Chapter 1: The Fundamentals of Inclusive Education

Part-time inclusion.

Reverse inclusion.

Inclusion in special subjects.

Inclusion teacher.

Inclusion classroom.

Inclusion student.

Since the term inclusive education was coined by Marsha Forest during a 1987 workshop for families and educators in New Hampshire, people have used it to describe a variety of educational practices that are not authentic inclusion. In an inclusive school, all students

> are presumed competent, are welcomed as valued members of all general education classes and extra-curricular activities in their local schools, fully participate and learn alongside their same age peers in general education instruction based on the general education curriculum, and experience reciprocal social relationships. (TASH, n.d., para. 1)

RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION

This chapter begins by describing the rationale for inclusive education including: social justice and civil rights, legal and regulatory requirements, research on the academic and other benefits for students with and without disabilities, and research showing the positive correlation between the time that students spend in general education and quality of life outcomes after high school. The second part of the chapter describes the core elements of inclusion and the rationale for each.

Social Justice and Civil Rights

The introductory Congressional findings of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 reflect the values- and evidence-based rationale for inclusive education.

> Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society…Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible. (IDEA, 2004, pp. 2, 3)

Least Restrictive Environment Mandate of IDEA

In the final regulations that guide the implementation of IDEA 2004, the term least restrictive environment (LRE) is used to specify the meaning of access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom.

> (1) To the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not handicapped, and (2) That special classes, separate schooling or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, §§ 300.114-300.120)

Although the LRE mandate seems to give a very high priority to general education placement for students with disabilities, in reality, this is far from being achieved, especially for the 84% of students with IDD who still spend the majority of their day outside of a general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Because of the vagueness of the LRE regulations, parents and schools have sought relief from various levels of the U.S. court system, to define LRE for a particular student or class of students. Some of these cases have supported an individual student's inclusion and others have determined that a separate educational environment is the least restrictive. In reviewing these cases there are only four reasons why students should *not* be placed in a general education class, *with the burden placed on the IEP team to justify removal from general education.* Those four reasons are

- lack of educational benefits,
- lack of non-academic benefits,
- negative effect of the child on the teacher and other children, and
- unreasonable cost (Wright's Law, n.d.,, para. 15).

Unacceptable reasons for removing a student from a general education classroom, as described in a variety of guidance documents (South Dakota Department of Education, 2013; Wright's Law, n.d., para. 15), include

- the number and intensity of needed services and supports,
- student's need for extensive curricular modifications,
- student's participation in a state's alternate assessment,
- student's need for behavior support,

- student's reading level,
- student not having the prerequisite skills required by the curriculum being taught,
- student's use of communication or other assistive technologies,
- school's lack of experience with inclusion,
- school's history of placing students in separate programs,
- location of skilled staff in other buildings or classrooms,
- class size, and
- lack of knowledge or skills by staff.

Better Outcomes in Inclusive Environments

Inclusive education is also supported by strong educational research. Using theory, historical research, and empirical literature Jackson, Ryndak, and Wehmeyer made a case for inclusive education as a research based practice and concluded:

> …placement in age- and grade-appropriate general education contexts and having special and general educators team to provide supports and modifications for all students are first-order research based practice, and…the benefits of proven methods of instruction are realized in the long run only when this first step is implemented in the life of a child. (Jackson, Ryndak, & Wehmeyer, 2008/2009, p. 190)

Findings from a large number of research studies show a positive effect of inclusion for students with IDD including

- higher expectations for student learning (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2007);

- heightened engagement, affective demeanor, and participation in integrated social activities (Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 1994);
- improved communication and social skills (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2005; Fisher & Meyer, 2002; McSheehan, Sonnenmeier, & Jorgensen, 2009; Soto, Muller, Hunt, & Goetz, 2001);
- more satisfying and diverse social relationships (Guralnick, Connor, Hammond, Gottman, & Kinnish, 1996);
- optimal access to the general education curriculum (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2010; Wehmeyer & Agran, 2006);
- improved academic outcomes in the areas of literacy and mathematics (Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004; Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013; Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010; Ryndak, Alper, Ward, Storch, & Montgomery, 2010; Ryndak, Morrison, & Sommerstein, 1999);
- better quality Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) (Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992);
- fewer absences from school and referrals for disruptive behavior (Helmstetter, Curry, Brennan, & Sampson-Saul, 1998);
- achievement of more IEP goals (Brinker & Thorpe, 1984); and,
- improved adult outcomes in the areas of post-secondary education, employment, and independence (White & Weiner, 2004).

Research on the impact of inclusion on the performance of students without disabilities has shown either a neutral or positive impact. In a meta-analysis of research

conducted by Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, & Kaplan (2007), 81% of the outcomes reported showed including students with disabilities resulted in either positive or neutral effects for students without disabilities. Theoharis and Causton-Theoharis (2010) found improved educational outcomes for students with and without disabilities when inclusion was the primary school reform.

Other positive effects of inclusion on students without disabilities include

- improved attitudes towards diversity (Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009);
- unique opportunities for learning about prejudice and equity (Fisher, Sax, & Jorgensen, 1998); and,
- increased academic achievement, assignment completion, and classroom participation by students providing peer supports (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997).

The rationale for inclusion is also supported by the fact that no studies conducted since the late 1970s have shown an academic advantage for students with IDD educated in separate settings (Falvey, 2004). In fact, studies have shown some negative effects of separate special education placement (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Orsati, and Cosier, 2011; Fisher, Sax, Rodifer, & Pumpian, 1999; Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992).

