Inclusive Education Moving Forward

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Abstract

Change is not synonymous with improvement. Improvement of special education requires better instruction of individuals with disabilities. Although LRE and inclusion are important issues, they are not the primary legal or practical issues in improving special education. Federal law (IDEA) requires a continuum of alternative placements, not placement in general education in all cases. To make actual progress in education of students with disabilities, a single and strict principle of equality or/and anti-discriminatory legal instruments, such as the CRPD, is not enough. Social justice as a multifaceted principle can serve the education of the whole spectrum of special educational needs in national and international contexts. Responsible inclusion demands attention to the individual instructional needs of individuals with disabilities and consideration of the practical realities involved in teaching. If inclusive education is to move forward, it must involve placing students with disabilities in general education only if that is the environment in which they seem most likely to learn the skills that will be most important for their futures.

Keywords: instruction, realities, law, attitudes, individualization, international context
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History and Meanings

General and special education are changing, as the title of this book suggests. But change does not necessarily mean progress, the field is improving, or our knowledge about educating students with disabilities has advanced. Change itself is not synonymous with improvement. Change can also mean regression, depending on the measure of movement. In this chapter, we try to focus on forward movement or substantive progress related to inclusion—what we see as improvements in the lives and prospects for individuals with disabilities, not merely change or difference in their education. We necessarily mention non-examples and failures to clarify change without progress, differences that can be observed without movement toward the goal of substantive improvement of the education of and social justice for individuals with disabilities.

Perhaps Warnock (2005) most clearly distinguished between meaningful inclusion and inclusion that does not represent substantive progress. She argued for including students with disabilities in meaningful and appropriate education wherever that was best provided, not meaning necessarily “under the same roof” or in the same building or class as those without disabilities. This definition makes effective education the priority, not location. Although the term “full inclusion” has typically referred to educating all students in general education at all times, its priority of placement rather than effective instruction is neither appropriate nor consistent with reality (Anastasiou, Kauffman, & DiNuovo, 2015; Hornby, 2014; Kauffman & Badar, 2014b; Kauffman, Ward, & Badar, 2016). To the contrary, we believe effective instruction of the learner with a disability, not placement, is the most important objective of special education. Despite decades of research and advocacy for full inclusion, we are aware of no convincing evidence demonstrating its efficacy in reaching desired educational outcomes for learners with disabilities.
We are aware of opinions that it is never appropriate to place a student in a specialized classroom or school and that education is only appropriate when it occurs in general education classrooms. That viewpoint ignores important realities, discounts and dismisses the meaning of disability, is inconsistent with U.S. law and regulations governing special education (Bateman, in press; Bea, 2016), and will not help the nations of the world effectively educate students with disabilities. Rather, we see inclusion as the most appropriate setting where effective instruction in meaningful tasks that are relevant to the student’s future can be assured (Ayres, Lowrey, Douglas, & Seivers, 2011; Hornby, 2014). Research clearly supports this model of inclusion—placement in general education when that is the most appropriate place for the student because he/she can be taught there most effectively. However, no research supports the inclusion of all students in general education (Hornby, 2014). Thus, judgment is required about where each individual student should be placed, given his/her instructional and social needs. Special education is fundamentally about individuals, and it precludes the uniform educational placement of students comprising any group in a particular educational environment (Kauffman, 2015b).

Judgment about where education should occur is one of special education’s perpetual issues. Decisions about placement must be made for individuals, not groups (Bateman, 1994, in press). Individuals with disabilities comprise an extremely diverse group, and judgment of the best place to educate a person must be made after assessment of an individual’s educational needs. Moreover, such judgment must be based on logical consideration of the best scientific evidence available. Empirical evidence and logic do not support full inclusion, but it does support placement in the LRE (least restrictive environment)—the inclusion in general education of those who learn best there. A critical point here is that inclusion is not an intervention. That is, it is not an instructional strategy or method, but a belief about where instruction is most effectively delivered. Inappropriate inclusion in general education does more harm than good,
and inclusion in specialized schools and classes can be highly effective. We need more research about the types of schools and classes in which students with particular learning needs are taught most effectively (Hornby, 2014; Kauffman, 2015a; Warnock, 2005). The fact that inclusion results in the same or better outcomes for some or most students is not convincing evidence that it will do so for all. And therein lies the rub for proponents of full inclusion. The failure of any individual(s) to benefit from the general education setting belies the full inclusion mantra, “all means all.”

An important objective of special education is achieving social justice in the education of all children. Belief in full inclusion without reliable evidence supporting it is not a path to social justice, and dogmatic adherence to its ideology does not make it true. Scientific evidence and sound logic are our best guides to finding truth and can provide tools to achieve social justice. Although proponents of full inclusion believe inclusion in general education is always best and make claims that research supports their view, the belief is dogmatic, inherently irrational, and without convincing evidence (see Bateman, in press; Hornby, 2014; Kauffman et al., 2016; Zigmond & Kloo, 2011). However, full inclusion is inimical to achieving social justice for all students. Social justice depends on access to effective instruction which, in turn, requires recognition of the differences between disabilities and other diversities (Anastasiou, Kauffman, & Michail, 2015; Kauffman & Landrum, 2009; Zigmond & Kloo, 2011).

