

READING INCLUSION DIVERGENTLY

Articulations from
Around the World

Edited by Bettina Amrhein
and Srikala Naraian

Series Editor Chris Forlin

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES
ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

VOLUME 19

READING INCLUSION
DIVERGENTLY

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INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION VOLUME 19

**READING INCLUSION
DIVERGENTLY:
ARTICULATIONS FROM
AROUND THE WORLD**

EDITED BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

CONTENTS

<i>About the Editors</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>About the Contributors</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Series Introduction</i>	<i>xvii</i>
<i>Foreword</i>	<i>xxi</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xxv</i>

Theories, Contexts, Practices: Traveling Alongside the Possibilities of ‘Inclusion’	1
<i>Srikala Naraian and Bettina Amrhein</i>	

PART I UNDERSTANDING INCLUSION VIA STRUGGLES AROUND THE WORLD

A World Exposed: A Plaintive Plea for Inclusion	21
<i>Roger Slee</i>	
Historical and International-Comparative Perspectives on Special Needs Assessment Procedures – Current Findings and Potentials for Future Research	35
<i>Till Neuhaus and Michaela Vogt</i>	
Genealogical Critique of Institutionalising ‘Inclusive Education’ in Indonesia	49
<i>Johannes Tschapka and Tri Nawangsari</i>	
Disability Studies, Disability Arts and Students’ Perspectives: New Critical Tools for Inclusive Education	63
<i>Julie Allan</i>	

**PART II
CRITICAL INTERROGATION OF INCLUSIVE
PRACTICES IN LOCAL CONTEXTS**

- Incessant Agitations: Inclusive Education and the Politics of
Disposability** 77
Tamara Handy
- Inclusion and Exclusion in Local Governance:
A Post-Development and Spatial Perspective on a Field Study
from Benin** 93
Eva Bulgrin
- The Struggle for the Power of Interpretation of Inclusive
Education in Germany – Multi-Level Theoretical
Considerations** 109
Bettina Amrhein
- Stifled or Loosened Course of Inclusive Education in Rwanda:
*Interrogating Policy and Practice in Africa*** 127
Evariste Karangwa

**PART III
METHODOLOGICAL/EPISTEMOLOGICAL
COMMITMENTS IN ANALYZING INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION PROCESSES AND PRACTICE**

- Establishing and Maintaining Participatory Elements in
Transnational and Cultural Research Collaboration on Inclusive
Education** 145
Michelle Proyer
- The Notion of Context in International Research on Inclusive
Teaching Practices: Perspectives Derived from Reconstructive
Research Approaches** 157
Simon Reisenbauer and Eva Kleinlein
- Reconstructive Approaches in Inclusive Education:
Methodological Challenges of Normativity and Reification in
International Inclusion Research** 171
Benjamin Badstieber, Julia Gasterstädt and Andreas Köpfer

Stimulating Methodological Innovations in Researching Inclusion: Posthumanism and Disability	187
<i>Srikala Naraiian</i>	

**PART IV
CONCLUSION**

Staying Mindful, Moving With (Un)certainty	203
<i>Bettina Amrhein and Srikala Naraiian</i>	
<i>Index</i>	209

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

The adoption internationally of inclusive practice as the most equitable and all-encompassing approach to education and its relation to compliance with various international Declarations and Conventions underpins the importance of this series for people working at all levels of education and schooling in both developed and less developed countries. There is little doubt that inclusive education is complex and diverse and that there are enormous disparities in understanding and application at both inter- and intracountry levels. A broad perspective on inclusive education throughout this series is taken, encompassing a wide range of contemporary viewpoints, ideas, and research for enabling the development of more inclusive schools, education systems, and communities.

Volumes in this series on *International Perspectives on Inclusive Education* contribute to the academic and professional discourse by providing a collection of philosophies and practices that can be reviewed by considering local, contextual, and cultural situations to assist governments, educators, peripatetic staffs, and other professionals to provide the best education for all children. Each volume in the series focuses on a key aspect of inclusive education and provides critical chapters by contributing leaders in the field who discuss theoretical positions, quality research, and impacts on school and classroom practice. Different volumes address issues relating to the diversity of student need within heterogeneous classrooms and the preparation of teachers and other staffs to work in inclusive schools. Systemic changes and practice in schools encompass a wide perspective of learners to provide ideas on reframing education to ensure that it is inclusive of all. Evidence-based research practices underpin a plethora of suggestions for decision-makers and practitioners, incorporating current ways of thinking about and implementing inclusive education.