CORE ELEMENTS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The core elements of inclusive education are depicted in Figure 1.1 and include a foundation of effective team collaboration and strong administrative leadership, presuming students' competence, welcomed membership in a general education classroom, reciprocal social relationships, full participation in general education instruction and social interactions in the classroom and school community, and learning

of general education academic content along with the skills necessary for participation in an inclusive school and community (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2010).

Insert Figure 1.1 here

Presuming Competence

Imagine you are about to meet for the first time a student who will be coming to your high school next year. You have read her cumulative file and IEP and discovered the following information. Kim is a 16 year old student who has a label of intellectual disability. Recent assessments have determined that her I.Q. is 40 and she has a developmental age of 36 months. She has seizures and sensory processing difficulties. Her motor movements are jerky and uncoordinated, making it difficult for her to get around in small areas, write legibly, or use a computer. She is sensitive to certain environmental stimuli such as bright lights, loud noises, and rough textures. She has no conventional way to communicate; she uses facial expressions, body postures, and occasional vocalizations to express wants, needs, and emotions. When she is frustrated by a task or situation she runs away or sometimes hits herself or others. She does not appear able to read (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2010).

How should this information affect Kim's educational program and future decisions about her life after high school? Should her team assume that these test results, labels, and observations are correct and accurately describe her current abilities and predict her future potential for learning? As her new case manager will you suggest that her educational program reflect academic content from the general education curriculum or that it reflect functional life skills? Do you think she should be in classes

alongside other students with significant disabilities, be fully included in general education classes, or be scheduled for a combination of both?

In order to answer these questions, I suggest that you take a step back and consider the history of education and treatment of people with Kim's profile, flawed assumptions about intelligence and intelligence testing, the meaning of the label of intellectual disability, and the vision that general society and schools in particular have for students like Kim.

Flawed Assumptions

Four flawed assumptions influence people's view of students like Kim and their educational programs.

1. Intelligence is something that can be reliably measured; therefore significantly sub-average intelligence can also be reliably measured.
2. Students who are judged to have significantly sub-average intelligence can't learn much of the general education curriculum, and even if they could why would they need to?
3. Students who can't learn much of the general education curriculum won't benefit from being in general education classes and should be taught functional life skills.
4. When students can't communicate effectively we based our assumptions about what they currently know and what they might be able to learn on whatever communication abilities they may have or lack.

When these assumptions are put into practice, students' educational programs often have the following characteristics.

- Students are not included in general education classes or they are only included in classes such as music or art.
- If students are included in any general education classes they are there only for the social interactions, not to learn academics.
- Students are not provided with a way to communicate about age-appropriate academic or social topics.
- Students who are included part-time in a core academic class are working on skills that are far from the grade-level curriculum or they are learning functional skills such as calling on the next student, washing the lab equipment, passing out papers, and so forth.
- Students are given materials that are so different from their classmates that they find it difficult to work together.
- People talk to students as if they are much younger than their chronological age.
- Students are not supported or are actively discouraged from participating in age-appropriate social activities.
- Planning for students' futures does not include the choice of postsecondary education.
- Career options are geared to lower-skilled jobs or sheltered workshops rather than to jobs in integrated work places based on students' interests.
- Students are expected to live in congregate settings such as group homes rather than in integrated housing with supports.

In recent years, a growing number of researchers, educators, parents, and self-advocates have argued that these educational program options are inappropriate for

students with IDD and that the assumptions underlying such programs are seriously flawed. Let's look at each of the assumptions one by one.

Assumption #1: Intelligence is something that can be reliably measured; therefore significantly sub-average intelligence can also be reliably measured.

In the early 1900's, French psychologist Alfred Binet developed a series of tests to help identify students who were most likely to experience difficulties in school and need specialized assistance. When children's scores were computed, they were assigned a number to indicate their mental age versus their chronological age. Children whose mental age was less than their chronological age were then labelled retarded. However, Binet cautioned against the overuse of the test and said

> Some recent philosophers seem to have given their moral approval to these deplorable verdicts that affirm that the intelligence of an individual is a fixed quantity, a quantity that cannot be augmented. We must protest and react against this brutal pessimism; we will try to demonstrate that it is founded on nothing. (Binet, 1909, p. 141)

Binet did not believe that his test or any other could or should be used to measure a single, permanent, and inborn level of intelligence. He felt that intelligence was far too broad a concept to quantify with a single number, insisting that intelligence was multi-faceted, influenced by many factors other than innate ability, and could change over time with effective education. In the 1920's these tests were modified for use in the United States and they were termed intelligence quotient or I.Q. tests. And so began a history of using I.Q. testing not just for its original purpose, but also for the determining which immigrants would be let into the country ("feebleminded" people need not

apply), which children were eligible for special education services and where they would be educated (low I.Q. = segregated classrooms), and for determining which adults would be placed by the state in institutions (low I.Q. = being a "menace" to society, unable to live and work safely or productively in the community).

Although the debate continues among psychologists, researchers, and others about whether there is such a thing as a general intelligence factor that can be accurately measured, we *do know* without question that the use of I.Q. testing has rarely served to help children gain access to high quality educational services or adults the supports they need to live successfully in the community. Michael Wehmeyer, Professor of Special Education at The University of Kansas, said this about I.Q. tests.