The history of special education is rife with stories of students with disabilities who were unserved or very poorly served (see Gerber, 2011; Kauffman, 1981). The shoddy treatment of individuals with disabilities has included needless separation from general education in many cases. We agree that more students than in the past can and should be included in social and academic life in general education, but only when such involvement in general education confers benefits equal or superior to those obtained in specialized settings. This means opportunities for
appropriate inclusion must always be sought, but cannot come at the expense of appropriate and effective instruction. Effective instruction ought to be the primary concern of special educators, who must not allow other issues (e.g., societal attitudes or lofty ideals), important as they may be, to usurp effective instruction. Otherwise, many students with disabilities again will be treated shoddily, albeit with a different rationale than in the past. In our view, sacrificing the individual’s instructional improvement for the sake of advancing the societal value of inclusion does not indicate progress. To the contrary, we believe advancing toward a more socially just and inclusive society is contingent on most effectively educating students with disabilities who can realize their desired outcomes, which means placing students with disabilities in general education only when that is where they will best learn the skills most important to their futures. This requires preserving the full continuum of placement options for practical, philosophical, legal, and contextual reasons.

**Practical Realities and Doing What Is Best for Students**

Part of effective instruction is considering the practical details of what a practice or policy requires. As is true of most proposals for change, “the devil is in the details.” Inclusion of students with disabilities is no exception. We call attention to a few of the organizational, practical, and logistical details a policy of full inclusion requires. These realities too often are not considered. Our discussion here includes questions about the practicality or feasibility of inclusion that must be answered. They are questions that become more difficult to answer satisfactorily as inclusion approaches “full.” We also want to make clear that not all of these questions or their answers depend entirely on the severity of a student’s disability. That is, some of these questions and their answers may be more difficult for students with what are usually considered “mild” disabilities than for those with severe or obvious disabilities.

**Whose Interests Are Being Served?**
Many schools view “non-academic” times such as P.E., Art, Music, Library, Lunch, Recess, Assemblies, and Field Trips as the best and most obvious times for students with disabilities to be included with same-age peers. Often these students are not able to complete the tasks required in these settings, but they are said to benefit “socially” from interactions with typically developing students.

◆ In a P.E. class, the teacher is supposed to be addressing the physical needs of students. A student with significant physical and/or cognitive disabilities can often be years behind his/her peers in the development of physical skills. Therefore, these students tend to participate only marginally in a class with same-age peers (e.g., students using wheelchairs may sit on the sidelines throughout P.E. and yet be said to be “participating”), and their very different physical goals are never addressed. Is it appropriate to sacrifice a child’s physical needs (in a P.E. class) for some supposed social benefit? The same logic might be applied to Music, Art, Library, Assemblies, and Field Trips. Is it acceptable to expect a student to sit through lessons and activities that are far beyond his/her developmental capabilities, just to “rub shoulders” with general education students? Wouldn’t this student’s time be better spent doing activities that will further his/her development (not to mention that he/she might actually enjoy as opposed to being marginalized or bored)?

◆ When it comes to lunch and recess, a similar line of thinking leads to some of the same questions: whose interests are being served when a student with disabilities who is bothered by loud noises is expected to eat lunch in a noisy cafeteria? Is it better for that student to spend lunch with his hands over his ears than be offered a quiet eating place with a few peers, where he/she might actually learn to engage in a conversation?

When does “participation” in a curriculum become pretense, an attempted justification for the student’s being placed in a general education class that subjects him/her to humiliation or
pity because his/her expected level of performance is so far from that of the average in the group and failure to provide more effective instruction?

**Instructional Environment**

A student has an individual education program (IEP) *because* he/she has not progressed as expected in general education and requires specialized instruction and programming to achieve expected academic and/or social progress (Bateman, in press). Students with IEPs require instruction that is fundamentally different from that being provided to most other students in the general education classroom. This includes but is not limited to below-grade-level reading or math instruction or an environment with reduced distractions and interruptions.

◆ How does it make sense for a special education teacher to try to provide instruction that is *fundamentally different* to an individual or small group within the context of a larger classroom with 10-20 other students and numerous distractions? Does it not make more sense for this instruction to be delivered in a quiet classroom with reduced external stimuli and distractions?

◆ Good teachers fill their walls with relevant information that may provide students with visual cues or learned strategies to help them with learning tasks. If a student is working significantly below grade level (e.g., a 2nd grader or older student who is still learning letter sounds), how will these types of academic supports be available?

◆ Proponents of inclusion often cite the damage that is done to students’ self-esteem when they are “segregated” for instruction. How is it less damaging to a student’s self-esteem to engage in below grade-level instruction in full view of his/her peers?

**Scheduling**
Most Special Education teachers are responsible for implementing IEPs for students at more than one grade level. Most grade levels follow different schedules, and this is sometimes true of different teachers of the same grade. Important questions include:

◆ How can a special educator provide instructional or behavioral support for students who need it when there are schedule conflicts (i.e., when he/she is needed in more than one place at a time)?

◆ Is placing an instructional aide with a student (or in a classroom) an adequate substitute for having a special educator provide the needed specialized support?

How can a special educator participate in co-planning and co-teaching when he/she is managing students from various grade levels (in most schools, teachers share planning time with others at their grade level)? Is it reasonable to expect a special educator to plan appropriate, individualized, targeted instructional support for several students at the same time (assuming the instruction will be implemented by someone else)?

