How do we articulate the possibilities, limitations and challenges of inclusive schooling and education in African contexts? This book insists that inclusive education cannot be taken for granted. Inclusion is neither a natural nor a given educational practice. It must be struggled for. Bringing a critical perspective to inclusive schooling and education is imperative. This book adds to current educational debates with an African lens. It engages inclusive education from multiple lenses of curriculum content, classroom pedagogy and instruction, representation, culture, environment and the socio-organization life of schools, the pursuit of equity and social justice and the search for educational relevance. It is opined that Africa cannot be left behind in rethinking educational inclusion in ways that evoke critical questions of power, equity and social difference. The question of learner's identity in terms of class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, language, ethnicity and race are equally consequential for African schooling and education. When inclusion is understood as wholeness of education, then how schooling and education engage the complete learner – her/his body, mind, soul and spirit, as well as the use of local community and Indigenous knowledges in teaching and learning become relevant. Inclusion stands the risk of liberal educational agendas that simply tinker or toy with schooling and education and hardly embrace the challenge of educational change. What we need is a fundamental structural change that ensures schooling and education embraces difference while grappling with the teaching of Indigeneity, decolonization and resistance.
Inclusive Education in African Contexts
ANTI-COLONIAL EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Volume 5

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Scope

Informed by an anti-colonial spirit of resistance to injustices, this book series examines the ways and the degree to which the legacy of colonialism continues to influence the content of school curriculum, shape teachers’ teaching practices, and impact the outcome of the academic success of students, including students of color. Further, books published in this series illuminate the manner in which the legacy of colonialism remains one of the root causes of educational and socio-economic inequalities. This series also analyzes the ways and the extent to which such legacy has been responsible for many forms of classism that are race- and language-based. By so doing, this series illuminates the manner in which race intersects with class and language affecting the psychological, educational, cultural, and socio-economic conditions of historically and racially disenfranchised communities. All in all, this series highlights the ways and the degree to which the legacy of colonialism along with race-, language-, class- and gender-based discrimination continue to affect the existence of people, particularly people of color.
Inclusive Education in African Contexts

A Critical Reader

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank all contributors to this book, in particular Professor George Dei for his guidance and support towards its eventual completion. We also owe a great debt of gratitude to Sense Publishers for the decision to publish it. We believe it will contribute to critical dialogues on Inclusive Schooling and Education in African contexts.

Dikeledi Mahlo and Nareadi Phasha
INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS

INTRODUCTION

Why do we need a book on inclusive schooling and education in Africa? Why would you want to read it? On the face of it these may seem trivial, simplistic questions, but it is important for us to ask them because, contrary to received wisdom, inclusion is not a given in our communities. We all have to work hard to achieve social inclusion and we as educators do not as yet see our schools enthusiastically grasping the concept. In order to give attention to the issue we must ask the most basic, simple questions. We all have our different conceptions of inclusion but not every school, family, community or institutional setting can claim to have understood it. In many respects our respective locations and situatedness in different spaces allow us to bring differing and perhaps converging views on what we would all like to see as an inclusive school and inclusive education.

One does not have to yearn for inclusion simply because one has been excluded. It is just the right thing to do. We are all better for inclusion. We cannot have communities in which ‘others’ do not belong. Schools cannot educate as if our students are homogenous in every aspect of human life. We are about differences. Differences are the source of our strength as much as our commonalities. We can no longer afford to make difference a site or source that disunites or divides us. We must bring a reading to inclusion that values us all as part of a single humanity. To do so, however, we must challenge our refusal to engage in critical questions of power and privilege. We must be prepared to think laterally and widen our perspectives. We may be utopian but we have to work hard to make our ideals a reality.

In this book we write about inclusive schooling and educational difference. Notwithstanding good intentions of educators, Africa’s schooling and education is still at a crossroads. To some this may be a harsh assessment, however, if one looks critically at key issues of curriculum content, educational relevance and schooling outcomes for youth one cannot help but come to this realisation. A neo-liberal agenda has presented Africa’s education with great challenges that call for creative imagination in revision for effective schooling and education for young learners today (see Brock-Utne, 2003; Berthe’lemy, 2006; Mundy, 2008; Osei, 2006). We take up an emerging subject in African education, namely the question of educational inclusivity, and examine the strengths, accomplishments and challenges, as well as the way forward. Apparently, no longer present is the foresight of pre-colonial
educators who brought to education a much broader understanding than present in
the formal classrooms of today (see Fafunwa, 1974, 1982; Fafunwa & Aisiku, 1982;
Sifuna, 1990, 1992). Today’s educators can only fight hard to restore this vision. We
have no other choice because the limits and limitations we impose upon ourselves by
not having an inclusive schooling environment are too numerous.

For these educators there is nothing more deserving than to see education as
a totality encompassing the varied ways, options, and strategies through which
learners come to know their world, and to effect social and personal change. While
colonial and post-colonial education have had their limited strengths the challenges
of meeting inclusivity in global education remain (see Allan, 2007; Pivik, McComas,
& Laflamme, 2002). Part of the problem, as far as Africa is concerned, remains a
conceptual understanding of inclusion which until quite recently was largely viewed
as special education or the education of learners with physical disabilities (see
many of the essays in this book). The idea of inclusion as addressing fundamental
questions of power and equity, promoting a link between students’ myriad identities
has not always been taken seriously. The reading of education as promoting “national
citizens” with shared aspirations and dreams, while noble, has tended to sweep
differences under the carpet, as if they were a problem, but Africa cannot be left
behind in rethinking educational inclusion in ways that evoke critical questions of
power, equity and social difference. We cannot afford to think of learners as universal
subjects without identities of class, gender, sexuality, [dis]ability, language, race and
ethnicity that necessitate a linking of knowledge production and schooling (see also
Campbell, 2002; Carrington & Robinson, 2004; Armstrong, Armstrong, & Barton,
2000; Barton & Armstrong, 2007; Brock-Utne & Skattum, 2009, writing in other
contexts). We must tap into our rich cultural resource base for their contributions to
inclusive schooling and education.