While many barriers have been identified that may potentially constrain the implementation of effective inclusive practices, this series aims to identify such key concerns and offer practical and best practice approaches to overcoming them. Adopting a thematic approach for each volume, readers will be able to quickly locate a collection of research and practice related to a topic of interest. By transforming schools into inclusive communities of practice all children can have the opportunity to access and participate in quality and equitable education to enable them to obtain the skills to become contributory global citizens. This series, therefore, is highly recommended to support education decision-makers, practitioners, researchers, and academics, who have a professional interest in the inclusion of children and youth who are potentially marginalizing in inclusive schools and classrooms.

Volume 19 on *Reading Inclusion Divergently: Articulations from around the World* was inadvertently affected in many ways by the international COVID-19 pandemic that occurred from 2020, continued through 2021, and remains with us in 2022. With work commitments fluctuating between face-to-face to online environments, academics and teaching scholars have had to learn to become more flexible and certainly more cognizant of the use of technology to support their work. This has resulted in increased time needed for work preparation, causing in many instances less time for research and the writing of publications. The authors who have contributed to this book stem from a wide range of regions and have experienced enormous diversity in the challenges they have faced to accommodate the needs of all learners during this time. The chapters they have produced are a tribute to their dedication to continuing the dialogue about inclusive education and to ensuring that their own experiences through these unparalleled times are shared globally.

By drawing on research from across the globe, this volume has been able to collate an extraordinary collection of how inclusive education is contextualized and enacted given divergent social and political contexts. Each chapter provides a wealth of information to add to the discourse surrounding what inclusive education is and how it can or should be ratified locally to ensure equity and social justice for all children and youth.

Across the four continents of Africa, Asia, America, and Europe, chapter authors tease out the key issues they experience regarding following the international directives to establish better inclusive practices within the parameters of their own regions. These global reflections lead to a strong debate about the complexity and relational nature of inclusion internationally, while highlighting the continued need for greater flexibility and sustained deliberation regarding the pertinence of applying global models of inclusion to local contexts. Inclusive education is seen as *process* rather than an abstract ideal, with authors providing a wealth of evidence regarding the constantly emerging perspectives needed to be considered to enact effective inclusive educational practices in a changing and diverse world.

The volume concludes with an attempt to provide a practical way forward while acknowledging the enormous multiplicity of situations experienced globally. A transnational approach to understanding inclusive education is proffered. While recognizing that this aim is likely to be one of the most significant international development projects in the social and educational spheres, the complexities of doing so are sensitively examined and analyzed without judgment. An innovative approach is considered by potentially linking a transformational model with a mindful dimension, to ensure the right of all children to a truly inclusive education system that opposes exclusion across all dimensions of diversity.

This volume assembles an excellent collection of alternative models for realizing inclusive education in a global context. These varying approaches identify the need to broaden the dialogue about inclusive education and provide opportunities for critical reflection and future planning in global contexts. I highly recommend this volume as essential reading for all involved in establishing

equitable inclusive educational research and practices at country, systems, and local levels, and as an excellent addition to the *International Perspectives on Inclusive Education* series.

Chris Forlin
Series Editor

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FOREWORD

Globally, the meanings ascribed to inclusive education as a simultaneously pedagogical, social, and political concept are frequently contested, and often complex, yet they must always be contextualized if we are to make sense of them. This is not least because of the complicated relationship of inclusive education to special education, with a long history of community ambivalence, professional dominance, and sociopolitical controversy. The diversity of readings of dynamic conceptualizations of inclusive education and ensuing patterns of practice around the world is the subject of *Reading Inclusion Divergently*. This volume of contributions builds upon dialogue among scholars from diverse cultures and working in different regions, whose contexts of work and study range considerably in their political and pedagogical understandings of inclusive education, equity, and diversity, as of disability and disadvantage. Emphasizing the process of inclusion as well as the dynamics of interpretation, instead of the unidirectional, linear development focus on policy implementation and gaps, the editors and authors position themselves within the broad spectrum of voices of the global inclusion movement that derives its myriad perspectives from academic and policy to practitioner and advocacy-activist communities. The theoretical, methodological, and empirical diversity of these contributions reflects contrasting concepts and institutionalizations of special and inclusive education worldwide; an important undertaking as the rhetoric threatens to become increasingly separated from local school realities.