◆ Unless a special educator is fully involved in co-planning with general education teachers, does “co-teaching” really mean the general education teacher teaches, and the special education teacher acts as an overqualified aide in the classroom?

◆ Even if a school tries to maintain a continuum of services and offers a self-contained class but expects students from that class to be included at certain times (usually lunch and “specials”), how can a special educator provide effective instruction when students from various grade levels are coming and going throughout the day?

◆ Even if a school has a special educator assigned to each grade level (which is far from typical), unless all the students with IEPs are placed in the same classroom, the same problem exists: No teacher can be in more than one place at a time.
We have raised only a few questions about practical realities and doing what best serves the interests students. At times, it is very difficult to separate our own interests and commitments from those of the student. Commitment to an idea or ideology can lead us to develop attitudes, beliefs or philosophical perspectives that are misleading and ultimately destructive of students’ best interests. Open-mindedness helps us evaluate the practical realities involved in movement toward better inclusion because we appreciate the nitty-gritty issues raised by any philosophical perspective or “theoretical” proposal. Full consideration of practical realities also helps us avoid short-changing students’ and teachers’ ability to function effectively, sacrificing more satisfactory options to maintain philosophical purity, or making hollow promises of support.

**Attitudes and Philosophical Perspectives**

Positive change in the educational experiences of students with disabilities is achievable, but not without examining attitudes and philosophical perspectives. Philosophical perspectives on inclusive education are important because they both enable and constrain—sometimes powerfully—thinking and acting in relation to educating students with disabilities. This is especially true for philosophical perspectives that allow no or very few exceptions to the expectation that all students, regardless of their individual learning needs, will be taught in the same setting or the same program (Wiley, 2015). The primary concern of advocates of full inclusion (“all means all”) is unifying education such that there are no or very few lines of demarcation between students, teachers, instruction, programs, and settings (Burrello, Sailor, & Kleinhammer-Tramill, 2012; explore also the SWIFT web site, 2015). The core or sacred value of the full inclusion movement appears to be *equal treatment* for all students. From this perspective, anything that involves different treatment (e.g., labeling, specialized settings, individualized learning expectations [unless differentiated for all students], and special education delivered outside the general education classroom) is harmful and unjust, while all efforts to
abolish different treatment (or abandon “silos”) are assumed to be beneficial and a sure path to social justice for students with disabilities.

Moral values that are resistant or impervious to tradeoffs are known as protected values. Extreme, “no exceptions” perspectives based entirely or almost entirely on one protected value (e.g., equal treatment) inhibit the ability to be open minded and think critically about limitations and downsides related to that value (Ditto & Liu, 2011). The belief that inclusion is right in each and every case is a form of moral absolutism, and moral absolutism significantly increases and intensifies well-known errors in reasoning like confirmation bias. Confirmation bias entails the selective attention to evidence for an already accepted conclusion and/or biased evaluation of contradictory evidence and arguments (Nickerson, 1998; Sinatra, Kienhues, & Hofer, 2015). These biases make it extremely difficult to think open-mindedly about protected values and may lead to distorted perceptions of the actual (versus preferred) harms and benefits associated with that value.

Although protected values come in all political stripes, we offer one example typically associated with conservatism—economic freedom. When economic freedom, based on the ideals of free market capitalism, is elevated to the status of a sacred or protected value, the ability to think open-mindedly about potential downsides or negative consequences associated with unregulated economic freedom is compromised. The denial of scientific evidence for global climate change is perhaps the most familiar manifestation of this phenomenon, although there are many others (Gawande, 2016). Similarly, elevating economic freedom above all other sources of moral value can bias someone to believe that publicly funded programs (e.g., public education, “food stamps,” Medicare, Social Security, what has been called “Obama Care”) are harmful and ineffective in all cases. Again, these cognitive biases operate across the political spectrum and
are associated with strong beliefs about any divisive moral issue (e.g., gun control, the death penalty, contraception, abortion, and same-sex marriage).

Full inclusion is a prime example of how this moral approach to empirical issues can mislead individuals to accept (and disseminate) the idea. Full inclusion proponents may conclude that all children should be educated in general education environments based on beliefs that separating children for specialized treatment violates equal treatment (i.e., cherished value). It’s important to point out that full inclusion is the cherished belief, not the educational outcomes of individuals with disabilities. Believers embrace full inclusion as *principally right* and therefore morally superior (i.e., moral judgment) to every possible alternative. This moral position is beyond the empirical sphere and therefore impervious to arguments based on scientific evidence. However, full inclusion advocates may buttress their argument via appeals to consequences. In order to justify their belief, full inclusion proponents may present evidence that an individual (or some individuals) appear to benefit from inclusion (biased reasoning). This fallacious argument fails to demonstrate that all children (i.e., “all means all”) benefit from full inclusion, but also fails to account for the type of benefit (i.e., academic, social, behavioral) and whether it confers some long-term advantage in ways superior to benefits of a specialized setting. It is worth noting the argument that *some* students benefit from full inclusion is not a valid reason to accept the belief that *all* students benefit from full inclusion (i.e., a *non-sequitur* fallacy).

