversity, includes 12 chapters that scope school responses to students with mild-learning difficulties, dyslexia and autism, as well as drawing on students' voices, teachers' beliefs and issues of transition in primary school and post-primary school settings. Part 2, Access to the Curriculum, includes eight chapters that scope communication and language, literacy, pedagogical repertoire and teachers' constructions of inclusive practice. Part 3, Collaboration, includes seven chapters that highlight the importance of collaboration for meaningful inclusion.

In doing so 'A Review of Special and Inclusive Education: A research perspective' tackles key issues head-on for the development of more inclusive practices in the Irish context. It raises legitimate questions about the implementation of such policy with regard to changing attitudes, development of collaborative structures of organisation and pedagogical or social norms that can foster inclusion or that have exclusionary tendencies. However, this is a positive book that shows how schools and teachers can make real differences to the education and lives of children with special educational needs, and gives many ideas about how schools can become more inclusive in their organisation and practices.

As well as having its finger on the pulse, the editors and authors succeed in producing a scholarly volume that will have wide appeal to researchers involved in inclusion as well as to teachers and students.

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*Constructing Childhood Theory, Policy and
Social Practice*

Allison James & Adrian James (ed)
Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 232pp
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Towards an understanding of the development of inclusive practices from the point of view of international law on the rights of the child: a global perspective.

James and James (2004) *Constructing Childhood Theory, Policy and Social Practice*, published by Palgrave Macmillan and Bueren (1995) *The International Law on the Rights of the Child*, published by Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. Reviewed in the context of a global perspective on the promotion of Article 42 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child with regard the development of inclusive educational practices.

A little background

Since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was signed in 1989, increasing attention has been paid to the importance of children's issues

worldwide (James and James, 2004). This Convention was established to protect any child from birth to 18 years old (the age group agreed by the UNCRC) (Libal et al., 2011) and to give children rights. Wring (1996) as cited by James and James (2004, p. 84) described the role of the UNCRC as being '. . . about rights of freedom, rights of protection and needs-based or welfare rights, the first two of which reflect "traditional doctrines of Natural Rights" ': 'The century began with children began isolated and enslaved, having no rights at all, and ended with children connecting worldwide to advocate for their own right' (Hick and Halpin, 2001, p. 69). So far, 191 countries have ratified the Convention, with the exception of the USA and Somalia.

This review draws on Article 42 of the UNCRC that sets out governments' roles in making society aware of the UNCRC and children's rights issues and how these have been promoted worldwide. This is pertinent to me because in Saudi Arabia – my home country, as indeed it is throughout the World – the UNCRC has important implications for the way of participation between adults and children in a multitude of aspects of life, particularly with regards my work as an educational researcher who is keen to conduct participatory research with children. I am therefore raising awareness of this Convention in this book review in order to demonstrate the importance of reading more widely in the area of policy. I have fore grounded the books by James and James, and by Bueren because I have found them personally helpful to me in making this connection which has been significant in the on-going development of my own thinking.

Overview of Article 42 of the UNCRC

Article 42 of the Convention states that: *The Government should make the Convention known to all parents and children* (UNCRC in Wales, 2011). Bueren (1995) clarified the purpose of Article 42 as: to give children and adults the opportunity to participate in the political considerations of their country, and described it as the keystone of the other Articles for when a country promotes Article 42 well, the implementation of the other Articles are facilitated. Surveys, such as that conducted by Karaman-Kepenekci (2006), have shown the importance of Article 42 for both adults and children; she illustrated the reason for this importance: '[in] the communities where children's rights are taught, the concept of right of children makes sense to everybody' (p. 310). In addition, a number of studies have pointed to the significance of enabling the participation of children in promotion of the Article, Badham (2002) as cited in Lyon's (2007) paper mentioned that without children's and young people's participation in promoting their rights, the achievements for their country would only be nominal. Hinton (2008) suggested that involving children in the process of the implementation of this Article is one way to raise children's awareness.

Children's voices and the implementation of Article 42 worldwide

UNICEF published a report about the promotion of the UNCRC worldwide (Moccia et al., 2009), which showed not only the participating UNICEF offices in some coun-

tries, such as Egypt and South Africa, but also presented articles from some beneficiaries who discussed their perspectives on their experiences and the achievements of the UNCRC in their country. Entitled 'Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child all over the world', this paper commented on and celebrated the fact that the UNCRC has opened new horizons in the field of human rights and codified the rights of children globally.

