

Becoming a Great Inclusive Educator (Disability Studies in Education)

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reviewed by [Kate Esposito](#) & [Kimmie Tang](#) January 12, 2016

Title: Becoming a Great Inclusive Educator (Disability Studies in Education)

Author(s): Scot Danforth (Ed.)

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National statistics indicate that more than 6.4 million children and youth with disabilities between 3 and 21 years-of-age received special education services during the 20132014 academic school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In addition, 95% of these students received special education services in public schools, with 61% or more of them said to be highly included80% or more of their school dayin general education classroom settings (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). On one hand, these estimates may be quite positive given the high number of students educated in inclusive settings. On the other, they can be disconcerting because inclusion greatly relies on educators who are ill-prepared to meet the needs of all students, and would prefer not to do inclusion (p. 307).

Scot Danforths

Becoming A Great Inclusive Educator is the 16th volume in the Disabilities Studies Series, edited by Susan L. Gabel and Scot Danforth. Danforth provides teacher practitioners, graduate students, educational researchers, and faculty members with a variety of perspectives that interrogate existing social, political, and educational realities faced by individuals with disabilities. The volume also provides readers with the necessary tools to transform shared educational spaces within which all stakeholders interact (e.g., students, families, teachers, and communities). Danforth offers educators seeking to implement truly inclusive practices a useful path of personal change and the necessary conceptual and practical provisions for the journey (p. 14).

Situating this volume within disability studies provides a valuable theoretical framework from which to operate when seeking to ameliorate educational insufficiencies suffered by students with disabilities. The 22 chapters are organized into three sections: 1) Foundations of Successful Inclusion, 2) The Living Tradition of Inclusive Education Practices, and 3) Narratives of Inclusive Education Struggle and Success. These sections reflect Danforths belief that valiant advocacy, pedagogical competencies, and powerful human connections are intricately tied to successful inclusionary practices.

The first section is steeped in a disability studies perspective, and provides readers with a strong and engaging narrative covering the disability civil rights struggle that still continues today. Danforths review of recent legislative gains and ideologies of ability are meant to serve as a foundationfor the conceptual and ethical challenges of becoming an inclusive educator (p. 20). This foundational knowledge is central to understanding the lived realities of individuals with disabilities and often missing from teacher preparation programs. Danforth posits that purposeful efforts to create access and social acceptance in the general education community for students with disabilities isthe disability rights movement occurring inpublic schools (p. 45). This book is a welcome addition to teacher education programs, especially if schools are to become more socially just and inclusive.

In the next section, Danforth provides a rich tradition of inclusive instructional practices that have been developed by general classroom teachers, special educators, parents, students, and researchers over the past 25 years (p. 98). These well-written chapters offer many useful strategies that teachers can readily implement into their daily classroom practice. For example, Chapter Eight, Encouraging Positive Behavior, encourages readers to think of disabled students as citizens, and brings to light critical questions educators and policy makers need to ask regarding the widely implemented Response To Intervention (RTI) practice. However,

- Kate Esposito
California State University
[E-mail Author](#)
M.C. KATE ESPOSITO is professor, in the Special Education Program in the College of Education at California State University, Dominguez Hills. Dr. Esposito conducts and publishes research in the areas of teacher preparation, inclusion and is currently working on a project specific to creating inclusive educational settings for students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Most recently she co-edited a book entitled *Inclusive Practices for Special Populations in Urban Settings: The Moral Imperative for Social Justice Leadership*. Dr. Esposito has conducted workshops in the areas of bullying, inclusion, Response to Intervention, and complying with special education law. She received her BA and MA from Loyola Marymount University and her PhD from University of Southern California. She holds Multiple Subject and Mild/Moderate Teaching Credentials. Additionally she has served on editorial

Danforth misses a valuable opportunity to question existing school policies that have created the school-to-prison pipeline evident in urban schools. The pipeline warrants greater attention given that schools suspend or expel students who are non-white and suffer from disabilities at significantly higher rates than white students (Cramer, Gonzalez, & Pellegrini-Lafont, 2014; Gowdey, 2015). This volume would benefit from discussing methods to reduce the overrepresentation of students with disabilities in suspension and expulsion rates, and dismantle practices that are destroying the lives of many oppressed K12 learners.

Finally the third section provides readers with personal lived testimonials and perspectives from a broad range of individuals (e.g., parents, teachers, researchers) regarding their experiences with the inclusion movement. Danforth notes that these testimonials are not standardized, cleaned up, and purified (p. 171) but portray the challenges and successes that exist within schools in a raw manner as individuals transform entrenched ideologies and educational practices. In Danforth's words, a story that seemed less germane years ago speaks directly to you in the present moment is not only the power of the stories but the dynamic of the interaction between your stories and these (p. 172). These testimonials are not simple recipes that any person can just pick up and follow as Danforth cautions, but serve as exemplars of the power of human connection. The richness in this approach is the implicit knowledge that some stories will resonate with readers more than others, and may lead to the identification of key elements to support readers' own inclusion journeys. Chapter Eleven's parental perspective is of great value to practitioners given the pivotal role parental involvement plays in the academic achievement of students with disabilities (

Thigpen, Freedberg, & Frey, 2014).

Becoming A Great Inclusive Educator is a rich text that implores readers to continue the work of the disability rights movement within schools. It is well suited for general and special educators, policy makers, researchers, and parents who strive to create socially just, humane, and equitable learning environments truly valuing individuals with disabilities. The books probing questions serve as effective instructional tools that university faculty, professional development leaders, and reading groups can easily implement on the journey to true inclusion.

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- Kimmie Tang
California State University
[E-mail Author](#)
KIMMIE TANG has over 17 years of experience in the area of special education as a teacher, administrator, researcher, consultant, and college faculty. Dr. Tang is currently an adjunct professor at California State University, Dominguez Hills, and Mount St. Marys University, Los Angeles. She was previously an Assistant Professor and Director of K-12 Mild/Moderate Special Education Teacher Preparation Program at Mount St. Marys College (MSMC). Dr. Tang has conducted presentations and workshops in the areas of instructional strategies, inclusion, classroom management, collaboration/teaming, and special education laws. She received her BA from Occidental College, MA from California State University of Dominguez Hills, and doctoral degree from University of Southern California. She holds Special Education Teaching Credentials in Early Childhood, Mild/Moderate, and Moderate/Severe, an Administrative Credential, among other certifications.