People are entitled to their philosophical perspectives, including those that are extreme. The danger is that ideologically constrained thinking, weakly tied to facts and logic, contributes to injustice via misguided action or inaction. In the case of inclusive education, cognitive biases are evident when advocates of full inclusion incorrectly claim that “research shows” inclusion in general education is beneficial for all students, or that separate placements are always inappropriate or ineffective. The truth is that research on the relationship between placement and
student outcomes is inconclusive, in part because—as we have argued in this paper—quality of instruction is the critical variable, not location of instruction (Zigmond & Klooo, 2011).

Advocates of full inclusion might deny that their beliefs are based on moral absolutism, to which we would say, good. Rejecting moral absolutism frees us to pursue a richer vision of social justice for students with disabilities, one that is built on multiple sources of moral value. Effectively educating students with disabilities requires focused, sustained action based firmly on clear thinking, scientific evidence, and compassion. Divisive and circular debates about full inclusion have surely impeded, or at least distracted us from, the collaborative and thoughtful work needed to make real (vs. illusory) progress in educating students with disabilities. We acknowledge the emotional appeal of arguments for blurring or erasing all distinctions between students, instruction, and settings. However, an open-minded evaluation of these arguments, based on logic, historical evidence, and observations of educational systems that do not make these distinctions, suggests that failing to draw lines, make distinctions, or speak clearly about differences will cause far more harm to students with disabilities than good.

To make progress in inclusion, we must recognize and avoid philosophical perspectives on inclusive education that do not lead to the better outcomes for students with disabilities. Improving instruction and services is a moral imperative because of the life-long benefits that accrue from maximizing students’ learning and independence. We do not believe that this perspective precludes us from addressing other important concerns in fully inclusive education, such as concerns related to belonging, acceptance, and dignity. We see these concerns as integral to the appropriateness and effectiveness of instruction and services, regardless of where these services are provided. Like efforts to improve instruction, efforts to promote belonging, acceptance, and dignity must also be guided by logic, evidence, and compassion, and they must
not be impeded by a philosophical perspective that arbitrarily or unjustly limits our ability to respond fully to the individual needs and unique circumstances of all students with disabilities.

**Legal Mandates and Categorical Perspectives**

The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (i.e., Public Law 94-142) and its subsequent reauthorizations (IDEA, in 2004 titled the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act) was a monumental achievement for the civil and social rights of children with disabilities and their families (Martin, 2013). This law not only provides legal protections to a historically marginalized group but also ensures access to specific benefits (i.e., entitlements). Other laws complement the legal protections and entitlements afforded under IDEA, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) (e.g., right to access and reasonable accommodations). We regard these laws as representations of a progressive society that values educating citizens with disabilities for participation in a secular democracy.

IDEA and ADA can be perceived as blunt instruments for assuring the civil rights of students with disabilities. Bluntness is a necessary characteristic of law because it must allow the consideration of unique circumstances when making decisions about educating individuals, but law also must be sufficiently specific to ensure enforceability (Howe & Miramontes, 1992). Although debate about various aspects of these laws abounds, the bulk of controversy surrounding inclusive education primarily stems from interpretations of two fundamental principles of IDEA, namely the right to a “free and appropriate public education” (FAPE) and the delivery of services in the “least restrictive environment” (LRE). Much emphasis (e.g., case law, scholarly work) has been placed on what constitutes an “appropriate” education, and what is meant by “least restrictive.”

**Special Education Eligibility Categories**
Although refinement of the law is necessary from time to time, revisions can be either beneficial or harmful. The eligibility categories of the IDEA are intended to identify individuals who are entitled to legal benefits and protection from the majority. Despite this, some have advocated that the eligibility categories be removed from the law (e.g., Harry & Klingner, 2014). Although stereotypes about people with disabilities can (and do) result in prejudice, oppression, and marginalization, we are unconvinced that eliminating eligibility (i.e., disability) categories will translate to better outcomes for individuals with disabilities. One is inclined to ask whether abstaining from identifying a child as having a disability (i.e., labeling) results in the disability ceasing to exist; does refusing to establish the presence of a disability mean the person does not have the disability?

Although seemingly bizarre, full inclusion advocates have a history of pretending children do not actually have intellectual (and other) disabilities by arguing that disabilities are entirely social constructions (Danforth & Rhodes, 1997; Hall, 2005; Kliewer, Biklen, & Peterson, 2015). Such ideas are accompanied by stories of alleged liberation, acceptance, and inclusion of people who use methods like facilitated communication, a thoroughly debunked communication tactic (Mostert, 2001; 2010; 2014; Travers, Tincani, & Lang, 2014) that has become increasingly tolerated and promoted by full inclusion proponents (Ashby, 2011; Ashby & Causton-Theoharis, 2009, 2012; Kasa-Hendrickson, Broderick, & Hanson, 2009; Stubblefield, 2011). Such beliefs and behavior demonstrate a complete failure to recognize the importance of hard-won federal protection under the law for students with disabilities and their families, but also discounts or entirely ignores a mountain of evidence about the complex interplay of genetic, neurological, developmental, and environmental factors that give rise to disabling conditions.