The conceptualisation of inclusive schooling in an African context would
have to begin with an acknowledgement of social difference, power, identity and
culture. Difference must be acknowledged as a site of strength. In our contemporary
classrooms we have learners who come from different or diverse social backgrounds,
which are not simply sites of knowledge but are also shaped by the exigencies of
history, politics, and self-location. An affirmation of who our students are, their
relative identities and histories, the cultures and experiences that they bring to
the school system, and the interplay of culture, history and location in shaping
educational outcomes is paramount. These sites of learning should be tapped into as
part of the learning process for the benefit of all.

If identities are relational then difference can only enrich the cause of education.
History, culture, experience and location offer different standpoints to learners,
linked by knowledge production through the production of the multiple identities
that shape learners in the school system. Education cannot be provided uniformly
and the urgency for inclusion necessitates that educators deal with the challenges,
possibilities and opportunities entailed in having different bodies in their schools and
classrooms. Disability is a significant dimension of our identity, shaping who we are,
as are questions of class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language and religion. A number of works in transnational contexts have affirmed this understanding (see Danforth & Narraian, 2015, Slee, 2001a; Dei, James, James-Wilson, Karumanchery, & Zine, 2000; Dei, James-Wilson, & Zine, 2002). Inclusive schooling and education is about all learners and cannot be simply for those deemed to be outside the norm. We must question our supposed normalcies and look at who is outside. In effect, inclusive education must trouble our conceptions of normality and what is deemed ‘abled’ and ‘disabled’.

As Dei (2016a) notes, there exist extensive writings on ‘inclusive education’, including the social justice perspective that highlights significant theoretical, philosophical, conceptual and practical questions about the ways we approach educational inclusion (see Ainscow & Dyson, 2006; Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Ainscow & Sandhill, 2010; Amstrong, Amstrong, & Spandagou, 2010; Peters, 2005; Peters & Oliver, 2009; Slee, 2001b, 2011; Slee & Allan, 2005). There is much that can be learned for the African context from these international sources and vice versa and the continent’s educators also need to theorise the uniqueness of our take on inclusive schooling and education. Appreciating, sharing and validating values, histories, experiences, knowledges and experiences of all groups are relevant, but by themselves these may still be inadequate to transform African schooling and education. We need a fundamental structural change for a school system which cultivates sameness and for the most part takes a lukewarm approach to difference. African education must grapple with the question of how much of inclusive education should be about teaching indigeneity, decolonisation and resistance on the part of learners and educators. Inclusive schooling and education must also confront some questions: What have been the consequences of the on-going ‘marketization of education’ (Kenway & Epstein, 1996) in/for Africa? How does the economics of schooling today implicate strategies on inclusive education and the search for educational equity in the face of globalisation and encroachment of global capital in schools? What are the limits of promoting inclusive education through an uncritical social justice framework which works with an approach towards integration and equality? How do educators begin to think of radical notions of inclusion as beginning anew to realise the limits of integrating into what already exists when ‘that which already exists’ – the current education system is the source of the problem in the first place? (Dei, 2016a). How is ‘integration’ into such a hegemonic system transformational, subversive or even radical? When educators begin to think of ‘equity’ as radically different from ‘equality’ how do we promote alternative models of social justice which require treating people differently [and not the liberal conception of simply “treating everybody the same”]? Cherishing difference and plurality still promotes an image of multiple, thriving, mutually respectful and appreciative of ethno-cultural communities.

The discussion on reframing inclusive education in Africa must also engage with literature and theorists operating from anti-colonial, de-colonial and integrative perspectives. These works pose additional key questions, for example,
• How do we decolonise education and the school curriculum in Africa? How do we subvert the structures and processes of educational delivery (structures for teaching/learning/administration of education) that end by creating sites of marginality and colonising education for African learners?

• How should African educators, school administrators and policy workers take up ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, class, religion, language and disability as important identities that trouble and complicate the notion of the ‘universal’ and ‘disembodied’ learners as significant social categories and relations of power and domination in schools?

• What powerful markers of identity and difference connect to schooling for knowledge production, curriculum, pedagogy, classroom and anti-colonial transformations of schools and educational systems?

• How does inclusive education acknowledge colonial hierarchies and relations of schooling as revolving around certain ontological, epistemological and axiological hegemonic foundations?

• How does a critical inclusive education approach challenge power and the rationality for dominance?

• How do we bring a more holistic and multidimensional understanding of inclusion and social justice to include spiritual, emotional and socio-environmental dimensions of learners?

The question of re-visioning schooling and education from a critical inclusionary perspective must seek a structural transformation of school/education systems in ways that pay particular attention to the macro-social processes, economic, political and psycho-cultural realms of domination and colonisation. Specifically, we must find ways to change the macro-structural and political conditions in society which create socio-economic inequities that impinge on school systems and the schooling experiences of all learners. While measures for the redistribution of resources in schools, representation of diverse stakeholders, effective collaborations and consultations with parents and local communities, as well as ensuing wide involvement in school decision-making processes (to include all groups in society) is critical we must continually keep a gaze on how inclusive education approaches can be framed within the deficit, compensation and ameliorative lenses. Inclusive schooling and education in Africa must be about co-creation of schooling curriculum, Indigenous classroom pedagogies and holistic instructional strategies which bring to the fore other questions about responsibilities of educators: what type of education do we provide for contemporary learners, how and why, and what are learners going to do with such education? We also ask what it means to create an inclusive anti-colonial global future and the nature of work that is required collectively to get us there.