> I would argue that they have been used to determine a person's incapacities and incompetence to determine eligibility for the services and programs created, which of course have been primarily segregated settings. Short of qualifying for gifted and talented services in schools, there are few uses of I.Q. tests that I can come up with that determine capabilities and potential. (M. Wehmeyer, personal communication, June 30, 2014)

Another rationale for extreme caution in using a number like a student's I.Q. score to guide his education program is the results of research on how well I.Q. scores predict student achievement. McGrew and Evans (2004) concluded:

> Given the best available, theoretically and psychometrically sound, nationally standardized, individually administered intelligence test batteries, three statements hold true.

- IQ test scores, under optimal test conditions, account for 40% to 50% of current expected achievement.
- Thus, 50% to 60% of student achievement is related to variables "beyond intelligence."
- For any given IQ test score, half of the students will obtain achievement scores at or below their IQ score. Conversely, and frequently not recognized, is that for any given IQ test score, half of the students will obtain achievement scores at or *above* their IQ score. (p. 6)

Assumption #2: Students who are judged to have significantly sub-average intelligence can't learn much of the general education curriculum, and even if they could why would they need to?

The first part of this assumption has been disproved by many researchers over the last 40 years. Browder and Spooner describe a visit to a local high school and their observations of Lucas, a tenth grader who is labelled with an intellectual disability.

> When we arrive in his language arts class, Lucas has just finished a read-aloud with a peer from a chapter in the novel the class is reading. The teacher is asking about the main character, a young man who has to decide if he is going to be loyal to a friend who tries to manipulate him to do the wrong things. Along with his classmates, Lucas's goal is to form an opinion about whether the main character should trust this friend. Everyone must support their answers using facts from the text. For Lucas, writing will involve selecting some answers from a list of quotes from his chapter summary and dictating others. In math, Lucas is working on transformations on a coordinate plane. The content made no sense to

> him (or to a lot of his classmates) in the prior day's lesson. Today the teacher had the idea to show how characters in video games can be rotated, inverted, and so forth using the coordinates on a plane. The class had fun giving coordinates (e.g., -10, +2) and seeing what happened to their characters. Because Lucas can recognize numbers and understands that there can be both positive and negative numbers, he is able to do some of the transformations with his partner. (Browder & Spooner, 2014, pp. 3, 4)

The expectation that Lucas can and will learn some of the general education curriculum based on the general education standards is a cornerstone of IDEA 2004 and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) that require that students be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum, the same curriculum that is taught to students without disabilities. Furthermore schools are accountable for reporting on the progress of all students towards the achievement of general education curriculum standards, even those students who are judged to have the most significant cognitive disabilities. ESSA allows up to 1% of students in a state to participate in alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards which is a change from the previous allowance in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 that 1% of students' scores at the proficient level could be counted towards a state's annual report to Congress on student achievement. Alternate achievement standards must be "aligned with states' academic content standards, promote access to the general curriculum, and reflect professional judgment of the highest achievement standards possible" (Karger, n.d., p. 18).

So if students judged to have a significant intellectual disability *can* learn the general education curriculum and two federal laws require schools to be accountable for such learning, what is standing in the way of schools eagerly teaching students that curriculum? Parents of students with IDD are sometimes told it is more important for their children to learn functional life skills than academics. To weigh the merits of this argument, consider the functional life skills students with IDD, particularly those in high school life skills classes, are commonly taught such as

- telling time and using money,
- brushing teeth and other personal hygiene tasks,
- getting dressed,
- recognizing safety signs,
- cooking,
- making beds,
- crossing streets, and
- setting the table.

Each of us completes most of these tasks every day (well, perhaps not making one's bed *every* day), so they do seem like important things to learn. But people without disabilities perform these skills *in order to participate in the important things that make up our real lives* – having satisfying relationships, earning a living, enjoying our leisure time, and giving back to our communities. These life skills, do not, in and of themselves, make our lives interesting and productive, yet they form the core of many self-contained educational programs. Life skills are important, but acquiring knowledge and passion for lifelong learning makes our lives interesting and enables us to develop

relationships with others based on common interests. A student with IDD may not learn the whole periodic table of the elements, but enjoying experimentation and discovery may mean a future job in a chemistry lab or at a science museum. A love of Shakespeare might inspire an actor or writer. Learning advanced math may lead to a job for a computer company. Mastering computer skills might lead to a job at Google or one of the many technology companies that are eager to hire individuals with disabilities.

There are literally hundreds of inclusive opportunities to learn the functional skills that make life interesting and rewarding now and in the future such as texting a friend, knowing how to throw a great party, or being part of a sports team and taking pride in victory while being gracious in defeat. The goal of an American education is to educate people to participate in our democracy by understanding the lessons of history, the logic and magic of science and math, the joys of art and music, and the power of words to inspire and communicate. It is not equitable to deny those rights to a group of students who happen to have the IDD label.

Assumption #3: Students who can't learn much of the general education curriculum, including those participating in alternate assessments, won't benefit from being in general education classes.

You can see how these faulty assumptions build on one another and form a seemingly airtight rationale for students to be segregated from their typical peers. Even if I thought that a student couldn't learn any of the general education curriculum, I would still believe – and have 30 years of experience to prove it – that there are benefits to being in general education that are not available anywhere else. Where else do students learn the rules of social engagement better than from being around a diverse

group of peers? We adults may think that a social skills curriculum helps to teach those rules, but I suggest that you hang out with a group of teenagers for an evening to see just how kids communicate and interact with one another. They interrupt to talk about their own interests; often to the exclusion of others; swear and use slang and shorthand indecipherable to grown-ups; and are generally an unruly and sometimes rude bunch of developing human beings. If we want our students with IDD to really fit in inclusive environments the best environment in which to learn fitting in skills is an inclusive classroom in an inclusive school and in the related social activities pursued by all students.