Furthermore, no evidence indicates that changing labels from typical language (e.g., autistic child; learning disabled child) to person-first language (e.g., child with autism; child with
learning disability) or to non-disability terms (i.e., child with tier 3 needs in mathematics; child who gets tier 2 interventions in reading) will have any meaningful effect on improving educational outcomes of a child with a disability. The attempt to discard useful (and well-established) disability categories in favor of less precise terms is potentially harmful to education outcomes because disability and its manifestations on child functioning are disregarded rather than recognized. This will undoubtedly have the effect of making individualization exceedingly difficult, thereby undermining access to effective instruction and obstructing progress toward desired outcomes.

Elimination of specific labels only creates new space for different terms. Over time, new terms acquire the stigma that motivated the previous change in terminology. This cycle likely can only be disrupted by effectively educating learners with disabilities to become adults who, through living their life and participating in a pluralistic society, erode stereotypes and stigma. In other words, elimination of eligibility categories is futile attempt to reduce stigma in the absence of effective, individualized education. Stigma associated with disability originates from various sources, but the terms used to articulate the stigma are merely artifacts of that phenomenon; stigma is not caused by the term itself. We contend that recognizing disability as a manifestation of the diversity of human life and educating individuals to achieve their desired outcomes represent a truly progressive position that directly addresses stigma associated with disability. Attention to superficial issues like the rapid evolution of politically correct language only serves to distract from that effort (Kauffman, 2013; Kauffman & Badar, 2013, 2014a).

To agree with full inclusion proponents that disability categories ought to be removed from federal and state special education law, one must (a) discount the relevance of federal protections and guarantees; (b) reject and/or deny an extensive body of literature about disability etiologies and manifestations; (c) convince one’s self that, for example, severe autism in a four-
year-old child is a social construction; (d) subscribe to a set of beliefs and engage in a repertoire of behavior associated with disproven, unproven, and pseudoscientific nonsense; and (e) fail to recognize that stigma is not caused by labels themselves. Abandonment of eligibility categories is antithetical to equity of opportunity for individuals with disabilities, a path toward further marginalization, and a degradation of individuals by rejecting the reality of their disabilities. For these reasons, we view the suggestion that disability categories be jettisoned to be profoundly regressive, a belief that ultimately dismantles the rights and protections afforded under United States laws to children with disabilities and their families.

**Appropriate Education and the Least Restrictive Environment**

The IDEA clearly outlines a continuum of services, including the location where services will be provided, contingent on stakeholders’ consideration of the needs of individuals with disabilities. The least restriction environment (LRE) is the place where instructional benefit is best received, depending on the learner. This feature not only protects children with disabilities and their families from unilateral decisions of the majority (e.g., changes in service delivery based on policy changes of school administrators), but also ensures that students with disabilities have access to and participate in meaningful instruction. These concepts are fundamental to the IDEA and the ADA (see Bea, 2016). The primary purpose of these laws is to prevent discrimination on the basis of disability by requiring individualized decisions about instruction and guaranteeing access and participation in education. Importantly, these laws do not state that children must be educated in any particular environment, but do suggest access and participation in general education as appropriate. Exposure to a curriculum certainly does not mean the student has meaningful access (Fuchs, Fuchs, Compton, Wehby, Schumacher, Gersten, & Jordan, 2015). We therefore contend that it is sometimes inappropriate and harmful to withhold from students with disabilities access to specialized education environments.
Some students, such as those with autism and other developmental disabilities, engage in a range of severe behaviors that impede their learning and the learning of others. Although rare, some individuals’ behavior may result in permanent self-injury or death (e.g., eye gouging; head banging). Some individuals also may engage in severe aggression, causing temporary or permanent injury to peers. Such individuals benefit from highly specialized environments with well-trained behavior specialists who are equipped to predict, understand, and replace such behaviors. We contend that providing such services in, for example, a 10th grade physics classroom or 4th grade general education classroom (see Ayres et al., 2011; Fuchs et al., 2015) is more restrictive for a student with the self-injurious or aggressive behavior because it limits the type and extent of behavioral interventions and supports that can be provided. Furthermore, such service delivery is detrimental to his/her relationships with others and overall quality of life, not to mention failure to learn the general education or any meaningful curriculum. There is no benefit a physics class or other general education environment can offer a student with such behavior that would supersede the benefit of improving his or her behavioral functioning. Yet this sort of argument is used to deride the right to make decisions based on individual needs guaranteed by law in favor of “all means all” fully inclusive education.

The notion that all children should be educated in the general education classroom replaces progressive values regarding the rights of the individual (a fundamental element of the IDEA) with a collectivistic utopian vision. Not all inclusive education proponents adopt this absolutist ideology (see Hornby, 2014). Some students with disabilities excel in general education with supplementary supports and services. However, the primary assumption of full inclusion is that general education is an inherently superior environment compared to a specialized one for all students. In other words, a typical educational environment will result in an education for the student with a disability that will be on par with, if not superior to, an
education that is tailored to her/his unique needs. It’s worth noting the bizarre belief that students with disabilities will be expected to perform in a manner consistent with peers via exposure to general (i.e., non-specialized) environments and differentiation made therein (Fuchs et al., 2015). Not only does this seem to discount the very meaning of having a disability, but it also advances an idea that doing less will result in performance that exceeds what might be expected in a specialized environment. Such notions go beyond rational arguments about how special education ought to be improved and trespasses into avenues of wishful thinking.