The creation of communities of learners requires that we do not ignore differences while thinking they constitute a problem. Schools as working communities require that our conception of inclusion goes beyond questions of physical ability to how
fundamental characteristics intersect and come to shape schooling and knowledge production. Given that difference has conventionally been seen as a liability, it has become a site of power and asymmetrical power relations. We need a critical understanding of difference as power to subvert what is viewed as normal and our expectations of the universal learner.

It is important for us to advance a rationale for inclusive schooling that extends beyond the qualitative value of educational justice (see also Karagiannis, Stainback, & Stainback, 1996; Loreman, 2007; Mittler, 2012; Abgenyega & Supple, 2011; Dei, James, James-Wilson, Karumanchery, & Zine, 2000; Dei, James-Wilson, & Zine, 2002, in other contexts). Such environments can only enhance learning outcomes but we need inclusive education because it is about creating communities of learners and seeing schooling as community. Schooling and education must welcome and embrace difference in order to be truly inclusive. Our schools must embrace and address what social difference entails, particularly its connection with the educational and learning processes. We must identify sites of marginality and exclusion in order to develop strategies that would include everyone. We must understand inclusion and exclusion as being about power and how it is enacted to meet different needs and expectations for diverse people. Sites of social exclusion and bodies excluded are more than people with physical disabilities. Schools usually work with a dominant view of the learner and this interpretation is transposed to every learner, making it difficult for the one who fails to conform to what is viewed as ‘normal’.

We see radical inclusion rooted in local cultural knowledge as the new norm of what education should be about. A rethinking of African schooling and education has to take us back to our roots and an examination of our histories and cultural traditions of knowledge production, dissemination and use. We need to look at education from this source in terms of its connections with family life, community and social relevance, and see how the question of difference was evoked and responded to. This means drawing on the lessons of how knowledge is impacted through early socialisation practices, childrearing practices, teaching and learning responsibilities of community membership, and the application of knowledge to solve practical everyday problems within one’s backyard and beyond.

Traditional African communities are about inclusion. If one analyses aspects of African Indigenous education, for example, one can infer that we need to create spaces in African schools for parents, elders, families and cultural custodians to come in as teachers to work on a daily basis to complement the work of professionally trained educators. Community teachings emphasise togetherness, sharing and reciprocity. Inclusion is taken as meaning we all belong and a responsibility of every citizen is to ensure that mutual interdependence is respected as an ideal and a virtue. To make our schools inclusive, students must be firmly grounded in their local communities and a practical component of classroom teaching must be to see students locate in their communities to implement their classroom ideas and engage community knowledge. We have to return to the days when the separation of school and community was non-existent.
Consequently, it is important for us to understand difference in the local community setting. Gender, class, ethnicity, language, religion, sexuality and (dis)ability have long been seen as inclusive categories in traditional African education within community settings, but this is not the case now. For example, understanding gender and schooling in African an context calls for a deeper reflection on the way gender education is pursued in the postcolonial setting. Lip service is paid to gender, schooling and education as an equity issue and Eurocentric constructions provide the basis of a critique for Africa. An examination of gender in African ways of knowing would permit us to simultaneously examine boys and girls in relational terms, that is, in terms of reconceptualised inclusion.

There are complexities and contradictions in the function of schools as gender socialising agents. African schools today have become ‘masculinising agencies’ through official policies and practices (curriculum, pedagogy and instruction), yet there is a failure to examine how these reinforce particular notions of what it means to be male or female. Also, colonial and postcolonial forces, including globalisation, have impacted on everyday social constructions and practices of masculinity in a schooling setting. Much research on gender and schooling in Africa has excluded boys’ experiences and how they are implicated in unequal and unjust gender relations. Often, within African schooling and education, questions and concerns about African/Black masculinity are reduced to questions of identity, identifications, and socio-cultural differences, thereby eroding in a sense the question of community. Inclusion is about communities, groups and collectiveness. Individual learners are in social relational ties with each other, so teaching about these addresses a basic tenet of inclusion as much as community building.

Inclusion is also about wholeness. The learner is a complete person who engages body, mind, soul and spirit. Inclusion respects such holism of the learner. Elsewhere, Dei (2015b) has argued that African countries would need a cultural and paradigmatic shift to avoid the privileging of Cartesian reasoning and intellect over body, such that vocational training is seen as less desirable and more suited for lesser intellects, often meaning poor and working class bodies. We know that technical and vocational training often forces this separation of intellect from body, and skill from reason, which if we approach the critique with an Indigenous framework in mind is a false demarcation. Knowledge is more integrated and organic than this. Because of this demarcation, vocational schools often receive less funding and struggle to attract top teachers. The social stigmatisation of the students erodes their self-worth, so a re-visioned education will have to change this attitude and give value to it vis-à-vis the colonised and colonial education which privileged mere academic fields. This approach is inclusive education.