While special and inclusive education fundamentally reflect societal and educational change, these have also affected change in identifying differences in student bodies and the resulting pedagogical responses. During ongoing educational expansion, from contrasting starting points, schooling has changed quantitatively and qualitatively. Those who participate in special and inclusive education, from students and families to teachers and professionals, have also transformed education and society, especially with regard to understandings of dis/ability. This influence has been increasingly visible in the classifications and categories of dis/ability, and in the organizational forms, from original asylums and special schools and classes established so long ago to today's classrooms that (aspire to) valorize student diversity, which has always been a central challenge of teaching. Yet the (necessary?) existence of such segregated and stigmatizing settings is not everywhere similarly contested, despite the global norm of inclusive education mandated in human rights charters over the past decades. Indeed, such settings are still taken for granted in many contexts – or even bolstered, paradoxically, under the banner of inclusion.

Today, widespread recognition of the importance of education for public and private goods such as equity, emancipation, and participation galvanizes contemporary debates. If special education successfully provided learning opportunities to children previously excluded from schooling completely, in many countries the goal has forcefully shifted to inclusive education, yet there has also been backlash against this idea(l). The paradigm shift has certainly not been universally completed, as many chapters in this volume emphasize, no matter which world region we explore, especially due to widespread disadvantages and institutionalized discrimination that remains endemic. Yet the contributions here not only critique policy designs and multilevel reforms, proposed and ongoing, but mainly provide rich understandings of inclusion and of older and nascent forms of difference in schooling – and the dilemmas that follow. In so doing, these texts generate multidimensional perspectives on what inclusive education is becoming.

Ideally, inclusive settings support all children, regardless of their characteristics, who attend neighborhood schools and are guided in their individual learning processes to reach their learning goals in diverse classrooms. Yet in much of the world, even the most basic supports and services for disadvantaged students or children with disabilities are (completely) lacking, with impairment, poverty, and educational and social exclusion intertwined. Universally, children and youth need support to achieve their learning goals; albeit to varying degrees and at different times – and the responses to these needs are similarly diverse. Traditionally, special education has provided additional support for the heterogeneous group of learners perceived as having ‘special educational needs’ or labeled and grouped in innumerable categories, mainly defined by clinical, legal, and educational professions. The academic discourse of disability studies in education points out forcefully the danger of these often deficit-oriented categories and classifications and the legitimated, though questionable, diagnostics that especially clinical professions have often applied, pushing pedagogical considerations to the background. Attempting to make sense of global similarities as well as persistent cross-national and intercultural differences in special and inclusive education requires different approaches, as these contributions emphasize. Comparative and international education research, more than ever, should take on the challenge of explaining variation within and between national contexts in ‘inclusive education’ – and the resulting consequences for students and social groups. Thus, this volume’s contributions provide welcome additions to the literature.

Structured in several sections, *Reading Inclusion Divergently* begins with chapters aiming to understand inclusion as a project devoted to achieving equity and attaining social justice in divergent contexts affected by cultural, politico-legal, and socioeconomic factors. Here, challenges to democracy, rampant ableism, and persistent educational and social inequalities underscore the necessity of education reforms embedded in broader social and political responses, especially to secure human rights. Analyses of such change necessarily embrace history, often long-term colonial and conflict-ridden trajectories that are at once local, national, and global. Inclusive schooling must acknowledge and

respond to these legacies, whether in the existing structures and materials or the processes and practices, such as diagnostics and classification, that reproduce power, stratification, and inequity. Disability studies, and the global disability movement more generally, offer important lessons as they emphasize the necessity of participatory and emancipatory approaches across the disciplines and fields, including the arts.

Other readings offer critical interrogations of inclusive practices in diverse local contexts and in so doing deepen our knowledge of the range of struggles facing inclusion initiatives, from teachers' discriminatory practices to associations and other corporate groups' roles and influences in maintaining the status quo to the subversion of inclusive goals via narrow or contradictory interpretations of inclusion. Everywhere, education systems require transformation to be fully inclusive, but how to define and reach that goal is an urgent undertaking; one that remains contentious.

