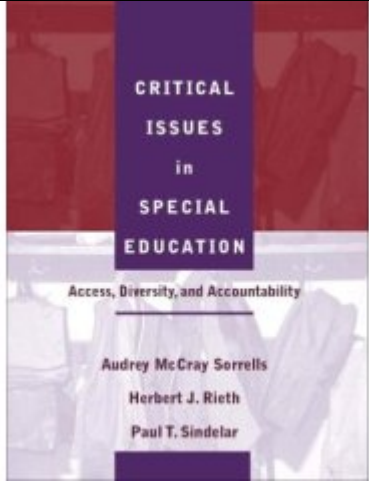


The Reading Matrix
Vol. 6, No. 3, December 2006
5th Anniversary Special Issue — CALL Technologies and the Digital Learner

| | |
|---|--|
| <p><i>Critical Issues in Special Education: Access, Diversity, and Accountability</i> Edited by Audrey McCray Sorrells, Herbert J. Rieth, & Paul T. Sindelar (2004) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Pp. x + 302 ISBN: 0-205-34022-9 Cost: \$65.20 Pearson Education, Inc.</p> |  |
| <p><i>Reviewed by Hajar Khanmohammad</i> <i>Islamic Azad University</i></p> | |

Critical Issues in Special Education is written with the purpose of making the Special Education reform of the “No Child Left Behind Act” understood in relation to students with disabilities and other stakeholders. One of the goals of the book is to address the achievement gap between students with disabilities and those without disabilities. The editors benefit from the contribution of researchers on how children with disabilities receive free appropriate education. What is implied in all the articles covered in the book is that special education is important for those who need special education as well as those who do not. Those who can benefit from the articles include researchers, teacher educators, policy makers, curriculum planners, teachers, parents and children with and without disabilities.

The book is designed in four parts: **Part I** deals generally with foundational issues including five articles on the background, laws, classification, placement, and teacher preparation issues in **Special Education**.

The articles in this part provide the educators with a rich and cohesive history of Special Education, enabling them to differentiate between the two concepts of “disability” and “handicap” in the domain of special education. They will know about the rights of children with disabilities, and how the growth of genetic science and ethical issues will help the implementation of human power in education, generally, and in special education, specifically, as future considerations in the field.

Curriculum designers and policy makers will know about the legal issues of Special Education, historical developments leading to the passage of Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), and ways to protect the rights of children with disabilities. By providing a framework for observation, evaluation, and development of appropriate procedures for classifying students with disabilities, the writers help educational decision makers consider the increasing number of minority students in schools with idiosyncratic problems, providing a systematic means of accounting for said problems. The elaborations made on the legal issues, psychological research,

and social science perspectives can help educators extend the placement of children in general education classrooms to placing them in institutionalized settings.

The other important issue discussed in this part is how to raise policy makers' consciousness about the students with disabilities who come from culturally diverse backgrounds with the purpose of restructuring the schools and educational institutes to give equitable learning opportunities to all social classes and racial groups. This part also highlights the importance of teacher education as a system for supporting teachers.

Part II, which is the largest part of the book, includes eight articles dealing with challenges in early intervention, assessment with the purpose of improvement in student learning, instructional interventions, sustainability of research-based practices, behavioral interventions, transitions, the technologies applied in teaching, and the interfaces between rehabilitation and special education.

In this part, curriculum designers can learn about the goals of Early Intervention, including the changing role of service providers to teachers in homes, childcare centers, hospitals, preschools, and other environments. This part includes recommendations on training service providers to give services to children and their families, and on providing in- and pre-service professional courses for young children with disabilities in their natural settings. It also indicates that policy makers and educators should make sure that a systematic assessment of students' progress with simple, reliable and valid measures is implemented under the name of Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM). The articles refer to the research findings on the positive effects of the CBM on the outcomes of assessment, despite the fact that the procedure is not widely used in the system.

Instructors are another group of people who can benefit from this part by obtaining information about the development and refinement of the instructional intervention, which seems necessary because of the increase in the number of students with disabilities. Instructional intervention, according to the authors, makes the provision of different levels of instruction in general education classes and an accountability testing possible and necessary. This on the whole requires teachers to adopt approaches to increase student engagement in learning, to ameliorate learning difficulties, and to maximize learning outcomes for students with disabilities. Teachers will also be informed about the importance of using computer-based instruction, peer-assisted learning, phonemic awareness instruction, verbal math problem solving, and strategies for enhancing essay writing, among other innovations, on the basis of research findings. The other important concept for teachers is to learn about advances made in current practices in classrooms, clinics, and treatment programs for children with Emotional Behavioral Disorders.

Part III includes two articles on teacher education, and personnel education and preparation. By reading these articles, policy makers will see how important the supply of special teachers is to meet the demand of the ever-increasing number of students with disabilities. Writers focus on two critical issues to produce an adequate supply of appropriate and qualified teachers: to recruit culturally and linguistically diverse individuals in the Special Education personnel preparation programs and to acquire more research-based knowledge about the impact of teacher education on teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions. This part warns policy makers of the importance of full time leadership faculty because, otherwise, unfulfilled faculty positions will result in

fewer number of academics, fewer number of graduates, and fewer number of teachers and related service providers for that matter, all of which would result in fewer services provided to children. Of course the effectiveness of the suggestion needs to be tested before it is implemented.

Part IV, the shortest part, includes only one article on public policy and the issue of accountability. Policy makers will be informed that the investigation into the efficacy of the IDEA 97 reforms is urgently needed, although few would disagree with the intent of IDEA 97 to improve the educational performance of students with disabilities. As the line between general and special education is becoming increasingly blurred, it is important to redefine and renegotiate the roles of all educators. These are the known assumption in the issue. What is not known and needs more investigation is the role of Special Education to identity whether it can retain its individual identity and rationale, and still fully participate in a reformed system that purports to afford all children an education that is both equitable and excellent.

Critical Issues in Special Education is a valuable collection of articles that provide readers with detailed and impressive information on the diverse Special Education Issues in the U.S., the background, the controversies, and the intervention processes. It can also make the educators in other countries conscious about the issue and what they can do in their own contexts if such an educational plan has not been implemented as yet or if there are problems in the way of the implementation of such plans. The significance of the book lies in the scientific background of the articles with rich list of references. Readers are encouraged to expand research and pedagogy efforts that empower a person with disability to achieve a socially meaningful and educationally effective interaction with the world.

Hajar Khanmohammad is Assistant Professor of English at the Faculty of Foreign Languages in the Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in applied linguistics. Her research interests include Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Second Language Testing, Language Assessment, Curriculum Development, Program Administration, Translation, and Teacher Training. She has published scholarly articles in Iran and abroad on testing, teaching, and translation. She has participated in many conferences on TEFL in Iran and abroad.

Email: fer987295kia@hotmail.com