Fallacious reasoning of full inclusion is perhaps more clear when applied to other contexts. For example, if applied to the medical field, generalized chemotherapy and radiation treatment of cancer would be regarded as inherently superior to specialized/targeted treatment protocols based on the cancer type, tumor size, growth rate, location, and so on (i.e., the individual’s particular treatment needs). Perhaps we ought to move patients from intensive care units to general hospital wards to ensure that everyone has the same type and level of care. Or, perhaps, we should abandon the idea operating rooms and instead require surgeons to operate in regular hospital rooms so that everyone can be together in the same environment. As bizarre as these ideas are, they reflect precisely the mentality of so-called progressive reformers of special education. Somehow, many special (and general) educators have become convinced that providing less specialized reading instruction or trying to do it in the context of general education is better than providing more specialized instruction in a special place. This is not only peculiar thinking but illustrates how ideology distorts perception and gives rise to harmful practices in the name of progressive education.

The no-holds-barred approach to advancing fully inclusive education (“all means all”) also is antithetical to progressive values. Progressivism values intellectual honesty, rigorous debate, and objective evidence as fundamental to making decisions, yet self-proclaimed
progressive reformers have suggested that these foundations of reason themselves are ideologies (Brantlinger, 1997). A progressive education platform, at least in the liberal tradition, would be comprised of open dialog, consideration of the evidence, and logically consistent debate. However, an array of dishonest tactics have been used to convince educators to adopt inclusive education ideology and to discard the reliance on individualized decisions about how to best educate children. False equivalencies are offered to generate fear and recruit professionals to join the full inclusion crusade. For example, the use of the term “segregation” to refer to specialized classrooms is used to instill fear of being maligned as a bigot for not joining in the inclusion movement. “Segregation” falsely insinuates that highly specialized instructional environments are in all ways inferior to general education. False dichotomy is proffered to wide-eyed future educators who are told they must either be for full inclusion or against it when, as we espouse, some students may be best served in the general education environment while others are best educated in separate/specialized settings.

Understanding and meeting the particular needs of learners with disabilities depends on understanding what their disability is, how it affects their lives (and the prospective life an individual and other stakeholders envision), and how to best support students in attaining desired outcomes. Disabilities are authentic conditions that put individuals at risk for marginalization. The IDEA and ADA are as or more important than ever before for ensuring protections for individuals with disabilities, given increasingly limited resources. Such protections include the right to effective instruction in the least restrictive environment (i.e., the location and types of services that confer the most educational benefit for the individual). Full inclusion is regressive in that it regards such protections and rights as harmful and fails to account for students who require highly specialized types of instruction and environments that cannot (and should not) be
afforded in, for example, a 12th grade English literature course or 2nd grade general education classroom.

**International Contexts and the CRPD**

Movement toward inclusion is international, as exemplified by the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; see United Nations, 2006). In December, 2006, the Plenary of the General Assembly of the UN adopted the CRPD, which went into effect May 3, 2008. Article 24 of the CRPD recognizes the right of the persons with disabilities (PWD) to education, spelling out obligations of States Parties (nations) to adopt measures that “ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and life-long learning.” As of October, 2015, 159 countries had ratified the Convention (thus became “State Parties”).

The United Kingdom (UK) and Mauritius expressed specific reservations or/and declarations concerning Article 24, particularly Clauses 2(a) and 2(b) in inclusion. For example:

The United Kingdom Government is committed to continuing to develop an inclusive system where parents of disabled children have increasing access to mainstream schools and staff, which have the capacity to meet the needs of disabled children. The General Education System in the United Kingdom includes mainstream, and special schools, which the UK Government understands is allowed under the Convention.

The United Kingdom reserves the right for disabled children to be educated outside their local community where more appropriate education provision is available elsewhere. Nevertheless, parents of disabled children have the same opportunity as other parents to state a preference for the school at which they wish their child to be educated.

Similarly, Mauritius responded to Article 24.2 (Article 24.1 is not cited in the reply of the Republic of Mauritius, hence there is no #1 in the quotation):
With regard to Article 24.2 (b), the Republic of Mauritius has a policy of inclusive education which is being implemented incrementally alongside special education.

Thus, the following sub-paragraphs of the CRPD are not universally accepted even among State Parties:

2. In realizing this right, States Parties shall ensure that:
   
   a. Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;
   
   b. Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live; (CRPD, 2006)

Further clarifications about the interpretation of the aforementioned controversial sub-paragraphs are needed. The non-exclusion language, used in sub-paragraph 2(a), aimed to affirm the right to receive education. However, in legal terms across several international contexts with long tradition in special education (e.g., USA, UK, and Finland), students with disabilities are not pulled out of the general classroom on the basis of disabilities per sé, but on the basis of their individual and special educational needs that should be met in the most appropriate way in order to achieve educational progress (Anastasiou & Keller, 2011; Anastasiou, Gardner, & Michail, 2011). Undoubtedly, placement in special education settings a priori on the basis of disability would be prejudicial and discriminatory. The IDEA (section 614(d)), requires an IEP for every student who is eligible for special education services, not for every person with a disability. Orthopedic impairments or chronic health problems, not relevant to learning, can be addressed by accommodations, through the allocation of space or other arrangements and are not
considered specialized instruction (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2015). Besides, the wording in sub-paragraph 2(b) of the CRPD may exclude remote special schools that are far from homes but not every type of special education unit (class or school), on the condition that they are accessible in a given community.