Epistemologically and methodologically, the assembled analyses of inclusive education are varied in their approaches to complex and shifting conceptualizations. By contrast, the contributions together clearly mark the importance of transnational and transcultural research, whether viewed from a bird's-eye or participatory face-to-face perspective. Here, collaboration, including joint interpretation across boundaries – cultural, disciplinary, epistemological, and methodological – is essential to develop shared understandings and valid reconstructions across contexts. Bringing together voices from the Global North and Global South and at various levels of analysis, this book facilitates a rich and important dialogue, showing pathways to fuller understandings of the worldwide discourses and dialectics of inclusive education.

Justin J.W. Powell

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We are deeply grateful to all of the contributors to this book who worked through the difficult conditions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and its rippling effects on personal and professional lives. We appreciate their recognition of this text as important for the continued spread of inclusive education in the world. Our own understandings have been enriched by their perspectives and commitments to the aims of this book.

We are thankful to the resources provided by the University of Bielefeld to assist us in this project. We are particularly grateful to Eva Kleinlein and Felix Steggemann who have supported this project in numerous ways and without whose meticulous help this book could not have come to fruition.

We would also like to express our sincere thanks to the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, whose financial contribution made the International Conference at Bielefeld University possible in the first place as the starting point for the present book project.

We would like to acknowledge Chris Forlin for her patience and encouragement throughout the process as it moved through periods of varying levels of intensity. We are thankful to the entire team at Emerald Publishing that has helped us take the book to publication.

Finally, we would like to take this moment to express our thankfulness to the community of scholars and practitioners everywhere who advocate for equitable and just schooling for children from minoritized communities, and particularly students with disabilities. Their commitments to this work sustain our own.

We hope that this book will be widely distributed, especially in the field of teacher education internationally. The book is also meant to be a conversation starter for all the actors who are doing innovative work in this area. Please contact us in any way you can. We look forward to the exchange and future joint projects.

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THEORIES, CONTEXTS, PRACTICES: TRAVELING ALONGSIDE THE POSSIBILITIES OF ‘INCLUSION’

Srikala Naraian and Bettina Amrhein

ABSTRACT

This chapter lays out the conceptual foundations for this book. Grounded in the tradition of disability studies, the authors describe their orientation to ‘inclusion’ and the entangled institutions of general and special education. They explain their attachment to the many ‘articulations’ of inclusive practices rather than engage in discourses of ‘implementation’ which inadvertently divide world regions. In doing so, they briefly trace the evolution of inclusion as a global concept and its relation to conditions in different parts of the world. They subsequently offer an introduction to the different chapters in the book.

Keywords: Disability studies; inclusion; inclusive education; articulations; Global North and South; intersectionality

Around the world, inclusive education continues to remain entangled within ecologies of practice that have resulted in blurred meanings. Such meanings inevitably register varying degrees of (dis)connections with the institutions of general and special education. Not surprisingly, inclusion as an ideal and as an objective remains protected, contested, diluted, malleable, vulnerable, intractable and frequently, just plain rhetorical. As ideals and contexts move alongside each other in all their socio-economic, cultural and political complexity, many of us worry about how to negotiate understandings of inclusion and how to continue serving as its advocates. At a time when social inequities have been made more glaringly visible by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have to wonder who in the world benefits from our theories and why/why not? How can we as researchers

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recognise and work with/against conditions that move us and our participants in more inclusive directions? How do we ourselves remain enfolded within processes of change?

While this book does not claim to answer all these questions, we do see them as animating its purpose. We consider this book as an urgently needed and long overdue intervention into commonly prevalent discourses of inclusion that are premised on static conceptions. In particular, we want to be mindful of not presuming a unidirectional flow of knowledge about inclusion from the Global North to the South (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2011; Walton). We cannot any longer ignore the fact, that the spread of inclusion is tied to multi-national agreements and that many countries, particularly in the Global South, have been required to take it up in pre-determined ways (Marshall, 2012). We seek, therefore, to be cautious about Eurocentric assumptions within notions of inclusion and instead privilege the perspectives of local agents/agencies (Connell, 2007; Meekosha, 2011). By acknowledging the priorities within regional contexts embedded within development activity, the book hopes to expand understandings of inclusive processes across Northern/Southern contexts.

