

Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education

Volume 1
Number 1 *Electronic Journal for Inclusive
Education Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1998)*

Article 5

Spring 1998

Book Reviews: Resources for Creating Inclusive Communities

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Repository Citation

Jantzen, A. E. (1998). Book Reviews: Resources for Creating Inclusive Communities, *Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education*, 1 (1).

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Book Reviews

Resources for Creating Inclusive Communities

Whether you are looking for an article for a study group meeting, working with a committee on a staff development plan, or preparing your school-wide plan for next school year, the topic of inclusion is surely on your list of critical issues. In working on a State Superintendent's grant for preparing principals for inclusive practice, I recently had the opportunity to become familiar with several excellent resources for all of us involved in transforming school settings into truly inclusive communities. If you don't already have the following titles on your close-at-hand bookshelf I would urge you to get an order out immediately.

My copy of Richard Villa and Jacqueline Thousand's book, *Creating an Inclusive School*, published by ASCD in 1995, has taken on the aura of the Velveteen Rabbit it has been so used and loved. This relatively brief text (eight chapters, 180 pages) would be an excellent choice for a study group interested in becoming more knowledgeable about and discussing the issue of inclusion as it pertains to their school setting. Villa and Thousand have brought together in this one text the work of more than a dozen experts on inclusion-related issues. Topics addressed include everything from an historical perspective on special education, to promising practices that foster inclusive education, to a process for adapting curriculum in inclusive classrooms, to a middle chapter (Four, my favorite!) on managing complex change toward inclusive schooling. In addition, the editors include some moving stories told by children, parents, and teachers who have worked to create inclusive schools and classrooms. Their voices are easily understood, difficult to ignore, and create a compelling reason to do a careful reading of the entire text.

So, whether you are looking for a handbook to guide you in your restructuring efforts and plans for staff development, or need a good read for a school-wide study group this may be the book.

Available through:

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

1250 North Pitt Street

Alexandria, VA 22314

Phone: 1-800-933-2231

Email: info@ascd.org

A much more comprehensive (five sections, 400 pages) compilation of articles on inclusion and restructuring is put together by Dorothy and Alan Gartner under the title: *Inclusion and School Reform: Transforming America's Classrooms*. This text, though expensive (\$36.95 from Paul H. Brooks Publishing, 1997), is a quality, in depth, and panoramic view of inclusive education -- past, present, and future. If you could afford to have only one book on the topic of special education and inclusion in your personal and/or school library this would be my pick for you -- I predict that it will become a classic.

The 27 chapters in this well-documented text start with a historical critique of our current separate special education system proceed to an analysis of the societal trends leading to IDEA and inclusive education, and then cover a wide range of current issues from program implementation and classroom supports to court decisions and financing. Because each chapter in *Inclusion* can be read as a stand-

alone piece, I recommend that educators start with the chapters that are most relevant to their interests and practice. School leaders will definitely want to read Chapter 10, "National Overview of Inclusive Education," because it reveals a number of common features in the national movement toward inclusion: the importance of leadership, collaboration across the lines of general and special education, the need for changes in pedagogy and school staffing, and financial issues. Perhaps the greatest "gift" of Lipsky and Gartner's book is that they, along with Villa and Thousand, emphasize the need to align our efforts toward inclusive education with the broader school restructuring movement. In other words, our vision for education in the 21st century must embrace (include) inclusive schools.

Available through:

Brooks Publishing Company

PO Box 10624

Baltimore, MD 21285-0624

Email: custserv@pbrookes.com

A final, and very practical resource that I would like to recommend on the topic of inclusion, is the comprehensive staff development series produced by Jennifer York-Barr, Robi Kronberg, and Mary Beth Doyle, entitled, *Creating Inclusive School Communities*, and produced by Brooks Publishing, 1996. This series is actually a set of activities designed for small groups composed of persons in diverse roles, who can, along with a facilitator, work through the activities at their own pace. Suggestions for setting the stage and framing the activities, along with videos, transparencies, and recommended resources are all included in this almost overwhelming package of five staff development modules.

Indeed, everything except the time needed to carry out such an ambitious staff development plan, is included in the kit. The well-implemented use of this series could result in the formation of a cohesive school-wide team motivated to collaborate in order to create a more inclusive environment. In other words -- well worth the effort and time!

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