Why are so many of our youth disengaged from societal settings, including educational institutions? Many of us are quick to conclude that youth of today are the future and that we (as adults) need to stir them to appropriate ways of social conduct and responsible citizenship. Education is about the search for that future and through it we contest and design futures for ourselves and for others. All generations
INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS

have faced their own challenges and the youth of today are no exception. The task is to know and understand the challenges so that they do not become “rebels without a cause”. It is also important for today’s learners to know that whatever challenges and obstacles they face they are not insurmountable, but only if they accept the responsibility to be creators, initiators and doers to transform our communities. Arguably, what educators put into teaching is what we collectively and eventually reap. In an uncertain world the stakes have not been higher. There are no shortcuts to achieving educational success.

Inclusive education must be well thought out, planned and executed. We can learn from international contexts while not necessarily seeking a wholesale transplant of ideas and practice. Questions of local contexts and histories are significant (see for example, Ali, Mustapha, & Jelas, 2006; Mittler, 2012; Loreman, 2007; Slec, 2006; Vitello & Mithaug, 2013; Zine, 2002; Villa & Thousand, 2005; Pijl, Meijer, & Hegarty, 1997; Singal, 2006; Ainscow, 2005) yet, inclusive educational approaches must incorporate multiple learning methods and experiences. Contemporary educators must find a way to make that critical link of culture, identity, history, pedagogy, instruction, and education.

Notwithstanding the many noted strengths, creativity and resourcefulness of today’s youth, one often hears the popular refrain “today’s youth are a lost generation”, an assertion that not everyone agrees with but one that does reflect a growing concern for a youth that is sceptical of authority and eldership, and not interested in culture, tradition or the past. As educators, we must ask ourselves how we are imparting knowledge to youth so that they can identify with and engage as part of their everyday living, how youth have found themselves to be inclusive within our educational institutions, how we have grounded them in their cultures and histories as part of their educational journeys and how education has equipped them with the skills and capabilities to actualise their ambitions, hopes and desires.

No one can duck these questions. While not casting aside the disempowering aspects of culture and tradition it is foolhardy to be overly dismissive of culture and tradition. We need to educate young learners to be critical of all knowledge. We argue that education is partly to blame for the inability to translate what is taught into more concrete and purposeful action that shows true meanings, values and purposes. Critics often point to acts of juvenile delinquency, social violence, disaffection, disengagement and disenchantment as among the most urgent problems of contemporary society, but how do we teach affection, engagement, respect, discipline, and strong character as part of an inclusive strategy for education? Adults cannot escape responsibility for helping youth navigate the challenges of everyday living. With educators, parents and community workers they have particular responsibilities to ensure that the youth are not disengaged or disenchanted with their lives, but rather they have a responsibility to ensure they are socially engaged and responsible members of communities. We can all insist that youth be provided with education to help them not only understand society but also meet their responsibilities and obligations. We need education that gives back hopes to today’s youth. When we fail we cannot blame them.
In the context of the foregoing discussion the question arises as to what type of education youth must receive and what they are to do with it. The least education can do is to restore their lost aspirations. Unfortunately, what we hope for and actually accomplish are not always the same. We need education (like knowledge) to compel action. It should aim to bring personal, collective and social transformation and equip the learner with the skills, knowledge and tools to build and sustain communities and social and physical environments. Education is about teaching and learning responsibly. There are particular knowledges that educators can teach young learners as means to realizing their full potential as members of society, to do with the teachings of community, social belonging, citizenship participation, civic responsibility and collective survival.

Local cultural resource knowledge has implications for critical and oppositional work in schools. Learners can be taught to embrace their cultural knowing, particularly enshrined ideas and principles that espouse the attributes of healthy and sustainable community living where everyone has a sense of belonging (see Zollers, Ramanatha, & Yu, 1999, in other contexts). Educators’ classroom pedagogies and instructional strategies can be effective when inclusive and the pursuit of local cultural knowledge systems by learners can be part of the intellectual project of affirming multi-centric knowledge systems in schools. Learners thus make sense of their worlds and communities differently and are able to interpret their schooling and everyday experiences as they seek healthy sustainable living. In North America this is particularly poignant, given the difficulties schools face with educating an increasingly diverse student population, one marked by complex and competing histories, experiences and social expressions demarcated by race, gender, class, sexual, language, and religious difference. Local knowledge is significant in expressing and supporting the intellectual agency of different communities and subjects. Marginalised youth continually interrogate and utilise relevant knowledge from their home and street cultures, histories, and myriad identities to fashion solutions to daily problems. Such knowledge should be neither discarded nor deemed irrelevant in classroom teachings.

The current discourses of reclaiming knowledge, culture, history and identities of learners have emerged from the need to reflect on past experiences and histories and to utilise locally contextualised cultural knowledge to respond to contemporary problems (see Abdi & Cleghorn, 2005). This does not make a claim to a mythic or romanticised past, but rather realises that the past is part of the present, and that a people’s history and local cultural resource base have roles to play in the search for answers to daily concerns and problems. Furthermore, the assertion of local community voice and knowledge is a necessary exercise in resisting domination and colonial imposition of certain ideas of the privileged. In the context of such readings, local cultural resource knowledge as Indigenous knowledge can be oppositional and counter knowledge to conventional and official school knowledge.

We restrict our work simply to the African school curriculum. As argued elsewhere in a global context (Dei, 2016b), Indigenous philosophies express knowledge
systems, ideas and social values connecting local communities and cultures with the land and surrounding environments. For example, proverbs, cultural stories and mythologies have long been part of Indigenous knowledge systems. Proverbs, in particular, constitute a body of epistemology in African communities connecting questions of culture, society, land, environment, history, and tradition as valid sources of local knowledge. One may question the focus on African Indigenous philosophies or knowledge systems in a discussion of inclusive education, but we believe these have important lessons for all youth, irrespective of their location and context. Our interest or task is not the wholesale transplanting of such knowledges in a global context. We respect questions of the source and contexts, as well as the contentious but critical issues of ownership and appropriation of knowledge remain. While mindful of these issues we are most interested in highlighting particular teachings (as lessons) embedded in such knowledge systems for youth education in a global context (see also Dei, 2014a, b, 2015a).