In pursuing our vision for this book, we sought to avoid a 'tourist' model of inquiry (Mohanty, 2013) whereby we document each country's experience as though they could be considered separately from other regions. Such a model isolates struggles and successes such that the interrelatedness between geographic regions remains obscured. We grow accustomed to inquiries into 'inclusion' in far corners of the world while still remaining enclosed within our own. The trans-national processes that bind us at multiple levels are obscured in regional stories of inclusion that are nonetheless affixed to pre-given, static notions of inclusion. In seeking to avoid perpetuating that model, we encouraged our authors towards inquiries that illustrate the process of transitioning to inclusive practices such that inclusion is seen as an ongoing affair rather than as the pursuit of an abstract ideal. This means documenting the dilemmas and struggles within such efforts to better understand the significance of learnings that are produced therein and the new forms of difference that may be generated.

By recognising processes within diverse sociocultural contexts as significant to understanding inclusion, this book re-evaluates concepts, seeks new theoretical and methodological directions, and explores learnings from emergent cultural processes. We reject the uni-directional, linear conceptualisations of development implied in the term 'implementation' which posits some as transmitters of knowledge and others as passive receivers. In that regard, we question the phenomenon of an 'implementation gap' in inclusive education that has been used to characterise states of inclusion in various regions. A 'gap' theory serves to merely place some national contexts in competition with others producing hierarchies among those who are 'ahead' or 'behind' and between 'good' or 'bad' inclusive practices/models. The chapters in this book, therefore, are less likely offer up critiques of regional systems and policies to locate their shortcomings as much as review them to understand what else we might all learn about inclusion.

We had originally hoped to invite more southern-based researchers to contribute to this text in the hope of disrupting hierarchised epistemologies of inclusion. However, as it turned out, even as the geographic areas covered within

this book span several continents, our authors themselves are mostly situated in Northern institutions, particularly in Germany. We do worry, along with others, about the dangers of colonialising perspectives of inclusion (Stienstra & Ngyuen). We also note that the proximity, in this case, to the German schooling system has afforded a unique to opportunity to those authors to examine the irreducibility of inclusive education to special education. The risk we take, therefore, is mitigated by our focus on inclusion as *process* rather than an abstract ideal. The authors in this text invite us, from wherever they are located, to consider the need for continually questioning the norms we take for granted that enclose the concept of inclusion and inhibit radical moves towards equitable practices.

1.1 TRANSLATING IDEALS, ARTICULATING POSSIBILITY

We are aware that for many scholars and practitioners alike, inclusion itself has been framed as a ‘disability’ issue, although many inclusive education researchers have advocated for a more expansive meaning that encompasses students from all historically marginalised groups (Ainscow, 2007). We understand inclusion to accommodate both these perspectives. We suggest that the *concept* of disability offers a more helpful lens to understand the experiences of all marginalised schooling communities because of the *ideology of ability* (Siebers, 2008) – and concomitant production of dis/ability – that structures most schooling systems remains widespread around the world today. We are able to then inspect the interweavings of ability and disability in local practice, while always leaving open to scrutiny the normalised practices within which dis/ability comes to take form.

Such interweavings are inevitably the product of divided systems of practice. In most countries *special* education remains unhappily bound with (or mis-recognised as) inclusive education even as *general* education may be minimally affected by legal and political developments related to the former. We see special education, at this historical juncture, as compulsorily embedded within the assemblages that deliver inclusion, even as we reject the former’s fixed-ability, deficit-based orientation. Said differently, aspirations for inclusive education must explicate connections *with* special education. The ambiguity of this stance – these are, after all, divergent frames of coming to know learning and dis/ability – is not lost on us. We seek it intentionally. Our experiences as teachers, teacher-educators and researchers substantiate the futility of securing a purist location where the struggle lies only on one side of the border. We occupy the border ourselves and in risking the dangers of doing so, we follow Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa – to remain at ‘the crossroads’ (1987, p. 102).