Assumption #4: When students can't communicate effectively we base our assumptions about what they currently know and what they might be able to learn on whatever communication abilities they may have or lack.

In particular we associate being able to talk with being smart and the inability to talk with having an intellectual disability. This may be particularly true for some people with autism who don't speak and who have associated movement and sensory difficulties that make them very poor test-takers. It surely can't be very reliable to give a student with autism an intelligence test if the student doesn't have an effective way to communicate, has difficulty even with the physical movement of pointing, and who may not have had the opportunity to learn from a very young age because of the up-front assumption that he or she had an intellectual disability. This kind of circular reasoning is so harmful to students with IDD labels and it goes like this.

> From the way you talk and move and your past poor performance in school I think that you have an intellectual disability. Just to be sure, we need to give you

> a test that requires you to sit in an unfamiliar room, on an unfamiliar seat, and with an unfamiliar person; and answer a series of questions that you've never heard before that don't seem relevant to anything in your life, and that test skills you've never been taught. When the result comes out that your I.Q. is under 70 I'll base your entire educational career on that number and even influence your living and career options as you transition to adulthood. Because you can't show me reliably that you know words like eat, break, yes, and no, I'll require you to be close to 100% accurate in handing me little cards on which those messages are printed day after day before I give you more complex vocabulary or a higher tech communication device.

I wish that I could say that the above script exaggerates reality, but unfortunately, it is one that I hear in school after school when students are unable to communicate well. This assumption is flawed because we have a growing body of research showing that students can learn literacy skills when they have a means to communicate and are taught and supported well (Biklen & Cardinal, 1997; Broderick & Casa-Hendrickson, 2001; Erickson, Koppenhaver, & Yoder, 2002; Erickson, Koppenhaver, Yoder, & Nance, 1997; Ryndak, Morrison, & Sommerstein, 1999). We have also learned that researchers in the area of autism who make pronouncements about students' intellectual shortcomings may not be as un-biased as they ought to be. Edelson (2006) reviewed 215 research articles published between 1937 and 2003 that proposed that the majority of students with autism had an intellectual disability. She found that 74% of the claims in these papers came from non-empirical (non-scientific) sources, 53% of which never traced back to *any* empirical data. It seems that whole generations of children with

autism have been assumed to have an intellectual disability because researchers passed along unsubstantiated claims for over seven decades.

New Assumptions

So if these four assumptions are faulty and have contributed to the current segregated educational programs for students with IDD, what new assumptions might we make?

- Intelligence is not a single measureable characteristic.
- All students have different talents and skills.
- Students learn best when they feel valued, when people hold high expectations for them, and when they are taught and supported well.
- When students can't currently communicate that they are smart (whatever that means), presume that they are and develop their educational programs based on that assumption.

When I propose these new assumptions some people say "but how can we know that these assumptions are any more accurate than the old ones?" A principle called the least dangerous assumption may help. Anne Donnellan, a respected researcher in special education, wrote

> The criterion of least dangerous assumption holds that in the absence of conclusive data, educational decisions ought to be based on assumptions which, if incorrect, will have the least dangerous effect on the likelihood that students will be able to functional independently as adults. (Donnellan, 1984, p. 142)

Furthermore, she added "we should assume that poor performance is due to instructional inadequacy rather than to student deficits (Donnellan, 1984, p. 147)." Let's consider

how the least dangerous assumption might play out through three scenarios about Kim, the student introduced at the beginning of this section. At the end of each scenario we will use Donnellan's principle of the least dangerous assumption to consider the potential harmfulness of each decision (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2010).

Scenario #1. We presume that Kim is competent to communicate about and learn the general education curriculum.

When developing her educational program we implement the following decisions.

- We teach Kim the general education curriculum in the general education class.
- Her IEP goals reflect general education curriculum content and learning functional skills within inclusive activities such as belonging to clubs and extracurricular activities, working in the school store, having a summer job, and so forth.
- We provide her with an augmentative communication system that includes age-appropriate social and subject-matter vocabulary.
- Her classroom materials reflect the same learning goals as students without disabilities.
- We talk to Kim about current events and other age-appropriate subjects.
- We support her to engage with her classmates in typical social activities.
- We will plan her transition to adult life with choices of post-secondary education, gainful employment, and living in an inclusive setting in the community.

In order to evaluate whether these program decisions are appropriate or have caused harm, we now apply Donnellan’s least dangerous assumption principle. But to

do that we have to transport ourselves to a fictional time in the future when we find out, definitively, what Kim's capacities are and what she learned. Remember that the least dangerous assumption principle requires that we consider the harm that *we might have caused if our initial assumptions were wrong.*

If we meet Kim in the future and learn that the newest brain imaging test shows she is smart, she did learn the general education curriculum we taught her, and she doesn't have an intellectual disability, did any harm come to her because of the educational decisions we made based on our original assumption? No. We made the assumption of competence, it turned out to be correct, and caused her no harm.

Scenario #2: We presume that Kim is competent to communicate about and learn the general education curriculum and develop her educational program based on that assumption.

So far this scenario is the same as Scenario #1. Again, we develop her educational program that looks like it did in the first scenario.