The above countries’ declarations and reservations are related to the infamous and ambiguous phrase “full inclusion” in sub-paragraph 2(e) of the CRPD, which states:

e. effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion. (CRPD, 2006).

“Full inclusion” was subjected to considerable debate during the travaux préparatoires (preparatory works) of the CRPD, despite the shameful fact that the special education community did not participate in the preparation of Article 24. This critical absence of special education might have made a significant difference in the wording of Article 24, although special education does not speak with one voice. But neither have Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) always spoken with one voice. For example, the UK-based Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) lobbied for emphasis on full inclusion and was disproportionately more influential in drafting the CRPD compared to its influence in the UK. The selective criteria for participants from the NGOs were not clear. Finally, the European Union was the agent insisting on “full inclusion” in the eighth and final session of discussion of the wording of the CRPD. Even though this wording was a matter of serious disagreement among national delegates and disability movement agents in the critical last three (6th, 7th, and 8th session) discussions of Article 24.

Subparagraph 2(e) of Article 24 of the CRPD is remarkably self-contradictory. The subparagraph included the clauses “effective individualized support” in “environments that
maximize academic and social development,” both of which fall into a special educational needs paradigm. Therefore, the clauses seemed to recognize special instruction that met the specific needs of the individual student with a disability. In addition, many agents involved in the travaux préparatoires used the key word “environments” to clearly denote environments beyond the general or “regular” education classroom. However, if the meaning of the phrase “goal of full inclusion” as stated in 2(e) is interpreted in the sense of inclusion debate in the USA and UK, then this seems a direct contradiction to the emphasis on individualization and specialized environments; the two propositions are mutually exclusive. **Subparagraph 2(e) can be coherent and meaningful if “full inclusion” has the meaning of “full participation in the community,” or “a fully inclusive society”. But such an interpretation is not relevant to the full inclusion debate in the special education literature. Despite the fact that subparagraph 2(e) was introduced by the European Union and had the support of UNESCO, very important disability organizations such as the World Federation of the Deaf, The World Blind Union, and The World Federation of the Deaf-Blind strongly opposed the terminology “full inclusion.” Upon passage of the CRPD, these groups reinterpreted “full inclusion” as “totally supportive environments.” For example, the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) not only advocated for such a meaning for students who are deaf, but also argued for an inclusive education as the least restrictive environment: Many policy-makers today strongly support full inclusion in education, which they interpret to mean full-scale mainstreaming of all disabled students with all students in regular schools near their homes.

Although such a goal may be generally appropriate for many disabled learners who can hear and interact with their peers and teachers, WFD has serious differences regarding implementation of this concept for Deaf learners.
WFD holds that *the least restrictive environment* for a Deaf learner is whatever is the most enabling environment for that learner. *Full inclusion for a Deaf learner means a totally supportive, signing and student-centred environment.* This permits the learner to develop to his/her full educational, social and emotional potential. This is stated also in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (World Federation of the Deaf, n.d., [emphasis added])

Consequently, the following two statements, a and b, are false: (a) the CRPD is a UN treaty in which the *people of interest* through their organizations shaped the final document, and (b) the CRPD has strong support from the *entire* disability community. The meaning of “full inclusion” in the CRPD is seriously misleading. Logically, “full inclusion” in the full context of Article 24 and its travaux préparatoires must mean fully supportive environments, not always placement in general education.

Without surrounding context, including discussions before adoption of the CRPD, “full inclusion” cannot be interpreted accurately. The CRPD Committee’s Concluding Observations (COs) sent to China, Argentina, and Paraguay were openly critical of specialized education schools (Argentina) and systems (China, Paraguay) for not relying entirely on fully inclusive (i.e., general education) settings for all students. Moreover, in the cases of China and Argentina, the CRPD Committee’s COs clearly suggested the reallocation of resources from the special education system to inclusive education in “mainstream schools.”

However, as of 2008-09 (the most recent data available) only 0.2% of the school population in China, 0.3% in Paraguay, and about 1% in Argentina received special education services across a continuum of placements (Anastasiou & Keller, 2014). It is disturbing and tragic that the CRPD Committee focused exclusively on condemning the minimal services
available rather than advocating the rights of children with disabilities to an appropriate education.

Different interpretations of Article 24 of the CRPD have created great dilemmas for some States Parties and perhaps for the members of the Committee itself. Despite the best intentions of the creators of the CRPD, interpretation of “full inclusion” has led to confusion in the disability rights movement, dissenting voices in special education, and inconsistency in the scientific community. The best interests of people with disabilities will not be served by ignoring problems in the wording and presumed meaning of statements, imagining the benefits of placement of students with disabilities in general education, or transferring resources from special education to general education. Sensitivity to the educational interests of children with disabilities requires the best specialized instruction for those who are excluded from education altogether or are underserved in many nations of the world. In many nations of the world, there are deep-rooted and structural inequalities going far beyond the superficial anti-discriminatory spirit of Article 24 (Anastasiou & Kauffman, in preparation; Anastasiou & Keller, 2011). For example, whereas Italy represents the single national example of implementation of a nearly fully inclusive education system, the available data show that “the everyday reality in Italian classrooms is more complex and not as encouraging as one might hope” (Anastasiou, Kauffman, & Di Nuovo, 2015, p. 439). Similarly, in Ghana, general education is improving, but special and inclusive education remain stagnant, mainly due to unclear or dogmatic approaches to inclusion (Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015).