The divergent enactments of inclusion currently produced via negotiations between general and special education systems constitute an opportunity to demystify an arguably decontextualised ideal (Singal & Muthukrishna, 2014; Walton, 2018). Research tells us that inclusive schooling requires intentional shifts within and across multiple domains – cultural, political, socio-economic (Kozleski). The means and methods, therefore, by which inclusive schooling has been interpreted and enacted are inevitably characterised by diversity and

struggle (Artiles, Kozleski, & Waitoller, 2011). While some regions seek to make educational policies more disability-inclusive (Carrington et al., 2017), others worry about restrictive opportunities for refugee and/or immigrant students (Gomolla & Radtke, 2009). Each particular category of learners deemed to show evidence of ‘special educational need’ – disabled, refugee, out-of-school, poor, migrant, immigrant – acquires salience within different national contexts through its entanglement in sociopolitical processes unique to that region.

To privilege the unpredictable ‘agentive manoeuvrings’ (Naraaian & Schlessinger, 2018) within these processes on the ground and the myriad intertwined contextual specificities, we follow Stein, Andreotti, Bruce, and Suša (2016) to understand such efforts towards inclusion as ‘articulations’. Articulations may be relevant not only to understand contextual differences between nation-states, but differences *within* them. They refute notions of passive compliance to external norms implicit in notions of *implementation* to disclose, instead, the complex workings of agency across multiple planes. Local agents anywhere actively construct ‘foreign’ ideas to develop degrees of congruence with local beliefs and practices producing ‘a two-way dialogue involving the localization of universal ideas and universalizations of local normative and social frameworks’ (Acharya, 2018, p. 46).

Seeking ‘articulations’ of inclusion affirms the call by scholars in the Global South for a theory of translation, a ‘hermeneutics that makes it possible for the needs, aspirations and practices of a given culture to be understood by another’ (Tikly, 2004, p. 193). This is particularly relevant given that global commitments to address equitable education for children and youth – indeed, the very foundations of a global imaginary itself – remain embedded in histories of colonial expansionism that have left many nation-states economically and politically disadvantaged within the world order (Stein, 2017; Tikly, 2004). Indeed, scholars have argued that the intellectual traditions that underlie social science research have historically adopted colonialising perspectives and continue to do so today (Connell, 2007; Takayama, Sriprakash, & Connell, 2017). Therefore, rather than assess regional efforts towards inclusion against norms established in distant spaces, we are interested in the disclosure of processes of ‘vernacularisation’ that can account for the unequal locations of individuals and institutions who participate in the flow of ideas; the channels through which collective packages of ideas and discourses are communicated translocally; and, the negotiations that occur within and across nation-states (Levitt & Merry, 2009).

Such translations are themselves set against a backdrop of widespread neoliberal discourses which inform the rhetoric of policies stemming from national priorities and/or multinational agreements that represent disability in stereotypical ways (Dingo, 2007; McRuer, 2007). The inevitable danger that lurks alongside translations accomplished under these conditions, therefore, is that by engendering various ‘versions’ of inclusion, the struggle against exclusionary practices may inadvertently be domesticated, or at worst, ignored (Peters, Johnstone, & Ferguson, 2007). As teacher educators ourselves, we know that mitigating this risk calls for teachers to adopt a reflexive orientation towards their practice (Black-Hawkins & Amrhein, 2014; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992).

However, we also acknowledge that such practices of reflexivity can implicate other historically mediated regional processes such as the evolution of the disciplinary foundations of teacher education; reflexivity is itself a materially grounded phenomenon (Naraian, 2016). Without accounting for the lived experiences that take form within multiple overlapping social dimensions, the requirement for reflexivity can serve as a 'posture of domination' (Alarcon, 1991). Struggle, then, is inherent in any articulation of inclusion (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013).

Why do we edit a book on the struggles of inclusion around the world? We want to understand how inclusion *moves* people, places and policies in various regions and what that can teach us about how to advance our goals for equitable schooling. Indeed, the movement of ideas, people and practices is implicit within the concept of inclusion itself (Ainscow, 2016; Booth, 2009; Köpfer, 2020). Still, the beguiling simplicity of the term 'inclusion' has posited global rhetoric against the complexities of actualising its localised production, delivering inclusion as a 'wicked problem', (Walton, 2017). To move beyond characterisations of inclusion as a problem, we think it is important to unravel this 'wickedness' such that our theories move alongside the unpredictability of material worlds.