- We teach Kim the general education curriculum in the general education class.
- Her IEP goals reflect general education curriculum content and learning functional skills within inclusive activities such as belonging to clubs and extracurricular activities, working in the school store, having a summer job, and so forth.
- We provide her with an augmentative communication system that includes age-appropriate social and subject-matter vocabulary.
- Her classroom materials reflect the same learning goals as students without disabilities.

- We talk to Kim about current events and other age-appropriate subjects.
- We support her to engage with her classmates in typical social activities.
- We will plan her transition to adult life with choices of post-secondary education, gainful employment, and living in an inclusive setting in the community.

In order to evaluate whether these program decisions based on our assumptions caused harm, we apply Donnellan's least dangerous assumption principle. Again, we transport ourselves to a fictional time in the future when we find out, definitively, what Kim's capacities are and what she learned. This time we find out that the brain imaging test reveals that Kim didn't learn much of the general education curriculum and does have an intellectual disability. And again we ask, did any harm come to her because of the assumptions on which we based our educational decisions? Most people say no. Even though Kim did not learn much of the general education curriculum she did learning functional skills that will help her in her adult life. She was exposed to a rich general education curriculum that may have helped her develop lifelong interests. Her communication skills flourished because she was around competent communicators all day. She had the opportunity to develop friendships with a diverse group of students, not just those with IDD. She had a typical high school experience.

Scenario #3. In this scenario we believe the accuracy of the I.Q. test results and the judgments about her development level and don't presume that she can communicate about or learn much of the general education academic content or benefit from being in general education classes.

What might her educational program look like under this scenario?

- Kim is not included in general education, or if she is, it is for the purpose of socialization and learning some functional skills.
- Her IEP goals focus primarily on communication, movement, self-regulation, self-determination, work skills, and social skills.
- Her communication supports have vocabulary and messages related to her perceived developmental level and enable her to communicate basic wants and needs but not academics.
- We talk to Kim in a way that might be appropriate for a younger student at the same developmental level as the reports indicate.
- We don't support her to engage with her classmates in social activities because we say she is too immature, too naïve, or isn't interested in those kinds of activities.
- We plan a future that might include working in a sheltered setting and living in a congregate facility with other folks who also have IDD.

Now consider whether these decisions caused any harm *if we were wrong about our assumption of Kim not being competent to learn the general education curriculum.* This time, the future brain-imaging test shows that Kim is smart, she could have learned the general education curriculum, and would have benefitted from being included in inclusive social opportunities. Here is what most people say when asked if our incorrect assumptions and educational decisions were harmful.

- We lost an opportunity to teach Kim things she could have learned.
- We didn't include her as much as we could have and she did not develop a wide network of social relationships.

- She wasn't supported to develop communication skills beyond saying "I'm hungry," "I'm thirsty," "I want a break," and so on.
- We negatively influenced her self-esteem by treating her as if she were not smart.
- She missed out on the typical high school experience.
- We narrowed the possibilities for postsecondary education, her future career, and inclusive employment and living arrangements.

Clearly harm was done.

To summarize, I believe that there are five reasons why our least dangerous assumption should be to presume all students' competence and to promote their demonstration of that competence through an inclusive general education program.

First, expectations matter. In their classic book on the influence of teacher expectations on student performance Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) found that students' I.Q. scores increased significantly after a year of being in a classroom where their teachers had been told that their students would blossom, even though there was no empirical evidence to suggest that they would.

Second, traditional assessments of people with disabilities are seriously flawed. Those that purport to measure students' intelligence and adaptive behavior usually measure what they can't do, rather than what they might be able to do with the right supports. It simply isn't ethical or good educational practice to use flawed assessment results when they might negatively influence a student's entire education career and future life options.

Third, research shows that a growing number of students and adults who were labeled "retarded" have shown they are competent when they have a means to

communicate, the opportunity to learn, and the right instructional and technology supports.

Fourth, to presume *incompetence* could result in harm to our students if we are wrong.

And fifth, even if we are wrong about students' capacities to learn general education curriculum content, the consequences to students of *that* incorrect presumption are not as dangerous as the alternative.

Membership

What do you remember about high school? The Pythagorean Theorem? How to convert grams to moles? The source of conflict in Act II of Romeo and Juliet? The pluperfect conjugation of the French irregular verb prendre? If you do remember these academic facts I applaud your memory. But I bet that more of us remember things like who we sat with on the bus, the excitement of reaching the state finals in basketball, how we got in trouble for passing notes (or sending texts) in class, our first romantic crush, the theme of the junior prom, and the senior trip. These memories are related to our membership in our school community and whether or not we felt like we really fit in. Fitting in marks the difference between people who remember their school years fondly and those who don't.

For students with IDD and their families, being welcomed into an inclusive school community is oftentimes a battle that must be fought year after year with no guarantee of success. Why is membership so important? With membership comes access to a rich general education classroom, a skilled general education teacher, typical

students who are competent communicators, and a sense of unconditional belonging. Belonging that doesn't have any prerequisites.

In 1990 Schnorr conducted a research project about a student with Down syndrome named Peter who was primarily taught in a self-contained classroom and who went into a first grade general education class for activities such as morning meeting and one special subject (e.g., art, music, physical education, or library) per day. She was primarily interested in the perspectives of the students without disabilities. Here's what they said when Schnorr interviewed them.

