

Book Review

## Review of *Voices on the Margins: Inclusive Education at the Intersection of Language, Literacy, and Technology*

Yenda Prado and Mark Warschauer, *Voices on the Margins: Inclusive Education at the Intersection of Language, Literacy, and Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2024)

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**Abstract:** *Voices on the Margins: Inclusive Education at the Intersection of Language, Literacy, and Technology* (MIT Press, 2024) by Yenda Prado and Mark Warschauer presents a compelling ethnographic account of how digital tools can reimagine inclusive schooling through interdependence and social connection. Drawing on a two-year study of a full-inclusion public charter school, the authors demonstrate how technology mediates language and literacy practices, amplifies student voice, and fosters community among culturally and linguistically diverse learners with and without disabilities. Framed within sociocultural and disability studies, the book challenges deficit-based and individualistic models of inclusion, proposing a relational framework that situates digital technologies as catalysts for equity and belonging. Both rigorous and reflective, it contributes significantly to rethinking inclusive education policy, pedagogy, and research in the post-pandemic era of hybrid learning.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Digital Technology, Interdependence, Disability Studies, Language and Literacy, Ethnography

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In *Voices on the Margins*, Yenda Prado and Mark Warschauer offer a penetrating ethnographic portrait of what inclusive schooling can look like when technology, language, and literacy intersect as mutually constitutive practices rather than as discrete domains. Drawing on a multi-year qualitative study of “Future Visions Academy” (FVA)—a pseudonymous full-inclusion public charter school in California—the authors reimagine digital learning through the lens of interdependence, sociocultural theory, and disability studies. The book situates itself within the post-pandemic urgency to rethink education as a site of connectedness rather than remediation. As the authors note, “this was supposed to be a book about technology and literacy, but ... it also became a book about connection” (p. xiii).

At its core, *Voices on the Margins* challenges the residual segregation of students with disabilities in ostensibly “inclusive” systems, where 63 percent of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) still spend at least one-fifth of instructional time in separate settings (p. 4). Prado and Warschauer trace these inequities to a lingering medical-deficit paradigm that locates barriers within students rather than structures. Their social-model framing, informed by disability rights activists such as Mia Mingus and Alice Wong (pp. 9–10), anchors inclusion not in “fitting in” but in *redesigning systems* to value human diversity.

The book's theoretical innovation lies in its framework of interdependence, elaborated in Chapter 8 as a "relational lens for exploring inclusion" (p. 161). This notion reframes assistive and mainstream technologies as tools for collective mediation rather than individual compensation—an insight resonant with Garland-Thomson's (1997) call to revalue dependence as a human norm and with Goodley (2020) who views disability as vital to imagining inclusive futures. The authors' move from independence to interdependence resists neoliberal notions of self-sufficiency that pervade special-education policy.

Equally compelling is their articulation of the *social use approach* to technology. Rejecting technological determinism, they emphasize that "technologies do not place positive or negative impacts on society; people mediate technology use" (p. 10). This resonates with Alper's (2017) analysis of mobile media as "social infrastructure" for disabled youth. At FVA, tools such as iPads, Google Suite accessibility features, and the AAC app Proloquo2Go are not studied as interventions but as mediators of literacy practices and social belonging. The vignette of Tammy, a nonspeaking fourth-grader with Down syndrome who "uses Proloquo2Go on her iPad to collaborate with classmates", captures how technology can function as relational scaffolding—amplifying voice and agency within community rather than simply "giving voice" to the voiceless.

The authors adopt an ethnographic case-study design integrating participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis over two years. The depth of immersion—before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic—allows them to capture the dynamic reconstitution of schooling from physical to hybrid to remote modes. The methodological transparency in Appendix A further strengthens the credibility of findings, detailing recruitment of racially, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse families. Such attention to positionality is ethically important: Prado discloses her identity as a disabled scholar and parent, while both authors locate themselves as practitioners shaped by personal and professional experience.

This reflexivity deepens the epistemic authority of the study. It also aligns with feminist disability methodologies that value standpoint knowledge (Kerschbaum et al., 2022). The explicit acknowledgment that "we were not neutral observers" (p. 9) resists positivist expectations of objectivity and positions research as co-constructed with participants—a move consistent with inclusive and participatory paradigms.

The analytical arc progresses from historical and policy analyses to thick descriptions of classroom practices. Chapter 2's reconstruction of *Contested Models of Inclusive Education* traces the genealogy of inclusion from *Brown v. Board* (1954) through the IDEA (2004) and the Salamanca Statement (1994), situating U.S. debates within global justice movements (pp. 18–21). Yet the authors avoid legalistic narration; they interpret these milestones as cultural negotiations about who is deemed educable. Their critique that "questions of equity and access—who has the right to share space—are at the heart of the struggle" powerfully re-centers inclusion as a moral and political project rather than a technical reform.