1.2 PUTTING OUR CONCEPTS AND THEORIES TO WORK ALONGSIDE DIVERSE PRACTICES

We follow meanings of inclusion that have been derived from theorising within the field of disability studies (Gabel, 2002; Taylor, 2006). However, we know that inclusion, as a form of practice, does not always grow out of the insights from this work. While the distinction between ability-based inclusion and a more socio-culturally derived notion has been put forth (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014), we are also interested in other ways that 'practice' intrudes on theories of inclusion. Certainly, this means recognising the very real challenges of enacting inclusion in regions with high levels of poverty, low rates of literacy, high population density and limited resources. However, we would also like to know about the demands the practical negotiation of such conditions place on our theories of inclusion. How can practice in regions, where the feasibility of major transformations of schooling is unlikely, *act* on theories of inclusion developed elsewhere and incorporated within multinational agreements?

In seeing the value of material determinants to our understandings of inclusion, we also want to acknowledge the materiality of intellectual inquiry itself (Hau, 2000) in the knowledge production of inclusion among unevenly resourced nations. For instance, the particular conditions of doing research including the reward and compensation structures in higher education, academic responsibilities, proximity to students, accessibility to journals and databases, and state/federal accountability mandates all index the material context in which inclusive education develops as a theoretical construct (Naraian, 2016). As researchers located within Northern institutions, we understand that our inquiries have

formed with(in) the unique set of affordances and constraints made available therein.

1.2.1 Our Arrival at Articulations of Inclusion

As co-editors, we have traversed different scholarly (and teacherly) journeys to arrive at this juncture. I, Bettina, would describe my journey toward articulations of inclusion as a very long one that has occurred predominantly within the German education system. For me, this process divides into five formative stages. My own school years (1), my training as a teacher (2), my 10 years of work as a teacher in so-called inclusive classes in the German school system (3) my now over 12 years of work as an inclusion researcher and educational scientist (4), and for the last 5 years or so my teaching and research activities internationally.

I grew up in the German education system of the 1980s, which was and is anything but inclusive. After only four years of common elementary school, children and adolescents are divided into three different types of schools at the age of 9. This practice of streaming is deeply rooted in the German education system and it is not too pessimistic to claim that the widespread school practice of ability labelling will dissolve in the near future. However, since I was one of the students who, with great personal effort, apparently unobtrusively made it through the system successfully, the massive educational inequities remained completely hidden from me during this first phase (1). (2) These also did not become clear to me in the second phase of my approach to articulations of inclusion. As a prospective elementary school teacher, I had nothing to do with special education students in my studies. I also did not get much insight into the topic of learning disabilities, since special education teachers were being trained for this next door. The big awakening came in the third phase (3), in which I was paid to compensate for educational disadvantages as a teacher of a so-called inclusion class. However, I had not learned how to do this in the two previous phases. What followed was a ten-year phase of learning on the job with all the professional ups and downs one can imagine.

It was especially the lows that then let me dive into the fourth phase (4), in which I am currently still. I have now been researching professionalisation and school development processes for over a decade, predominantly in the German education system, which have been given the label of inclusion, especially since 2009. I dived into a fifth phase (5) about five years ago. When I got tired of the national discussion around the topic of inclusion, I started traveling to very different educational systems. What I immediately noticed was that the simplistic idea of implementing inclusion in different educational systems, as described above, especially in the direction from North to South, produced endless misunderstandings and therefore could not contribute to a mutual understanding of this educational idea. The opposite was observed. A few actors dominated the field here without even being aware of it.

I, Srikala, had already experienced a disability rights orientation to practice during my early years as a special educator with an NGO in Chennai, India, before I was certified to teach disabled students in US public schools. My

subsequent gravitation to disability studies therefore seemed a logical progression from my initial encounters of inclusion through families of disabled students in Chennai. Disability theory tapped into the activist leanings that had been nurtured in me back then, even as it congealed my discomfort with existing practices in US schools. Still, my former experiences as a public school teacher and ‘direct service provider’, left me always lodged within the nexus of cherished ideals, school policies, and local practices that would continue to insert itself stubbornly within my subsequent attempts to theorise inclusion.