> Oh, that's Peter's desk. He comes here in the morning. He's not in our class. He doesn't ever stay. He comes in the morning when we have seat work. Then he leaves to go back to his room…
>
> He comes in the classroom when we get to school…and when it's after 9, then he goes up to his classroom. Sometimes he's in this class and the other time he goes down to his room…
>
> Peter…gives a sticker book to his teacher, because if he behaves very well, she gives him a sticker…'cause Peter's in Room 10…
>
> We do math, but he doesn't…he colors. (Schnorr, 1990, p. 235, 236)

Others who have studied the attitudes of typical students towards students with IDD have found that there is a direct correlation between the amount of time that both student groups learn together and improved attitudes toward disability specifically and diversity in general.

In the award-winning film *Voices of Friendship* (Tashie & Martin, 1996), several middle school students spoke about their friend Jocelyn who had significant IDD. One remarked

> Jocelyn is a really good listener and you can sit and tell her any of your problems. One time we were at a school dance and one of our friends was sitting on the floor crying and Jocelyn reached out and put her arm on the girl's back. It just showed that she does understand how people feel and she is there for you as a friend.

Fisher (1999) interviewed typical students from an inclusive high school after some of their classmates with IDD enrolled in general education classes. They talked about the changes in two of their classmates with disabilities.

> He stays for the entire period, his Spanish has improved, and he has a great relationship with peers in his class…
>
> Julie's totally different now. She fits in, participates in the class, talks to her peers, raises her hand in class, and has some new clothes that are more appropriate for her age. (Fisher, 1999, p. 462)

When I worked on a research project at Souhegan High School back in the mid-1990's, students with IDD were fully included in a full range of general education classes. They joined clubs and extracurricular activities and worked alongside their typical friends in summer jobs. One of the typical students, Brad Fach, wrote about his friendship with one of these students.

> I feel that everyone has a special gift to share. Amro gave me his gift that year, and it was the gift of believing. I never would have thought that I would have the

> opportunity to become close friends with someone who talks to me through a keyboard but it happened. I am amazed at how our whole school accepts and respects these students who are different. I feel good because I know that I have given him something he has wanted for a long time, something that everyone needs, a sense of belonging and more importantly, friendship, But I know now that he has given me much more than I could ever give to him. (Fach, B., 1994, p. 9)

The second aspect of this inclusion fundamental is reciprocal social relationships. Although "special friends" programs are popular, we need to take a close look at them to determine if they are based on equal value of students with and without disabilities. A typical website devoted to facilitating relationships between students with and without disabilities might say:

> Christine and Lesley have been friends for three years now. They share a beautiful relationship that truly illustrates the true meaning of friendship and serves as an example to all of us about the power of the [special friends] program. When we saw the two of them at this year's Meet and Greet, it brought tears to our eyes as the two of them gave each other a real hug and asked how each other was after a summer apart. Every time I saw Lesley in the summer, all she could talk about was her "Best Buddy" and how excited she was to see her in the fall. It is times like this that we are able to really realize the importance of true friendship and the impact it has on both the Student Buddy and the Buddy. When I read this I asked myself these questions.

- Do these girls spend time together when adults are not arranging or supervising?

- Do typical kids get awards for being one another's friends?
- Do students who are authentic friends see each other once a year at a "Meet and Greet?"
- Should we feel good when students with disabilities get "real hugs?"

Unfortunately these special friends programs operate under a set of assumptions that can be harmful – not only to students with disabilities but to typical students as well. They assume:

- Students with disabilities have nothing in common with students without disabilities, therefore we have to set up special situations for them to come together.
- Students with disabilities deserve our charity and benevolence because we should feel sorry for their plight.
- Students with disabilities don't really know that other students are not their real friends or that other kids have to be recruited to hang out with them.
- Students with disabilities aren't seen as potential friends by students without disabilities.
- Students with disabilities should be friends with others of their "own kind."

Just like the harmful assumptions that often pervade our view about the competence of students with IDD, these assumptions about students with disabilities and relationships can stand in the way of the development and maintenance of authentic social connections. There is an alternate assumption about social relationships that isn't grounded in pity, in charity, or in benevolence. It is that all students can have real friends when we address the attitudinal and systemic barriers that keep students apart.

Participation in General Education Instruction

Full participation in general education instruction in a general education classroom marks the difference between students who are really included and those who are "islands in the mainstream (Biklen, 1985, p. 18)." Membership and participation go hand in hand; membership is necessary but not sufficient for learning and that's where participation comes in. Participation means not just being there, but being an active learner in the same instructional routines as those experienced by typical students. It means everything from being called on in class, to having a meaningful role in small group activities, to handing in homework, to singing in music class. We know that student engagement is one of the most powerful predictors of student learning so it's vital that students with IDD are supported to participate in instruction by the general education teacher, and they are not just sitting at the side or back of the room being taught by a paraprofessional. Engagement is assured when students have the means to participate. Rather than viewing students' disabilities as a reason why they can't participate, the "try another way" approach is called for (Gold, 1980). Some examples include:

- If a student doesn't use natural speech to communicate, then she needs some kind of augmentative or alternative communication support to participate in class discussions or small group activities.
- If a student can't use a pencil or pen to write then he needs a keyboard or other piece of assistive technology to enable him to participate in note-taking or essay writing.

- If a student has difficulty walking from place to place then she may need a wheelchair to enable her to move around a science lab to each of the experiment stations that need to be at a height that enables her to reach the top of the table.
- If a student can't read then he may need to have all text materials available in digital form so that it can be read aloud to him by a text-to-speech computer application.
- If a student is working on academic material at a lower level than that of most other students in the classroom, she will need to have the general education materials modified to her reading and comprehension level, but still aligned with the same general education content.