UNICEF (2010) discussed how the world has been influenced by the UNCRC; in each region of the World, various examples of the impact on law and practice have been found. For example, some of the more positive examples of children's participation in the promotion of this Article are mentioned. Moccia et al. (2009) showed that in South Africa, the parliament and government are concerned about children's rights through their participation in children's policy. In 1992, children were given a chance to defend their rights by their participation in organising the important Molo Songololo summit. To give another example, India organised the Friendly City Experience, and the government has also established the Child Rights Protection Commission (UNICEF, 2009). As a result, the findings from the Save Children Report (Save the Children UK, 2009) show that in 2009 a huge number of children joined in children's rights activities, and this encouraged some children to go back to school rather than work in the streets.

To give yet another example, in Morocco, on 25 May 2011 young Moroccans gathered in the coastal city of Bouznika (Morocco) to play an active role in drafting a national youth strategy (Maghri and Otter, 2011). The Youth National Meeting brought together more than 845 young people who wanted to convey their voices. The group included those with no access to education or homes. The role of the young people was to discuss with ministers issues of concern; the aim was to elicit a guarantee from the ministers to promote the well-being of young people and adolescents, and help children to be aware of, and demand, their rights (Maghri and Otter, 2011).

With regard the Middle East, Buelens and Mortier (1989) as cited in Roose and Bouverne-De Bie (2007) argued that the issue of children's rights should be given priority over and above any other, even if the country is at war. Accordingly, the report on the performance of the Arab Council for Childhood and Development (2011) highlighted the need to tackle the issues of children's rights. As a result of this report, the Arab Council for Childhood and Development are continuing to focus on, and work towards, their key goals with the emphasis on increasing the knowledge of children's right issues. Manna (2006) highlighted the attempts of the Middle Eastern countries concerning children's rights issues. The 'Children in Jordan, Analysis of the Situation' published by The National Council For Family Affairs in collaboration with the UNICEF (2007) pointed out that the Children's Parliament, established following an initiative by the Jordanian Women's Union in 1996, with other partners such as the Ministry of Education

and the Ministry of Social development, formed an innovative partnership among school children aged between 10 and 18 years, the idea being to educate adolescents about the concept of democracy and child rights. The parliamentary procedures were in the form of a forum with discussions on topics chosen by the members themselves, unlike the traditional approach in which adults lead the seminars. This step taken by an Arab country is considered a positive move towards increasing society's awareness (among both children and adults) about children's rights issue (UNICEF, 2007).

Why reading about policy is important

There are several issues raised by exploring some of the examples above. Firstly, such top-down events can be criticised as being tokenistic, and failing to change the lived experiences of the majority of children in their day-to-day lives. On the other hand, such initiatives are worth celebrating because they mark a major breakthrough of governance and are an indication of intent. They are also important because they give activists credibility when they engage others with the ideas of the policy and implementation in practice. Policies become enacted, shaping the actions of those who live under their governance. It is people who become the policy–makers, and as an educational researcher this raises ethical issues about research design and the participation of children, the researched within the process of the research and ethical issues about the balance of power residing between those researching and those researched. In my country, where the idea of participatory research with children is fairly new, educational researchers have opportunity to make changes in their practice and to embrace a wider variety of researcher methods that include children in the process.

In this review, I have drawn in the main on gray literature, but two books have been important: James and James (2004) *Constructing Childhood Theory, Policy and Social Practice*, published by Palgrave Macmillan and Bueren (1995) *The International Law on the Rights of the Child*, published by Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. It is perhaps unusual in a review to turn to real life issues in the way I have done here, by means of sign posting the examples above, in order to illustrate the importance of other books. However, reading about policy can sometimes seem distant from how it can play out in the real lives of others, as well as in one's own life. Such wider policy may not at first glance be obvious as essential reading for those engaged in the development of educational inclusive practices. However, these books do give a broader perspective that connects principles of inclusion in education with other spheres of life and work, and also connect local practice to changes and developments taking place in a connected World. I recommend them as reading for those wanting to explore a wider perspective and especially to those readers who are keen to explore how governance and policy interplays on the ground and can become policy in practice. The limitation of policy to effect change is aligned here with opportunities for agentive subjects to bring about change using the spaces they have available to them. It is then salient to those intent on bringing about the development of inclusive practices, wherever this may be taking place in the World.

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