2014 ANNUAL MEETING PROGRAM

THE POWER OF
EDUCATION RESEARCH
FOR INNOVATION
POLICY AND PRACTICE

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We live in exciting times in education research, where every day new ground is being forged in research design, methodology, instrumentation, and assessment. Questions regarding how people learn, what should be taught by whom, and to what ends remain at the core of our field, enveloped in a “cloud” of new ideas and technologies. In our rapidly changing world it is clearly time to take stock of the value of education research, of how it has spurred innovation, and of its problems and the potential solutions it can provide for improving the learning and well-being of children and adults. The theme for the 2014 Annual Meeting aims to encourage submissions that link the possibilities of education research, recognizing how evidence of varying types can be used for tackling persisting issues in education and for their innovative resolution.

Information is everywhere. How to ensure the veracity of information and evidence, especially in a global knowledge environment, presents a new set of challenges to our education research community. Increasingly, the need for customized learning has been driving the development of new technologies that provide more choices and opportunities for learning. Researchers and commercial vendors are looking to technology to customize learning and devise unique, efficient ways of obtaining data to assess academic progress, remediate problems, address embedded inequalities, and predict future outcomes. There are now multiple ways of obtaining information from social interactions that are both virtual and in-person.

Against this backdrop of technology, education researchers struggle with closing a widening achievement gap between rich and poor students; devising rational systems for measuring teacher quality; sparking creativity and interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; discovering how we learn and interpret content, behaviors, and social settings; seeking more equitable solutions for college access and persistence; assessing the affordances of online learning; and measuring system accountability and human learning with massive data.

Education research has laid a foundation for many of these issues, but they need to be revisited and reworked if we are to make wise, reasonable choices for the education enterprise of today and tomorrow. It is our challenge not only to embrace change and innovate in choosing what problems to study, and how—whether through micro-interactions in classrooms or trends across dozens of large-scale national, state, and district data sets—but also to critically examine and evaluate what has changed, what is changing, and what will likely change the educational futures of all students of all ages, particularly those with limited social and economic resources.

This year we encourage submissions that examine seriously the many changes occurring across education research, from its design to its implementation, in areas where we have had a major stake, such as learning, pedagogy, school systems, higher education, and education inequality. We also encourage submissions that address how we are now conducting and plan to work in an environment vastly different from that of even five years ago. We look forward to receiving your ideas on this theme. We hope to see you all in Philadelphia, that city of brotherly and sisterly love, where we can ring a new bell that reaffirms our pride in being education researchers and our visions for the future.
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**Leading Practices On Workplace Disability Inclusion: An Analysis of Vocational and Career Development.**

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**Objectives**

Disability management studies have recently addressed the issue of matching companies’ productivity goals with the needs of workers through “reasonable accommodation” conceived as an interactive process involving both employee and employer. Our research aims to identify the factors that influence the hiring of disabled people and facilitate inclusion in the workplace. Focusing on a sample of small and medium Italian enterprises, we interviewed employers and employees and analyzed how the process which facilitates or hinders a successful job placement occurs through a sequence of choices and decisions. Moreover, we explored which kinds of “arrangement” promote positive performance of the disabled worker in the company, as well as the way they are designed and implemented.

**Theoretical framework**

If inclusion is full participation of people in society, work is one of the factors that most determine it, in addition to being essential for economic and personal growth. ([Bruyère, Erickson, Ferrentino, 2003](#)). The Italian law (68/99) requires employers to hire a percentage of workers with disabilities. Yet, legislation alone is not enough to ensure effective inclusion in companies. Investigation on this subject has focused on different aspects such as type of work ([Holmqvist, 2009](#)), employers’ characteristics ([Gilbride, 2003](#)) or corporate culture ([Shur, Blank, 2005](#)). Research shows that the main factors affecting the inclusion of disabled people in organizations are personal traits (attributes of the disabled person and the employer), environmental factors, and organizational characteristics such as norms, values, policies, the nature of jobs, and reward systems ([Stone, Colella, 1996](#); [Heerkens, 2004](#)). Disability management analysis has especially focused on the issue of matching companies’ productivity goals with the needs of workers through “reasonable accommodation” conceived of as an interactive process involving both the employee and the employer. Recent studies highlight that employers’ attitudes towards inclusion play a key role in ensuring the successful integration of disabled people in work. The literature emphasizes some important issues:

- **Understanding of disability**: employers can embrace either a “medical” or a “social” model, seeing disability just like a personal problem or, conversely, considering how the environmental aspects (organizational procedures and practices) may “disable” people and affect them ([Barner, Mercier, Shakespeare, 2009](#));
- **Size and type of activities**: the size of the company (i.e. SMEs or large companies) and the type of activities carried out significantly affect the job placement of disabled people (Davidson, 2011);

- **Attitudes**: employers’ attitudes encompass perception of the worker’s profile (type of disability, gender, motivation, and lower qualifications), and presumptions about productivity (lack of productivity or rate of absenteeism) and costs (workplace accommodation, safety expenses, additional duties and responsibilities) (Ren, 2008; Australian Government, 2011);

- **Previous experience**: negative past experiences lead employers to be more reticent; conversely, greater knowledge about disabled people would enhance their hiring prospects, particularly since they constitute a loyal pool of workers. The quality of experience can be mediated by the services (Lyth, 2012).

**Methods**

We adopted a mixed-methods-approach in the investigation, using three instruments:

- A questionnaire sent to all the companies (n=200) that had hired a disabled worker in the past year, aimed at measuring the degree of employer satisfaction related to the experience and testing their willingness to repeat it;

- In-depth interviews with 30 employers and disabled workers during the hiring process to capture the recruitment practices in real time (thus limiting problems of recall in retrospective interviews). The collected data has been analyzed using a phenomenological approach addressed at exploring in detail how participants are making sense of their experience. The results have been subsequently retuned with the participants using the Delphi method to share the interpretation of the data and obtain further details;

- Two longitudinal case studies which offered the opportunity of investigating the various stages of the hiring process and exploring tools which can enable employers to manage in a more conscious way the inclusion of a disabled worker.

**Results and educational significance of the research**

Our inquiry shows that successful job placement involves three main dimension (motivation, matching, and negotiation) and three key factors (worker’s position, expected performance, set-up provided).

Dimensions are:

- **Motivation**: the first dimension concerns the degree of motivation affecting both worker and employer, and producing initial and later expectations and attitudes;

- **Matching**: the perception of mutual needs have to be taken in account by the employer and worker in order to identify a common area of interest and, subsequently, a suitable professional task;
Negotiation: incorporating a worker with disabilities commits the whole organization to start a dynamic process of accommodation through negotiations involving physical environment, work procedures, and colleagues’ awareness about the inclusion policies.

On the other hand, key factors are:

- The worker’s position in the company: best practices show that it is possible to overcome the prejudice which automatically assigns the worker to a marginal job especially designed for a disabled person instead of a role that meets the real needs of the company;
- Responsibilities and expected performance: the performance of disabled people is generally seen as less effective compared to an “able-bodied” worker. However, experienced employers acknowledge that, in terms of performance, disabled workers are often as effective as the average “normal” worker;
- The set-up provided by the employer: the employer can widely encourage the worker’s collaboration and dialogue between his/her needs and those of the company, monitoring location changes and time management, negotiating rules, and providing effective guidance.

The research outcomes offer valuable suggestions about the design of career guidance tools which can provide the organizations the skills required for ensuring a successful job placement for people with disabilities.

References


Philadelphia, April 3-7 2014