

From the Editor

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To submerge oneself in the world of specific needs, either as a student or merely as a reader, is something like entering a zone where almost everything seemingly has been said, and at the same time, almost everything is yet to be said; where the majority seem to be in agreement, and yet different reasonings coexist. Wordplay aside, the truth is that special education brings with it a centuries-long history, and nonetheless its current conceptualization is fairly recent (Schalock, 1999). Add to this that the roots of special education are deeply interdisciplinary; its evolution can scarcely be understood outside this context. This implies that different disciplines make epistemological contributions, and therefore, use divergent methodologies – sometimes opposing – and the research themes are very broad (Peñafiel & Torres, 2002).

The papers contained in this monograph are nothing other than a precise reflection of this situation. Professionals from different disciplines (mainly from psychology, education and sociology) share these pages, addressing different categories of exceptionality and needs (intellectual giftedness, attention deficit, motor disability, language disabilities, deafness and blindness), all with diverse theoretical and applied approaches.

If there is agreement about anything, it is that the focus should be away from the disability itself and rather on the specific needs that the disability gives rise to, in a given context. For reasons of academic tradition, the preferred setting for studying such needs has been the school, even though there is a tendency to take this further (Ochaita & Espinosa, 2004). In this context, it is widely agreed that the traditional school is unsuitable for addressing heterogeneity and diversity, and there is a need for change in special education (Marchesi, 2001). Universal education is a challenge which has reached differing levels of development in different countries. The paper by Mel Ainscow offers general principles of universal education from the English panorama, where these have been applied over a considerable length of time. By way of contrast, the paper by Leyva describes a different situation, reflecting on how this new model, rising from ICF definitions, is taking shape in the Cuban context.

Another characteristic of the current view is that, from the ecological point of view (Schalock, 1999), the conceptualization of disability extends over the entire school age as a developmental stage and learning context, and focuses on the interaction between the person

and his or her environment. The paper from Tamara Polo and Maria Dolores López takes us to the university setting and physical barriers that students with motor disability must face there, while Alys Young and collaborators focus on the job of giving guidance and direction to parents of deaf children and to practitioners who will work with them, describing the work currently being done in this regard in the United Kingdom. Similarly, from a wholistic viewpoint, several empirical papers seek to relate one area that gives rise to specific needs with other areas, such as the study by Ferrando and collaborators, where relationships between intelligence and creativity are explored, or the article by Juan Moreno and María Rosa Mateos, relating dyslalia and personality, and that of Luz Ramírez and her team, studying different types of memory and ADHD.

Finally, an important part of the research effort in this field is directed toward development of programs, instruments or materials that aid in the detection, evaluation and diagnosis, and intervention with persons with SEN. Along these lines we find the article by Vicente Félix, presenting an updated view of neuropsychological and behavioral evaluation of ADD, and the paper from Pilar Martín, pertaining more to high capacities. Specifically in the line of intervention, Isidoro Candel makes an exhaustive description of the logic underlying development of an early attention program, while Sáez makes a highly interesting contribution bringing in stenography as an aid to children with reading problems. It is furthermore evident that information technologies have become an invaluable tool, as shown in papers from Carmen Hernández and África Borges, describing an interesting program in self-regulated learning, and the original proposal from Tomasa Sánchez and Francisco Salvador, who launch the challenge of creating a communication network among practitioners in the field of visual deficiency.

We would not wish to conclude without expressing deep and sincere gratitude to all the authors for their participation; their combined efforts have been the determining factor in bringing this special issue to our readers.

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