



4-1-2007

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Recommended Citation

Keller, Clayton E. and Brock, Barbara L. (2007) "Inclusion Extended: Educators With Disabilities," *Educational Considerations*: Vol. 34: No. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.1203>

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Inclusion Extended: Educators With Disabilities

Clayton E. Keller and Barbara L. Brock, Guest Editors

Although historically the focus of disability-related research in education has centered on special education and the inclusion of students with disabilities, schools also employ teachers, administrators, and other educational personnel who have disabilities. How these educators fare in the workplace is of growing concern. If inclusion of students with disabilities in classrooms is a desirable goal, should not the idea be extended to adults with disabilities? Our response to this question is a resounding “Yes!”

In answer to that question, this special issue has two primary purposes. First is the updating of the published literature on educators with disabilities. The most recent efforts in this area date back almost 20 years to Anderson, Keller, and Karp's *Enhancing Diversity: Educators with Disabilities*, an edited book of scholarly chapters on the recruitment, preparation, employment, and retention of educators with disabilities that included the voices of educators with disabilities.¹ This issue represents the next generation of contributions to this literature. Second is the dissemination of information on educators with disabilities. Previous research literature rarely has been directed to educational administrators, those who play critical roles in either fostering opportunities or perpetuating barriers for educators with disabilities. Principals, supervisors, and superintendents will find particularly useful the research and information covered in this issue in three key areas: (1) experiences of educators with disabilities who work in P-12 schools; (2) improvements needed to accommodate educators with disabilities in these settings; and (3) available resources to assist schools and districts in creating accommodations.

This issue begins with Donald F. Uerling's article, “Federal Legal Protections for Educators with Disabilities,” which summarizes statutory and regulatory provisions relevant to educators with disabilities in the United States under two statutes: § 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and the Americans With Disabilities Act. Uerling provides important guidance for administrators about their roles and responsibilities in hiring, employing, and supporting educators with disabilities.

The next three articles highlight different aspects of the experiences of educators with disabilities. First is Barbara L. Brock's in-depth, qualitative study of 10 educators with disabling illnesses, “The Workplace Experiences of Educators with Disabilities: Insights for School Leaders,” which describes the thoughts, feelings, perspectives, and fears of disabled educators as they construct professional lives. Next, in “An Exploratory Analysis of Employment-Related Experiences of Educators with Learning Disabilities,” Susan A. Vogel, Christopher Murray, Carol Wren, and Pamela B. Adelman present quantitative and qualitative results from their continuing longitudinal research. In the third article of this group, “Adolescent Perceptions of Educators with Physical Challenges,” Marie Beattie focuses not on the experiences of teachers who have physical disabilities but also on the perceptions of secondary level students taught by them. In the final article, “Systems of Support: The Educators with Disabilities Caucus and Mentoring Program,” Polly G. Haselden, Pamela K. De Loach, Jennifer Miller, Monica Campbell, Lynn Boyer, and Nancy Anderson describe a recently developed resource for educators with disabilities. Their article presents the rationale for the program, the development of the caucus and the mentoring program, and lessons learned from the first three mentor-mentee pairs. This national program provides a model for schools and districts to address the needs of new educators with disabilities or experienced educators newly disabled.

In closing, we would like to mention two resources to assist schools, districts, and educators with disabilities. Both emanate from teachers' unions efforts to support members who have disabilities. The United Federation of Teachers Committee for Members Who Are Capably Disabled, located in New York City, provides information, support, and assistance with accommodation requests; holds regular meetings; and has links to a variety of informational resources on its web site.² The United Kingdom's National Union of Teachers (NUT) has done extensive work since 1999 in promoting disability equality policies for teachers with disabilities. Organizationally, these efforts are currently located within its Education and Equal Opportunities Department, this combining disabilities with other groups pursuing equal rights.³ In addition, two NUT publications, although geared to British legal requirements, have much to offer to those in the United States: “Tool Bag for Supporting Disabled Teachers”⁴ and “Our Right to Stay in Work! Making Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled Teachers.”⁵

Our hope is that the articles in this issue will initiate further discussions in the community of educational leaders about ways to foster opportunities for educators with disabilities to make our schools inclusive environments for all.

Endnotes

¹ Ronald J. Anderson, Clayton E. Keller, and Joan M. Karp, ed., *Enhancing Diversity: Educators with Disabilities* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1998).

² United Federation of Teachers, “Capably Disabled Members,” <http://www.uft.org/member/other/capably>.

³ Personal communication from Rosamund McNeil, Principal Officer for Gender and Disability Equality, Education and Equal Opportunities Department, National Union of Teachers, to Clayton Keller, February 27, 2004.

⁴ National Union of Teachers, “Tool Bag for Supporting Disabled Teachers” (London, UK), <http://www.nut.org.uk/resources/pdf/toolbag.pdf>.

⁵ Doug McIvor, “Our Right to Stay in Work!” (London, UK: National Union of Teachers), http://www.nut.org.uk/resources/pdf/Our_rights_disabled.pdf.

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