When the experiences and histories of marginalised groups are denied or devalued in schools there is the need to centre their agency so that learners themselves become subjects of their own histories, stories and experiences. A culture-centred paradigm provides a space for marginalised students to interpret their experiences within their worldviews, rather than being forced to do so through a dominant lens. Within this is also a lesson for the dominant, who must begin to reflect on and appreciate what marginalised cultural perspectives can offer to the education of the learner. While we need to [re]construct an Indigenous identity outside of that which is constructed and imposed within the context of Euro-American hegemony, dominant learners must also critically interrogate their values and cultural frames of references for their omission, negations and blind spots.

As part of our learning objective we are offering suggestions for schools to be inclusive not only of the bodies (students, staff and faculty) who populate them, but also of the ideas, teachings and knowledge systems that are legitimised as worthy of pursuit. We are bringing an understanding to inclusivity that is holistic and incorporating of diversity and difference as sites of power and identity. We are offering a counter-visioning of schooling that makes a radical departure grounded on an Indigenous worldview that articulates the nexus of society, culture and nature to offer critical teachings of the land, environments, cultures and peoples. Before proceeding we share the theoretical structure with which we are operating.

Conceptualised as a prism, inclusive education affirms the role and power of local cultural knowledge to subvert such internalised colonial hierarchies of schooling by centring values such as social justice, equity, fairness, resistance and collective responsibility in the education of the learner. While not negating the importance of such values and their place in the school system it is maintained that currently, as can be witnessed in our schools, these values are about the individual learner and individualism. They may not be inclusive enough and do not necessarily create communities of learners/learning communities with social responsibilities. These values do not place emphasis on multiple ways of knowing, yet it is these latter
expressions, such as community building and community of learners, which are the hallmark of an inclusive schooling environment in which all learners, educators, administrators, parents and community workers develop a sense of shared belonging, pride and ownership, and see themselves as having valuable contributions to make to benefit all. This is what schooling should be about, i.e., creating communities of learners with shared responsibilities for the success of all.

THE CHAPTERS

Bringing interesting and diverse perspectives to inclusion in an African context, the chapters presented in this book mark a departure from conventional thinking about what inclusive education means in African contexts. In her theoretical discussion focusing on *Epistemologies of Inclusive Education and Critical Reflexivity for Pedagogic Practices in Primary Years (4–11)*, Tchombe makes a case for understanding inclusive epistemologies. Epistemology as a body of knowledge shapes educational practice. It is noted that epistemologies of inclusion traditionally emerged from differently held views about special education that focused more on disabilities. Accordingly, inclusion became a philosophy that ensured that pupils with disabilities were included in regular classrooms, whether or not they could meet traditional curriculum standards. However, this approach has only presented educators with a limited scope for inclusion by focusing on those with disabilities and difficulties and neglecting other disadvantaged groups. To rethink inclusion we need a reconceptualisation of educational practice. Tchombe argues for a clear epistemology of inclusive education, as well as associated pedagogic practices derived from the understanding that disability discourse is on a different developmental path and should not be based on a deficit hypothesis. Using lessons from the impressionable years of 4–11 as a focus of her attention, the author believes we need educators who can develop and utilise their transformative pedagogic skills and competences to reform current teacher education programmes. The paper is relevant to the discussion in bringing a broader view to inclusion, highlighting attitudes, values, skills, techniques, as well as the ways the structure of school organisation, curriculum, assessment and teaching strategies are employed to ensure full participation. All of these have major implications for an inclusive education policy.

We must extend the discussion of epistemology to policy, for example, asking: what thinking shaped educational polices about inclusive education policies in Africa? Education policies inform and determine to a large extent the educational approaches pursued in African schools. Specific educational policies and programmes offer some interesting perspectives. In *Creating Rights-Based and Inclusive Schools in South Africa*, Themane looks carefully at the *Charter on Children’s Rights and the Child Friendly Schools* framework, which seeks to advance the question of access and quality education as a lens for the interrogation of inclusive education in South Africa. The chapter calls for a shift from a focus on special education of students
with learning disabilities to address a broader view of inclusion that highlights questions of power and social difference and equity. The three aspects of Child Friendly Schools: (a) a right-based and inclusive school; (b) safety, protective and caring environments; and (c) a gender sensitive school that promotes equity; help ground insights on the need and rationale for a broader view of inclusive education.

In further exploring the dialectics of theory and practice, Mpofu and Molosiwa’s chapter on *Disability and Inclusive Education in Zimbabwe* is an interesting case study. The authors’ examination of the historical and contemporary events influencing disability spaces for learning, teaching and administration of education in Zimbabwe is an important addition to the collection. They propose community participation in education driven from a democratic citizenship perspective rather than one of inclusive education, as an accommodation approach to best represent the development of inclusive learning spaces for learners with disabilities. The question is being increasingly asked as to the possibilities of democratic education, especially for Africa. How can such education empower the continent’s learners to take up their civic responsibilities to nation and community building? Clearly, inclusive schooling environments can help us find answers. The authors argued that inclusive education strategies evolving from a democratic citizenship education perspective can help us better understand the history or evolution of inclusive education spaces in the Zimbabwean education system. A rights-oriented approach to inclusive education following the UN Conventions on disability rights (as human rights) makes for more inclusive learning spaces in the Zimbabwean education system. We need more evidence in support of this thesis and these points to some directions worthy of pursuit. The authors raise important issues relating to conceptualisation of rights education and how conventional approaches arrive at questions of power and equity for groups. While the idea of democratic citizenship education is important, the post-colonial challenges of African education, in which difference has been subsumed under the guise of nation building projects, have been problematic.