Learning General Education Academics and Skills for Participation in Inclusive School and Community

So what is important for students with IDD to learn while they are in school? In the 1970's and before, it was considered best practice to teach what were called developmentally appropriate skills. So for example, Jorgensen and Calculator (1994) described a classroom of this era that used developmentally based practices.

> In the Rainbow Connection classroom 12 students ages 3-21 with severe disabilities were enrolled…First thing in the morning, all students were "toileted," and they practiced combing their hair and brushing their teeth…Therapists worked on oral-motor skills and labeling of food items using sign language or picture boards…The PT worked with each student every day on neuro-motor developmental skills; the SLP had determined each student's "level" and worked with most on cause-and-effect and object permanence; and the

> teacher and the paraprofessionals used various preschool toys to teach size, counting, colors, and other relationships. (p. 5)

No academics were taught because all the students were assumed to have significant intellectual disability and because the thinking at the time was that students needed to master a sequence of typical developmental milestones before they were ready for higher level skill instruction.

In the late 1970's Brown and colleagues introduced a functional, life skills model of educating students with IDD (Brown, Nietupski, & Hamre-Nietupski, 1976). This model suggested that regardless of students' developmental levels, all students with IDD could learn functional, community-referenced skills if they were taught them in natural environments outside the school building. This philosophy resulted in students with IDD leaving the school building for increasing portions of their school day as they got older to learn how to use public transportation, access recreation facilities, make store purchases, and learn domestic skills at home. Although this model of education was an improvement over the developmental model because it showed that students with IDD could learn, they were still not taught academics and they spent most of their school careers segregated from typical students.

Over the next 30 years or so, with the increased advocacy for inclusion by families and their allies, advances in assistive technology and augmentative communication, research on effective instruction, and corresponding changes in special and general education laws, we now know that students with IDD can learn academics in inclusive classrooms as well as functional skills in inclusive school and community environments alongside their typical classmates.

Students with IDD should be taught the same academic subjects that are taught to all students. Usually that means language arts, math, social studies, science, health and physical education, computer literacy, the arts, a second language, and various elective subjects. Some students with IDD are expected to learn these subjects at the same level of rigor – the same depth, breadth, and complexity – as their typical classmates. Another very small group of students with IDD may be expected to master learning standards from these subject areas but at a reduced level of depth, breadth, and complexity. The learning standards that may be appropriate for these few students are called alternate achievement standards. The most important thing about these alternate achievement standards is that federal law requires that the standards be closely aligned with the same academic standards taught to students without disabilities. Table 1.1 shows the alignment between eighth grade general education standards and the corresponding alternate assessment standards.

Insert Table 1.1 here

In addition to students with IDD learning academics there are a myriad of other skills that are important for students to learn if they are to be fully a part of inclusive school communities and have an enviable adult life. These skills fall into the domains of: communication, social competence, self-determination, wellness and safety, and pro-social behavior. Students whose disabilities affect movement and the senses (e.g., vision, hearing, and self-regulation) may also need to learn strategies for making the most of the abilities that they have, utilizing assistive technology and other supports to accommodate for the skills they lack, and accessing natural and specialized supports

from peers, co-workers, and paid support providers. All of the skills in this category are appropriate for annual goals and short term objectives on students' IEPs.

Team Collaboration and Administrative Support

In Figure 1.1 that depicts the core elements of inclusive education, you'll notice that team collaboration and administrative support form a base for all of the other elements. Although I have seen situations in which a single committed teacher has successfully included a student with IDD without support from either her administrators or other members of the student's IEP team, it is a rare occurrence and rarely translates into a successful inclusive experience the following year. Team collaboration provides an avenue through which general and special educators and related service providers pool their knowledge to support students' learning and inclusion.

Team Collaboration

I've attended hundreds of team meetings over the past 30 years and one stands out as an example of ineffective collaboration. Seth's team was scheduled to meet for one hour from 11 a.m. until noon. Invited team members included his grandmother who was his legal guardian, his case manager, a fourth grade general education teacher, a speech-language pathologist (SLP), an occupational therapist (OT), a 1:1 paraprofessional, and the assistant principal. For the first 15 minutes his grandmother and the occupational therapist chatted about Seth's progress during his pull-out OT sessions. Around 11:15 a couple of other team members wandered in and they joined in that conversation. A few minutes later his case manager arrived and attempted to call the meeting to order. There was no agenda although most team members thought that the purpose of the meeting was instructional planning for the upcoming week. Since the

general education teacher never arrived (she had been delayed by a phone call from a parent) the team was unsure about what lessons she had planned, so they were unable to discuss the supports Seth would need in order to successfully participate. When the SLP arrived she took over the meeting with a discussion of the problems she was having with Seth's augmentative communication (AAC) device. She had little training in AAC for students with autism and relied on quarterly visits from an AAC consultant who was responsible for programming and trouble-shooting the device. Half way through the meeting the OT left, apologizing because she was scheduled to provide services to another student during this time.

People talked over one another's comments, side conversations between the grandmother and paraprofessional made it difficult to hear when others spoke, and some critical decisions were not able to be made because the assistant principal didn't arrive until the final few minutes of the meeting. No notes were taken and as the end of the meeting time approached people began to leave one by one. All and all I'm sure that everyone felt that the meeting was a colossal waste of time and another week went by without a solid plan in place for Seth's participation in his general education class. After a month of meetings just like this the assistant principal called me into his office and said that the school was planning to recommend an out of district placement for Seth because "inclusion is not working."

