

***Condition Critical: Key Principles for  
Equitable and Inclusive Education***

Diana Lawrence-Brown and Mara Sapon-Shevin  
New York: Teachers College Press, 2013

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**Often**, current research in teacher education identifies the increasing linguistic, racial, gender, socio-economic, or (dis)ability diversity of student populations as the impetus of their investigation. While it is critical to research the experiences of traditionally marginalized populations, especially as they pertain to training and supporting new or veteran teachers in the field, there are some concerns with this approach. The primary issue stems from the need to label, or a desire to identify, the norm (whether or not the researcher agrees with it) and the behavior or characteristic that deviates from that norm. In addition, much of this research concerns the importance of opening the perspectives of educators to the various assets and opportunities related to diversity, but not necessarily to the need for educators to strive to be allies to the students, families, and communities they work with, regardless of the various identities or labels those groups may possess. To respond to these questions, Lawrence-Brown and Sapon-Shevin, in their book *Condition Critical: Key Principles for Equitable and Inclusive Education* (2013), address how educators can develop an understanding of concepts of difference or diversity as well as how to enact powerful changes in classroom practice—in other words, act as allies.

*Condition Critical* is a collection of 12 edited chapters, separated into two general topics: understanding (Chapters 1-6) and enacting (Chapters 7-12). These chapters are bookended by work by the two main authors, introducing the personal and professional impetus for the work and summarizing the need for truly inclusive education. The text is geared for teacher educators, as suggested by the activities strategically placed throughout most chapters. In the introduction, Lawrence-Brown identifies eleven ideologies, which are referred to as key principles, to guide the work in preparing or supporting teachers for “equity and excellence in inclusive schools and societies” (p. 1). These principles stem from a rejection of deficit-thinking models; as such, they build upon “culturally-relevant responsive pedagogy” (p. 4) to develop the ability to recognize and value diversity in the classroom setting.

A recurring theme across the first six chapters is a societal need to label differences, particularly as they pertain to identity. The authors of these sections argue that through this need to classify and label individuals, we, as a society, tend to focus on single descriptors, often ignoring the larger holistic view of the person (Sauer, Chapter 3; Slesarasnsky-Poe & García,

Chapter 4). Furthermore, these labels, which carry a value and indicate one's location in the social hierarchy, may encourage educators to have "specific expectations of [a] student's behaviors and academic performance" (Sauer, p. 56). Enhancing this approachable read, the authors conclude each chapter with a "groundwork" example from a parent, a child/adult identified as having special needs, or a teacher. These brief anecdotes highlight the experiences of many, and provide a helpful perspective to support the research.

In the second half of the book, the authors encourage teacher educators to support their preservice or inservice students and teachers to go beyond knowledge gleaned through multicultural or diversity education coursework and critically examine the language and practice that is used for students who are typically identified as diverse. Beyond this, the authors suggest ways to address classroom variation of all kinds through strategies such as Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (see Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2010), Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (see Rose & Meyer, 2006), differentiated instruction (see Tomlinson, 2001), multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), and multicultural education (see Gay, 2003). The authors suggest that combining these concepts into a palette can create a "fluid, living, inclusive classroom" (Connor & Annamma, p. 146).

While the combination of these concepts and strategies may allow for the removal of labels and the identification of best practices, I, a researcher in UDL and sheltered instruction, would argue that some concepts might fundamentally disagree with one another (UDL and multiple intelligences, for one) and that this tension can lead to greater barriers to equity in practice. Yet, there is great value in preparing teachers to develop a collection of approaches that do not pigeonhole students or the practices that should be used. Connor and Annamma (Chapter 8) caution that educators who have not "unpacked harmful and misleading notions of the norm" (p. 134) tend to have a flawed understanding of difference versus deficit. Similarly, Skoning and Henn-Reinke (Chapter 7) reinforce the necessity of building communities within inclusive settings, which is deeply rooted in the culture of both a classroom and a school at large. These frameworks, therefore, can be supportive as educators continue to build their knowledge and implementation of inclusive practices.

This text is an exceptional example of connecting theory to practice. As the structure of the book builds from the first half to the second half, teacher educators can strategically build knowledge, understanding, and—ideally—action in their preservice or inservice teachers. Through this structure, Lawrence-Brown and Sapon-Shevin are able to provide credence to the goals and purpose of inclusive and equitable educational practices.

## References

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