The paradox and contradictions in pursuits of inclusive education not guided by an epistemology of knowledge is laid bare by Molosiwa and Mpofu’s case study, *Practices and Opportunities of Inclusive Education in Botswana*, which interrogates contradictory approaches. While it can be argued that inclusive education historically pursued under the different education policies have enhanced schooling outcomes for some, there are pertinent challenges that need addressing if inclusive education is to realise its full potential. For example, it is noted that child-friendly schools and pastoral care contributed immensely to shaping inclusive education practice in most African countries. As signatory to UN conventions, Botswana is mandated by Education For All and the Millennium Development Goals to provide accessible and equitable education opportunities in pursuit of inclusive education, yet in practice the country remains somewhat exclusionary due to its special education approach to teaching and learning, as evident in the existing special schools and classrooms. The authors point out that a special education approach is justifiable, though it can also be contended that it is an antithesis of inclusive education.
A rethinking of inclusive education could therefore be approached from three theoretical perspectives: social constructivism; the socio-cultural; and the community of learning theories; all of which draw upon learner-diversity and how learners support each other as they learn together in inclusive classroom settings. It would be interesting to see how an approach grounded in transformative education can strengthen such perspectives.

Learning together in inclusive classrooms is only productive and consequential if learners are empowered to achieve their full potential. Walton’s chapter, titled Inclusive Education: A Tame Solution to a Wicked Problem? interrogates the ease with which a vision of an educational system accessible to all, fostering participation, enabling belonging, and gaining powerful learning can be achieved. The difficulty is caused by the pervasiveness of exclusionary pressures in entrenched educational systems that have the potential to confound and constrain efforts towards greater inclusivity. While South Africa has policy and legislation to promote access to education for learners, and to secure support for their diverse learning needs, there is still evidence of exclusion from and within schools. This chapter proceeds from the premise that an understanding of the problem of educational exclusion is necessary to ensure that inclusive education is imagined as a reform initiative to promote social justice. Given the complexity and intractability of educational exclusion, the author uses the concept of a ‘wicked problem’ to explore some practices of exclusion in education, with particular, though not exclusive reference to South Africa. ‘Wicked problems’ are conceptualised as complex, dynamic, multi-faceted and intractable. The author argues that, given the complexity of the problem of educational exclusion, we cannot afford a ‘tame’ or watered down idea of inclusive education, that is, an approach to inclusion merely concerned with ways of ‘accommodating’ learners with additional support needs in ordinary classrooms. Instead, inclusive education needs to be a social and political project bold enough to identify and challenge the impediments to meaningful inclusion and requiring the radical changes necessary to ensure quality education for all.

Drawing from Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy, Mahlo’s Rethinking Inclusive Education in an African Context similarly notes how inclusive education continues to be a contentious issue in African schooling. In asserting that it is a relatively new concept, with its focus on special education, she draws attention to a failure to acknowledge difference as a significant site for schooling and education. Schools need to provide education for learners who have been traditionally excluded because of profound learning disabilities in order to enhance learning outcomes for all youth. This it itself is not in doubt but it is a question of whether educators and schools will be inclusive and go beyond the traditional markers. The question of what to do and how is equally critical for understanding the dictates of critical inclusion. This contribution is on some educational environmental factors that maintain and perpetuate social and educational injustice. Clearly, we must address these challenges because they have consequences and implications for envisioned African schooling.
In discussions of inclusive education, language as a key aspect of identity is often the least engaged. Hugo’s *Language as an Excluding Factor in the South African School System* is a much-needed contribution to this collection. The author brings into discussion the question of language as one of the myriad aspects of the learner’s identity that shape schooling and knowledge production. It is noted that language is the vehicle that carries educational content and knowledge. Well-developed language abilities and language skills are essential for learning to take place. Unfortunately, when the issue of the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in the school system is discussed in South Africa the authors observe that “the colonial yoke prevails”. In a South African educational context, the LoLT has become an extrinsic barrier to development and progress at school, even causing a breakdown in learning for some. The author raises several issues surrounding the accessibility to language and the use of the various official languages in the school situation. Hugo also helps shed some light on reasons the LoLT itself can be a barrier excluding some learners from attaining their full potential at school. The intervention of corporate capital in African higher education through privatisation measures has come with a high price, notwithstanding any benefits.

Darko’s paper, *Concealed Market and the Commercialization of Education and its Implication for Inclusivity*, critiques the specific development of market-oriented curricula and research schemes at institutions of higher education, arguing this trend of commercialising educational research and teaching has potential pitfalls in the fight for equity and access to higher education in Africa. Using a Ghanaian case study, the paper highlights a disturbing private hold on the nation’s higher education, with glaring social inequalities along lines of class, gender, religious differences having emerged that impact on the ability of local populations to have equal access to education. Are there implications for rethinking schooling and education for inclusion? What are the lessons for rethinking higher education to ensure that it becomes accessible to everyone? The paper suggests ways of understanding the phenomenon of privatisation to articulate alternatives through an effective strategy of inclusive education. This can only ensure that higher education does not privilege the few in Ghana, with wider significance for the debate on inclusive education in Africa.