In contrast to this meeting I have attended others that represent best practices in collaborative teaming for inclusion. These meetings have the following characteristics:

- A regular meeting time is on everyone's schedule and there are no conflicts with required services for other students.

- There is an agenda specifically focused on instructional planning (not on behavior, scheduling, field trips, or other extraneous topics) and it is displayed in the meeting room.
- Time allotments are given for each item on the agenda and if the discussion is not finished at the end of the designated time, the team defers making final decisions until the next meeting.
- Past to-do action items are reviewed to assure that they have been completed by the responsible person.
- All members arrive on time and stay for the duration of the meeting. Late arriving members are expected to read the minutes and talk to a colleague if they need to clarify what was discussed in their absence .
- There are no interruptions during the meeting (except for real emergencies).
- The following roles are distributed among the meeting participants: facilitator, note-taker, and timekeeper.
- Team members use effective meeting behaviors such as not interrupting, seeking to understand another's point of view before offering their own, staying on topic, and not having side conversations.
- Major decisions are made using a formal process of seeking agreement among all team members.
- A to-do list of action items is generated with persons responsible and timelines for completion.
- The meeting ends with a short evaluation of what worked, what didn't, ah-ha's, and what could be done more effectively the next time the team meets.

Administrative Support

Administrative support for a student's inclusive educational program takes many forms. This support comes from both general and special education administrators, with the school building principal assuming the primary responsibilities for creating an inclusive school culture and climate. The principal leverages this responsibility in his conversations with the school board; the Parent Teacher Association (PTA); the community at large; and of course with building faculty, staff, and students.

The principal and special education administrator work together on staffing, budgeting, resource development, and building a school schedule that prioritizes common planning times for general and special education staff. They assure that staff have the time, space, technology, and curricular resources necessary to teach diverse groups of students in general education. The school schedule and staffing allocation decisions bring specialized resources into general education classrooms, eliminating the silos of expertise that oftentimes prevent effective collaboration among general and special education, Title I, and English language learners staff.

Effective administrators take an active role in mediating disagreements or personal conflicts among team members. They implement strategic plans for involving families and the general community in supporting the inclusive mission of the school.

Souhegan High School, in southern New Hampshire, has a mission and philosophy statement that underscores its inclusive values.

> The Amherst and Souhegan school districts aspire to be a community of learners born of respect, trust, and courage. We consciously commit ourselves:

- To support and engage an individual's unique gifts, passions, and intentions;

- To develop and empower the mind, body, and heart;
- To challenge and expand the comfortable limits of thought, tolerance, and performance; and
- To inspire and honor the active stewardship of family, nation, and globe

> To this end [we] have determined that the skills and resources of special education will be…available to assist any student with exceptional needs. To the maximum extent possible, all of our students are educated within the regular class…We strive to be an inclusive system: inclusive of all students and all teachers. In this way, we will develop students who are independent learners, who understand their educational needs, and who can advocate for themselves within the academic environment. Our goal is to become a community of learners in the truest sense of those words. (Fisher, Sax, & Jorgensen, 1998, p. 35)

Three Souhegan administrators were exemplars of effective inclusive leadership which they demonstrated in interviews for the video *Class of '96: An Inclusive Community of Learners* (Jorgensen, Mroczka, & Williams, 1997). Superintendent Dr. Richard Lalley articulated his rationale for both equity and excellence.

> How do you create an environment where all children can excel? All children. Not some children, or most of the children, but all of the children. Every child is so important, so unique that to do anything less is a travesty. It's a simple view, not complicated. It's nice that the research supports it. But I think even if the research didn't support it, I wouldn't care. Because essentially schools need to be places where every child is respected for what he or she can do and worked with to raise that child's level of performance as high as we possibly can before we let

> them out into the cruel world where they not going to have our support. Let's give them the skills to fend for themselves. And I think more importantly the belief in themselves that they can be successful. We do that, I go home happy.

Souhegan principal Dr. Robert Mackin expressed a similar level of commitment to inclusion and heterogeneous grouping.

> The principal is really a role model. I have to be solidly behind inclusion and keep people coming back to the table to figure out solutions even when the going gets tough. This year some of the math teachers came to me and wanted to remove a group of kids from our math program because they were having difficulty passing Math 1. I asked them, "If we pull these kids out, will they acquire the skills to move on to Math II?" The teachers admitted that they probably wouldn't. While I understand that there will be some variability in the skills that our kids leave Souhegan with, I'm not willing to establish a totally different set of standards for students with disabilities. I think that we need to hold them to high standards and through the curriculum and the support we provide, push them to reach those standards.

Kathryn Skoglund was Souhegan's Director of Special Instructional Services and was instrumental in the development of the school's inclusive philosophy. Her commitment reflected a view from the trenches about what it takes to keep inclusive education at the forefront of the school restructuring conversation.

> It may seem easy to talk about what is necessary for effective inclusive education, however there still exist hurdles, even here. It is difficult to maintain the inclusive momentum unless the focus is constant and overt. It is imperative

that those of us who are involved in successful inclusionary practices take the time to gather data, particularly from a longitudinal perspective, that show where the successes are and why they are occurring. We must talk and talk and talk – about kids, curricula, schedules, pedagogy, shortcomings, strengths, planning, problem solving, miscommunications, and disagreements.

SUMMARY

This chapter described the fundamental elements of inclusive education and presented many reasons why inclusion is the right thing to do for students with IDD. In Chapter 2, step-by-step guidelines describe how families and educators can establish a vision for a student's inclusive education to serve as a road map to future educational decisions and future life outcomes.

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