To make actual progress in inclusion, not merely change, the international contexts and meanings of “inclusion,” “full inclusion,” and “inclusionary” must be clarified. Clearly, misunderstandings and differing interpretations persist among nations. Unfortunately, some nations, organizations, and individuals do not recognize that “inclusion” can mean including
students with disabilities in public education and insist that it means placing students only in general education, avoiding alternative placements in all cases.

Summary and Conclusions

Inclusion should mean placing students with disabilities in general education only when that is where it is thought they will best learn the skills most important to their futures. The judgment about where a student is most likely to learn needed skills best should involve choice from a full continuum of placement options. Such judgment requires careful attention to the practical matters involving instruction so that neither students nor teachers are short-changed in their ability to function effectively, sacrificed for the sake of philosophical purity, or left with hollow promises of support. Choice from a continuum requires open-mindedness about advantages and disadvantages of various placements. Efforts to promote belonging, acceptance, and dignity, as well as learning, must also be guided by logic, evidence, and compassion. Such efforts must not be impeded by a philosophical perspective that arbitrarily or unjustly limits the ability to respond fully to individual students’ needs and circumstances. Inclusionary practices must also be guided by the letter and spirit of a nation’s laws and regulations. In the USA, federal law in 2015 required a full continuum of alternative placements, disallowing placement of all children with disabilities in general education and requiring consideration of the needs of individuals, not groups, in all aspects of special education (Bateman, in press; Bea, 2016).

“Inclusion” has various meanings, and in some nations “inclusion” refers to including students in public education, even if this means placing some in environments not intended to meet the needs of more typical individuals.

If change in education is to be progressive, not regressive, it must be guided by clear thinking about the nature of disabilities in the context of education. We do not understand why, given the nature of disabilities, any of the following three quotations should be seen as rational.
Not only are very few students with disabilities meeting proficiency on NAEP – better known as the Nation’s Report Card – but large achievement gaps between students with and without disabilities remain. (Council for Exceptional Children, 2015)

But the lack of movement on scores means that students with disabilities gained no ground on closing the wide achievement gap between themselves and students who do not have disabilities… Most students covered under these federal laws are not cognitively impaired. (Samuels, 2015)

Thirty years of research shows us that when all students are learning together (including those with the most extensive needs) AND are given the appropriate instruction and supports, ALL students can participate, learn, and excel within grade-level general education curriculum, build meaningful social relationships, achieve positive behavioral outcomes, and graduate from high school, college and beyond. (SWIFT, 2015)

Are we really so naïve that we believe the achievement gap between students with and without disabilities might be closed by any but the most horrific and brutal means (we refer to gaps in average scores, the central tendencies of score distributions, probably means)? If not, why make such statements as those by the Council for Exceptional Children and Samuels? Are we really to believe that all students, bar none (the SWIFT website includes the mantra “all means all” repeated by many adults and children) will graduate from high school ready for college or employment? If not, why the emphasis on all? Should the grace of acceptance allow some individuals not to be included in some classes? Might a 15-year-old functioning intellectually at the level of a typical toddler be an exception? Or do such cases simply not exist? Or, if they do, is it only because they have not been given appropriate instruction and supports?

We do ourselves no favors by exaggerating claims, expressing faux horror when confronted with unpleasant realities, or requiring all to be included in all educational attainment.
The threat to special education posed by the ideology of full inclusion, meaning all children with disabilities are placed in general education, is real (see *The Special Edge*, 2016, detailing a state plan for California that is clearly contrary to a federal appeals court opinion regarding the requirements of IDEA—Bea, 2016). Moreover, we caution that this threat is not necessarily related to severity of the disability. In some cases, it may be easier to “include” a student in general education and claim that he or she is best taught there when the disability is severe than when the disability is considered “mild.” Martin (2013) has cautioned:

Experts in learning disability today report real fears that educators might make the case that special treatment programs, e.g., special education and special teachers of children with learning disabilities, should be ended and the children “included” in the regular classroom. This fear is, and I share it, that we will return to the time before PL 94-142, when large numbers of children in regular education received no real instruction. Eventually they lost interest and dropped out. (p. 227)

Much of the controversy about inclusion has to do with how students are best grouped for instruction, and we believe that a diversity of knowledge and skills requires a diversity of relatively homogeneous groups (i.e., relatively high homogeneity in the skills being taught) for the most effective instruction possible (Kauffman, Landrum, Mock, Sayeski, & Sayeski, 2005). Inclusion could be made better by focusing on including students in those groups in which instruction in needed skills can be most effective, not on placement of students in heterogeneous groups of students incorporating those without disabilities. The way forward for inclusion, if it is to represent real progress, requires remembering the history of the struggle to achieve appropriate education of all children with disabilities (Martin, 2013), improving instruction in special education, maintaining the full continuum of placement options, and including students in general education only as appropriate.
References


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