As editors we have taken the liberty of including in this collection a few chapters that extend the debate on inclusive schooling beyond the African context. Nyaga’s paper, *New Possibilities for School Curriculum: Praxis of Indigenous Peoples in Kenya*, draws on his academic and experiential knowledge in both Canadian and Kenyan school systems to show why we need a reframed school curriculum for Africa as way to decolonise education. The paper interrogates the power of Western hegemonic systems of knowledge production to define colonial bodies, histories and experiences and to impact educational journeys of young African learners. Nyaga’s experiences with the Kenyan school system leads him to acknowledge the power of Indigenous knowledge and the issues raised have similar implications for pluralistic contexts as borne out of his Canadian educational experience. His paper
demonstrates an ability to tease out possibilities and limitations of the two school systems in a way that leads him to the urgency of promoting inclusive education at levels of classroom practice, teacher’s pedagogy and the critical engagement of texts and other curricular resources.

Using equity as a conceptual lens for educational access, Akanmori’s paper, *A Ghanaian Teacher Evaluates Access and Equity to Education in Canada and Ghana – John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education and the Education for All Initiative*, examines the convergences and divergences in inclusive pursuits in the two contexts. Drawing on her insights and intellectual sojourn in Canada and her exposure to some of the conventional discourses for social inclusion, she highlights the educational and material resource gaps between and among countries as a hindrance to the promotion of global peace and social harmony. The work of John Dewey features prominently in her analysis of the challenges of inclusive education, in particular in understanding the role and implications of education for social development. The discussion has some insights on the way forward for African schooling and education in terms of contemporary broader and structural issues that implicate African education around equity and access, especially the current push for Education for All.

Torres’s chapter, *Transforming Indigenous Curriculum in the Philippines through Indigenous Women’s Knowledge and Practices: A Case Study on Aeta Women Healers*, pinpoints some of the similar challenges one encounters in Africa. She notes how Aeta woman healers’ epistemologies drawn from medical, political, cultural and spiritual resource base have lessons for an approach to inclusion that recognises the saliency of indigeneity. It is opined that the question of whose knowledge counts and how, even in most communities certain knowledges, can be privileged while others are devalued needs to be addressed as part of any approach to inclusive education. The paper is relevant in broadening debates on inclusion to touch on indigeneity and knowledge production. We must understand and respond to the colonial gaze as a strategy to make room for inclusive education through the transformation of the curriculum. Indigenous cultures and their epistemologies offer us important lessons.

**SUMMARY**

As readers engage this text we remind them that inclusive education is not new to African schooling and education. We offer a holistic perspective on inclusion that takes up how questions of local culture, knowledge and Indigenous prisms have been incorporated in schooling and education in various African countries to offer a much broader view of what education is about. The African conception of the family is broad and inclusive, with education having been taken to be more than what goes on in the classroom as traditional African communities have maintained integration of the social, political, cultural, physical and metaphysical.

We have had a knowledge base of holism that sees the individual as a sum of the integrated parts, just as a community becomes a network of individuals working together rather than in isolation. The school has always been part of the community
and education takes place in the homes, families, churches and workplaces. There has been much dictation between the teacher and the parent, and the success and/or failure of one is the success and/or failure of all. The responsibility for taking care of each other has been ingrained within families and communities, as in effect education has been about a community of learners and schooling has been about a community. Bringing such ideas and epistemologies of understanding to schooling and educational practices can position Africa at the forefront of critical discussions on inclusive education, but we need to restore traditional values and ideas. The individual learner is important but so is the community of which they are part.

While conventional approaches to inclusive education may have focused on assisting those deemed ‘disadvantaged’ or having some physical challenges, we need to develop a much broader view of inclusion, which is about all, and making sure that we address issues of power, privilege and dominance which tend to establish advantage and disadvantage among groups and individuals. All learners go to school with their varied and diverse identities. The challenge is for re-visioned schooling and education in an African context to work with a critical view of such diversity that sees difference both as a site of power and domination and source of strength. When acknowledged in schooling and education we hold possibilities of creating better learners and coming up with equitable and enhanced learning outcomes for everyone.

We began this chapter by asking educators to think laterally about educational inclusion. Clearly, we know there are different perspectives we each bring to the topic of inclusive education, and having such multi-perspectives on inclusion is part of the search for answers. As readers engage with this collection of views we are not merely interested in coming to some agreements but in seeing how the theoretical stance we as editors have taken on pedagogical and communicative issues registers with each of us, whether as educators, learners or community workers. There are different stories to be told about inclusion in Africa and ours are just a few of many. It is a beginning for us but it is not the end. As the Kiembu of Kenya say, “One step marks the end of a long journey”.

REFERENCES


INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS


1. EPISTEMOLOGIES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY FOR PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES IN PRIMARY YEARS (4–11)

ABSTRACT

Epistemologies of inclusion emerged from views about special education that, although different, all focused on disabilities. Accordingly, inclusion emerged as a philosophy that ensured pupils with disabilities would be included in regular classrooms, whether or not they could meet traditional curriculum standards. The limited scope ascribed to inclusion, by focusing only on those with disabilities and difficulties, neglected other disadvantaged groups. Inclusion is about managing diversity, thus the whole school philosophy. With a clear epistemology of inclusive education, pedagogic practices should be derived from an understanding that disability emerges from a different developmental path and should not be based on a deficit hypothesis. Focusing on the impressionable years of 4–11 is important, as this is a significant phase in child development that is crucial for identifying such difference. To achieve the goal of inclusive education therefore requires teachers with transformative pedagogic skills and competences that can only be achieved through reforms in current teacher education programmes. Teachers with an inclusive profile should be critically reflexive in their pedagogic practices. To develop the required competences, the education disciplines must be taught in ways that will address attitudes, values, skills, techniques, beliefs and knowledge, ensuring that these are linked to specific and generic pedagogic competences. Schools are expected to adapt and change in order to embrace inclusive competences as they reflect on their values, address the structure of school organisation, curriculum, assessment and teaching strategies in order to ensure full participation. All of these have major implications for an inclusive education policy.

