

Professor's book outlines how communities can reform education

December 17 2013, by Mike Krings

In the nation's public schools, some students are marginalized based on disabilities or differences, real or perceived. A University of Kansas professor has co-edited and contributed to a new book that explores how students, teachers, parents and community members can recognize the intersections of equity and ability to reform schools to be more inclusive.

Elizabeth Kozleski, professor and chair of the special education department at KU, has edited *Ability, Equity and Culture: Sustaining Inclusive Urban Education Reform* with her co-editor, Kathleen King Thorius, assistant professor of urban special education at Indiana University. Research has long shown that students placed in special education programs and minority students—who are placed in such programs at disproportionately high rates—are often denied access to the best teachers, programs and opportunities for a quality education, which puts them at a disadvantage later in life. Kozleski's research has focused on how to reform schools to break down those established barriers.

"How are schools organized to put people into different groups and how are school districts organized to spin some kids out to the margins? How can we help them to restructure their organizations, policies and practices so that these effects are no longer part of systemic, institutionalized minoritization and marginalization? Those are some of the questions I address," Kozleski said.

The book builds upon research conducted by the National Institute for Urban School Improvement (NIUSI), a 12-year, \$12 million program

Kozleski led that provided leadership for transformation and gathered data from five major urban [school districts](#) across the United States.

Kozleski and Thorius solicited and edited contributions from 17 NIUSI authors and co-authors exploring a range of topics in inclusiveness and school reform. The book is organized into five parts: examining theory and framework for systemic change; centering students and families in urban school reform; teacher efforts in transforming urban learning environments; building and district leaders' roles in urban reform; and intersections of macro, meso and local policies for urban reform. Each chapter balances the roles of research and practice by bringing together teams of researchers and practitioners as co-authors.

Often [students](#) are classified as disabled when their cultural, ethnic and/or experiential differences are misconstrued as disabilities, Kozleski said. Students from outside of the majority culture are often placed in special education programs even though the learning challenges they experience may not come from a pre-existing disability. Students can then fall behind and suffer numerous other negative educational results, since [special education](#) services may not address their learning issues. Kozleski and her colleagues' research in the book seeks to address how policy and practice at classroom, school and district levels can account for the widening diversity of children entering public school systems by increasing systems' capacities to include, support and educate all children together.

"The argument I'm making is that education and inclusivity happens in the center, in the school," Kozleski said. "If we expand the center and eliminate the margins, we will build the kind of networked learning communities that will provide robust education for all in 21st century contexts."

The book addresses increasing understanding among the many levels of

the educational understanding with chapters addressed to topics such as creating youth-adult partnerships for student success and social justice, creating classrooms for all learners, teacher learning in urban schools, the role of the urban principal in leading [school](#) change, educational systems change at the state level and making reform policy stick.

Ultimately the book examines ways to carry out reform as a means to promote inclusiveness by eliminating categorization that complicates and adds to the oppression of marginalized learners, Kozleski said.

"Until we deal with social aspects of how we construct and handle instruction and inclusivity, we're not going to have true equity in our educational system," she said.

Provided by University of Kansas

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