

## **FOREWORD**

The first international Inclusive Education Conference in the Caribbean focused on the theme “Achieving Education for All: Resolving challenges of learning difference, learner diversity and at-risk children and youth”. The idea for this conference had emerged during an informal conversation with a small number of Caribbean scholars at the 2015 AERA Conference in Chicago. The gathering had included Dennis Conrad of SUNY Potsdam, Jerome DeLisle of UWI St Augustine, Stacey Blackman of UWI-Cave Hill, and others who discussed the need for a conference on Inclusive Education. DeLisle proposed that such a conference should also include At-risk youth. Conrad agreed to accept the challenge. When administrators from SUNY’s system office invited faculty to work collaboratively with UWI through its Memorandum of Understanding, Conrad seized the opportunity and sought to bring together Elna Carrington-Blaides (UWI St Augustine), Stacey Blackman of UWI- Cave Hill, and Susan Anderson (UWI-Mona) at a meeting in Jamaica. While, this plan fell through, Conrad and Blackman successfully raised the idea with Carrington-Blaides and others at the UWI School of Education Biennial Conference held in Barbados later that year. From there, they established a small planning committee of interested stakeholders collaboratively and eventually led by Carrington-Blaides [Conference Program Director] and Conrad [Advisor/Project Planning Chair]. Many critical lessons were learned, not the least being the ability of stakeholders to organize and successfully deliver an international conference. The chapters that comprise this special edition represent a celebration of this effort. Faculty, staff, students and volunteers spent many long hours building community and skills and demonstrating resilience and creativity. The local team, led by Carrington-Blaides has much to be proud about.

Trinidad and Tobago, and the Caribbean in general have been striving to address the needs of students with disabilities for close to 40 years. This has transitioned since the 1970’s through support from various local pioneers and philanthropic efforts, voluntary organizations, and international mandates by the United Nations particularly UNESCO. In many ways the World conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand (1990) and the World Education Forum in Dakar (2000) have contributed to an awareness and a resolve by stakeholders and policy makers to support the call of Education for All. While this call seems to be philosophically sound, translating it into practice for countries around the world that are economically, racially, culturally and geopolitically diverse remains a challenge (International Conference Flyer, 2017).

Interestingly enough, achieving Education for All in the 21st Century should be effortless given the ubiquitous nature of technology and the Internet (Inclusive Education Conference Flyer, 2017) that promotes the preponderance and proliferation of distance learning options via Massive Online Open Campuses (MOOC). New pedagogical and andragogical models utilizing Universal Design for Learning, along with policies and legislation that promote, embrace and integrate inclusive practices, should assist with making 'Education for All' a reality. For the people of the Caribbean, it is imperative that we consider the contributions of scholars, whether home grown or from the diaspora, to our regional and local contexts. The efforts of these to meaningfully connect with or contribute to, global contexts for meeting the needs of our diverse and differently-abled learners are laudable.

Although situated in the Caribbean, the conference located the discourse on achieving education for all in an international context. Within the postcolonial world of Caribbean learning communities, diverse presentations from Canada, England, the United States, and Mexico challenged policy makers and practitioners to provide an engaging relevant experience for all learners. Presenters shared research that raised issues with and provided ideas and recommendations for new theoretical and epistemological frameworks. Collectively, these promoted best practices in inclusive and special education and helped to inform clinical, professional, and political priorities in addressing education inequities and facilitating education for all.

In celebrating the accomplishments of scholars, we present this special issue of *Caribbean Curriculum* that comprises the contributions of a select number of manuscripts. We see three emergent themes: Valuing and Preparing Teachers, Support Services, and Responding to Marginalized populations. In valuing and effectively preparing teachers, Geofroy, Ali, Bitu, Barras, Lochan, McLeod and Stephens-James share teachers' views of the learning potential of students from low-income households. Ramsook and Thomas explore the competencies of newly qualified primary school teachers engaging in inclusive practice. Reflecting their teaching context, Carrington-Blaides, Sanderson-Cole, and Laptiste-Francis focus on inclusive teaching and learning at the tertiary level. They aimed to identify approaches that enhance accessibility for learners with special educational needs. A second theme is support services, McCartney illustrates the role of Sign language professionals in facilitating social justice. Maynard and Jules explore how the Pre-service Emerging Reflective Teacher Training (PERTT) Model promotes inclusive education in Barbados. The third strand addressing characteristics and interventions for specific populations

include the work of Skerrit reviewing practices and routines that develop reading proficiency for deaf and hearing impaired and Petit-Hunte's case study of Eric Q, a student with emotional-behavioural difficulties within an inclusive learning community.

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