Most of my research inquiries have taken place within the US and in that regard, one may wonder about my suitability as a co-editor of a text centered on surfacing divergent understandings of inclusion around the world. Yet, it is precisely my epistemological position as a Northern-based researcher of Southern origin that complicates my attachments to the theories that have undergirded disability studies in education. For me, the plurality of epistemologies that disability studies scholars in education in the US and UK have argued for in debates with special educationists (Gallagher, 2006), extends beyond positivist-constructivist boundaries. My affiliation with a Southern context strongly suggested that the experiences of people in these regions bear epistemic significance for understanding inclusion. I have deliberately sought out theories including the writings of US Third World feminisms, critical realism, and posthumanisms that could conceptually ‘stretch’ my role as inquirer whether that was in the US, Germany or in India. In privileging learnings from practice to direct my theoretical explorations, I have shifted continually between ways of knowing that have undoubtedly evoked discomfort but have also been simultaneously generative.

1.2.2 Inclusion: Traveling Through Time, Place and Theory

Disability studies perspectives recognise disability not as an individualised deficit, but as a socially constructed phenomenon resulting from physical, cultural, social, and political barriers that impede the full participation of disabled individuals in society (citations). Inclusive education scholars working from this perspective regard efforts to identify and remediate learning differences in students as illustrating a ‘medical model’ approach that ignores the conditions within which such ‘differences’ were produced (Baglieri & Lavani, 2020). In that regard, while recognising that the impactful Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) still left many questions unanswered (Ainscow, Slee, & Best, 2019) we affirm one of the earliest formal meanings of inclusion within that document: ‘The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have’ (UNESCO, 1994, p. 11). The aim of ‘inclusion’ has been upheld as increasing presence, participation and achievement within schools by eliminating barriers to education for all learners, particularly those affiliated with historically marginalised communities (Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

The structural re-organisation of schools called for by this resolution, while originating in a concern for disabled students, simultaneously served as an

opportunity to actualise the goals of the global commitment to make education available to all children (Peters, 2007; UNESCO, 1990). Said differently, the concept of 'inclusion' as articulated in the Salamanca Statement could both reduce the numbers of out-of-school children and eliminate barriers for participation for many others, particularly children from historically marginalised communities, raising achievement levels for all children in the world. Indeed, recognising the urgency and relevance of inclusive schooling for achieving development goals in education, the most recent renewal of the global commitment to Education for All (EFA) initiated at the 1990 UNESCO Conference in Jomtien, has now come to place inclusive schooling at the center stage of its agenda (UNESCO, 1990, 1994, 2015, 2020).

Still, the complexities of enacting inclusion in various sociocultural contexts have not remained in sync with the expectations of the Salamanca Statement. Increasingly, researchers, particularly in the Global South, have questioned the wholesale application of models of inclusive schooling enshrined in the Salamanca Statement and the meanings of inclusion that predominate within inclusive education research (see for example, Grech, 2011; Karangwa, 2018; Kisanji, 1998; Rambla, Ferrer, Tarabini, & Verger, 2008; Urwick & Elliott, 2010; Walton, 2018). Some of these studies have also critiqued the concept of inclusion for its global ambition (Elder & Foley, 2015). Equally, the contributions of these nations to international conceptualisations of inclusion have not been widely recognised. Not surprisingly, there have been growing calls to re-calibrate understandings of inclusion and its theoretical groundings so that they can still be relevant in regions that bear little resemblance to the socio-economic and socio-political conditions of the North where much of the research in inclusive education has originated (Corcoran, Claiborne, & Whitburn, 2019; Messiou, 2017; Naraian, 2016).

As scholars within the disability studies tradition, we interpret the charge of inclusive schooling as interrogating normalcy and difference in schools such that multiple forms of abilities and disabilities may be valued (Danforth, 2014; Valle & Connor, 2019). We understand inclusive education as a democratic orientation to schooling that is premised on the capability of the educational environment to be hospitable to a range of diverse learners.

We subscribe to the curricular and instructional frameworks developed in the last few decades that can support teachers in creating hospitable classrooms for students with diverse learning profiles (see for e.g., Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Greenstein, 2015; Rose, Meyer, & Hitchcock, 2006). The adoption of these forms of pedagogies emerging largely from research in Northern contexts has also been encouraged and adopted in Southern nations (Biraimah, 2016; LeFanu, 2013; Walton, 2018). What remains less visible in research is how these pedagogies have been appropriated or transformed in the context of localised priorities and material conditions of enactment.

In recent decades, the field of disability studies has seen a renewed interest in materiality and embodiment that have disrupted the simple opposition of the medical and social models of disability (Siebers, 2008; Mitchell, Antebi, & Snyder, 2019). Even as researchers remain suspicious of a reliance of medicalised