Chapter 3's discussion of *Technology-Supported Language and Literacy* synthesizes an impressive range of empirical studies while arguing that technology's true promise lies in fostering *shared meaning* across diverse learners (p. 13). This insight anticipates the ethnographic chapters (4–7), which document how FVA used digital media to sustain community through pandemic-induced isolation. Particularly striking is the depiction of FVA's use of synchronous and asynchronous tools—Zoom, FaceTime, Google Classroom, and YouTube—to sustain relational learning (p. 14). The authors interpret these

adaptations not as temporary accommodations but as prototypes for equitable hybrid schooling.

Chapter 8's theorization of interdependence synthesizes findings across levels—student, teacher, parent, and institutional—arguing that “the true social value of technologies ... is their mediational power to promote interdependence between users” (p. 15). This conceptual shift echoes the UNESCO (2023) Framework on AI and Inclusion, which similarly foregrounds human-centered collaboration over automation. Prado and Warschauer's framework thus contribute a distinctive U.S. counterpart to emerging global discourses on technology-mediated inclusion.

The book situates itself vis-à-vis foundational works by Alper (2017), Cranmer (2020), and Schuelka & Carrington (2021), explicitly noting the scarcity of ethnographic research on *full inclusion* environments (p. 7). By focusing on mainstream and assistive technologies within a single integrated school ecology, Prado and Warschauer fill a significant gap. Their intersectional treatment—linking disability, linguistic diversity, and cultural marginalization—extends Cranmer's (2020) UK-based findings into a U.S. context while foregrounding voices of families of color (p. 12).

Moreover, the authors' sociocultural orientation aligns with Vygotskian traditions that view learning as “social, collaborative, and interdependent” (p. 10). Yet their analytic category of *interdependence* arguably pushes beyond Vygotsky, toward a critical posthuman understanding of networked agency. Technologies here are not neutral mediators but co-participants in distributed cognition—an idea that resonates with the “distributed literacies” framework in contemporary digital-literacy studies.

The book's principal strength lies in its holistic synthesis of theory, policy, and lived experience. Prado and Warschauer move fluidly between the micro (Tammy's iPad use) and macro (UNESCO and NCD reports), creating a rare multi-scalar ethnography. Their narrative weaves empirical observation with affective insight, revealing how inclusive practices are sustained by care, relational labor, and institutional design.

The prose is remarkably accessible for a scholarly volume, reflecting MIT Press's tradition of practitioner-oriented rigor. The appendices, detailing both methodological and technological inventories, serve as practical resources for educators. The discussion of *amplifying student voice* (Chapter 5) exemplifies how LLT (Language, Literacy, Technology) practices can enable agency: “alternative modes of expression allow students to express their voice while developing literacy skills”.

Additionally, the authors' refusal to romanticize inclusion is commendable. They candidly acknowledge tensions—resource limitations, competing priorities, and ideological conflicts—without undermining the aspirational ethos of FVA. The concluding call to “rethink digital technology use through a perspective of interdependence” grounds optimism in practical realism.

Nevertheless, certain limitations temper the book's claims. The single-site design, while methodologically defensible, constrains generalizability—a concern the authors themselves acknowledge. The study's concentration in a relatively well-resourced charter school may underrepresent challenges faced by underfunded public schools, especially in the Global South. A more explicit comparative discussion could have enriched the transnational dialogue initiated in early chapters.

Moreover, the emphasis on qualitative narratives, though powerful, sometimes underplays quantitative outcomes or longitudinal data that policymakers often seek.

Integrating learning-outcome metrics or cross-case triangulation could have bolstered the empirical weight of advocacy claims. The book also lightly touches on teacher professional-development structures, a crucial determinant of sustainable inclusion.

Stylistically, while the narrative fluidity is engaging, the dense layering of theoretical references (from Vygotsky to Mingus) occasionally risks over-conceptualization. Readers new to disability studies might find certain sections abstract without more concrete pedagogical exemplars. Yet such density simultaneously reflects the authors' ambition to bridge multiple discourses—education, linguistics, technology studies, and disability theory.

Beyond its empirical insights, *Voices on the Margins* contributes profoundly to rethinking inclusive education as relational ethics. It situates digital inclusion not as a matter of hardware distribution but of human connection and shared meaning. This aligns with UNESCO's (2023) assertion that "inclusion must be designed into the digital transformation of education from the outset." By positioning interdependence as both a pedagogical and policy principle, Prado and Warschauer open pathways for designing equitable hybrid systems that honor diverse communicative repertoires.

For researchers, the book exemplifies how intersectional ethnography can operationalize disability justice frameworks within educational technology studies. For policymakers, it underscores the need to evaluate inclusion beyond compliance metrics toward *relational outcomes*—belonging, agency, and community participation. For educators, it offers a hopeful yet grounded vision: technology as a medium of care rather than control.

Ultimately, the book's moral force lies in its insistence that inclusion is not an accommodation but a collective practice of democracy. As the authors write, "A comprehensive vision of inclusive education requires a substantive paradigm shift ... in how principles of inclusion have historically played out in public schools" (p. 15). This conviction situates *Voices on the Margins* alongside the most significant contributions to contemporary inclusive-education scholarship.

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