Keywords: diversity, epistemologies of inclusion, pedagogy, critical reflexivity, belonging, transformative teacher.

INTRODUCTION

The nature of knowledge and how it is constructed and validated (Brophy, 2006; Kirschner, 2009), epistemology can also be defined as how we come about knowing (Scanlan, 2005), providing a context in which to consider the rules and standards.
that organise perceptions, ways of responding to the world, and the concept of self (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998). For this reason it can be seen as the knowledge one holds about a situation or issue and how it impacts and orients thinking about practice. This chapter examines how different types of knowledge about inclusion were constructed and how they highlighted more issues related to special needs education. It traces how the evolution of the concept of inclusion has evolved as a response to the growing demands to address critical social issues related to access, quality, equity, social justice, and acceptance in education and schools. This is critical, as inclusion has from the beginning been concerned with ensuring that pupils with disabilities are included in regular schools. To ensure full participation, they are expected to rethink their values, address their structures, and restructure the curriculum and assessment procedures. The essence is to ensure that all challenges to learning be removed through reviewing the teaching strategies. Understanding the expectations of inclusion from the different epistemologies of inclusion should orient thinking and action necessary to address the whole school philosophy for full inclusive practices. Held knowledge and beliefs about any situation determine how it is managed. Inclusive education is also seen as a consequence of globalisation because it raises great concern about quality and equity, including relevance in education. The aforementioned does not encourage only access and participation with the end product in view, being attainment, but rather the major concern is the extent to which education focuses on learning and outcomes. Inclusive practices can greatly contribute to quality education and ensure equity in classroom participation, addressing cognitive and other self-reliant skills for enhanced self-realisation and greater productivity. On this account, inclusive education can be seen as an important aspect of social inclusion.

Inclusive education, for most policymakers and educationists, accommodates the disabled, those with difficulties, the talented and gifted in regular schools. In some cases, inclusion is about having all children with different disabilities in a class in a special school. The basic premise for inclusion can be identified in the tri-partite categorisation system of ISCED-97, with category A comprising learners whose disabilities have clear biological causes; category B those who are experiencing learning difficulties for no particular reason; and category C those who have difficulties arising from disadvantages caused by socio-cultural factors. The whole school philosophy therefore means all A, B and C as categories found in most classrooms. Even so, in some if not most cases inclusion is still seen only within the context of admitting children with special education needs in regular schools. Thus, disability is seen from a deficit model perspective with special difficulties perceived as a ‘disease’ within the child. Insistence on inclusion as acceptance of pupils with disabilities is still the major concern of inclusion. Of importance here is the engagement of pedagogical practices that ought to address all learners, irrespective of their developmental status, especially those with qualitatively different frames of mind.

Inclusion therefore is about people and society, valuing diversity and overcoming barriers (Topping, 2012) as a dynamic and continuous process. Diversity, a central
element, is not limited to children with different forms of disabilities that are visible (visual, auditory, learning, autism, handicap). The most neglected category is C, children in disadvantaged situations, created by socio-cultural context, such as those with language barriers, orphans, different ethnic groups, immigrants, albinos, pygmies, displaced, religious groups, and street children. In the case of gender and sexuality. For example, in the case of gender, in classroom processes, teachers may marginalise female students, often addressing only low order cognitive questions to female students rather than reinforcing their efforts as they commonly do for the male students (Tchombe, 2014a).

The way society is constructed can lead to different forms of restriction for certain groups, denying them equal opportunity to participate in all life events in their communities. Disability can be seen as a social construct that varies across cultures in the same way as gender, ethnicity and religion, for example. The point remains that inclusive education means accommodating children from remote and nomadic populations, from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and from other disadvantaged or marginalised circumstances in regular education. There are some common challenges that affect the inclusion of all learners in regular schools, related partly to the environment, practices, resources, values and attitudes of the community. If the purpose of education is to engage children in worthwhile learning activities and processes for the development of their competences the facilitating role of the teacher is an important element. Addressing teachers’ critical reflexivity requires those who are well trained to be innovative, creative, imaginative, analytic and action-oriented, and to work with all those concerned using an inclusive pedagogy that focuses on process. Through the process learners become more creative and analytical.

Teachers whose teaching is process-oriented base their reflections and actions on sound empirical evidence. Evidence-based knowledge and skills enable them to focus their techniques on ensuring that all learners are fully engaged in academic learning. If such learning occurs within the community of learners, positive human values will prevail. By making learners active in their learning, teachers would shift from the “banking” concept of education, which controls the thinking and action, inhibiting their creative power. Each learner, irrespective of his/her status, should be endowed with creative power that must be nurtured, given an enabling learning environment, with triangulated interactions flowing among teacher/pupils, pupils/teacher, and pupils/pupils action (Freire, 1970, p. 77).

It is a truism that there is a relationship between teachers’ underlying beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning, and about ability and disability. The philosophy and theoretical framework guiding general pedagogic practices of inclusion stem from constructivism and social constructivism, with each partner in the teaching and learning process counting. Each learner is a co-constructor of the knowledge that is being generated and there is mediation through scaffolding directed to all learners (Gandis, 1999; Tudge, 1992).