Strategies for Including ALL Students

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1. Historically, disability was understood within a model that was an extension of the medical model, which conceived health as an *interiorized state* and health problems as an *individual pathology*; a problem within the person.

2. Within such a context, disability was understood as a characteristic of the person; as residing with the person.
   - The person was seen as broken, diseased, pathological, atypical, or aberrant; as outside the norm.
   - Perhaps unavoidably, people with disabilities were, consequently, associated with numerous negative stereotypes.
   - Particularly with introduction of Mental Age estimates, led to “infantilization” of people with disabilities.

   These views resulted in people being isolated and separated, ultimately within large institutions that were later described by Robert Kennedy as “snake pits” full of filth and despair.
This view of disability has led us to hyper-focus on personal capacity. People were viewed as separate from the environment in which they learned and lived. Seeing a person as broken, atypical, diseased, or pathological has led to all kinds of efforts to fix the person. Fixing the person has often included medical interventions, many of which are painful and dehumanizing (Wehmeyer, 2013)
1) When people with disabilities became seen as objects to be fixed, cured, rehabilitated and, ultimately as “victims” of their disabling condition, worthy of charity.
2) At times, people with disabilities were seen as holy innocents and eternal children, leading to further infantilizing of people with disabilities.
3) This justified their separation and segregation, as it suggests people with disabilities are fundamentally different from those without disabilities and have needs that are completely different than their same aged peers.
4) For example, a belief that a 13 year old has a “mental age” of a 1 year old may lead people to speak to the person as if they were an infant, treat them as if they have the interests of an infant, and justify the need to separate them from other 13 year olds who would presumably have totally different interests and needs.

Photos courtesy of M.L. Wehmeyer
Today, we really know much better. In fact, we understand that the environment plays a critical role in either disabling or enabling a person (Thompson, Schalock, Agosta, Teninty, & Fortune, 2014).

For example, a person who uses a wheelchair has few limitations when the environment contains curb cuts, materials are stored at accessible height, and so on. In this case, a person’s capacity and competence is really met by the environment.
At other times, a person will require some supports from the environment. These supports might be simple things like visuals, or they may be human such as peer supports, or in the form of reinforcement or feedback, among many others.

This support framework is critical to our understanding of inclusive education. It enables us to realize that we have learners who are helped or hindered by our teaching and elements of the environment, including curriculum, groupings, and strategies that we use and can control in schools.

Further, the supports paradigm enables us to see students differently. Rather than seeing students as unable to learn, we see an environment that may not be providing everything that child needs to learn best. So rather than focusing our attention on “fixing” the student and moving them down the hall or out to the portable for “special” instruction, we think about how we can adjust our materials, teaching behaviors, and other aspects of the environment to benefit students.

This new way of thinking about disability is important in helping us to see all students as learners, who need different constellations of supports to learn (Thompson et al., 2014)
Emphasizing the importance of the role of the environment in learning also highlights how critical the right environment is in facilitating learning. Time and again, we’ve been reminded that the only way to access the general curriculum is by participating in the general setting. There is simply no way to set up a parallel classroom, curriculum, or activity that reflects the general setting and the skills needed in the setting. The only way to provide opportunities for students to learn the skills they need to part.

Just like the swimming instruction quote from Norm Kunc makes obvious, common sense also tells us how untenable learning in self-contained settings are. The limited range of contacts within these settings means students will have less information available from which to learn, and the patterns of life within general education settings simply cannot be replicated in self-contained settings (Jackson, Ryndak, & Wehmeyer, 2009). Our best, and really only, solution is to teach students in inclusive settings.
Inclusive education is defined as a community of belonging where students have supports provided to address their needs.

Inclusive education is about civil rights and human dignity. Inclusive education presumes all students are learners and capable to contributing. It presumes all learners have the same rights to be provided opportunity to learn, contribute, and succeed.

Research spanning 40 years has resulted in clear and consisted findings about inclusive education.

These findings suggest students
(a) exhibit growth in academic achievement when participating in inclusive settings (Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2012),
(b) show increased communication (Foreman, Arthur-Kelly, Pascoe, & King, 2004),
(d) self-determination (Hughes, Agran, Cosgriff, & Washington, 2013)
(e) and employment skills when placed in general education settings.

Researchers have also suggested students with significant disabilities have greater growth in social skills, largely as a result of access to social networks and peer models (McDonnell, Johnson, Polychronis, & Riesen, 2002).
Placement in general education settings has also been found to increase teachers’ learning expectations for students (Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010b).

Importantly, there is no evidence documenting any positive outcomes of segregation
Despite the positive outcomes of inclusive education, we have an emerging picture that it is not equally available to all students.

Previous research demonstrates increasing time spent in general education for students with high-incidence disabilities, including LD, OHI, and EBD (e.g., McLeskey, et al., 2012).

Is this true for low-incidence? We looked at Reports to Congress on Implementation of IDEA for the years 2000 through 2010 to describe placement rates for students with significant disabilities, (ASD, ID, MD, and DB).

An inclusion index was calculated to note trends and comparisons among groups.

The index is calculated by taking the log of the ratio of the number of students in general education at least 80% of the school day (inclusive) to students in general education less than 40% of the school day (calling this “segregated”).

In this way, the center point is 0, where the proportions are equal (meaning students have an equal probability of being included or segregated.

Looking at this graph, we see students with high incidence disabilities have a progressive and positive trend towards being educated the majority of their day in
general education. The Inclusion Index of 1.27 in 2000 shows these students are almost 4x more likely to be placed in inclusive than segregated settings. By 2011, these students are 9x more likely to be placed in inclusive settings.

However, for students with severe disabilities, the inclusion index of -1.27 shows they are 4x more likely to be placed in highly restrictive settings. There has been growth in access to inclusive settings for this population between 2000-2011, but students with significant disabilities are still 1.5 times more likely to spend their day in restrictive settings than inclusive settings.
So while there has been improvements in accessing general education settings, the rate of progress has been slow for students with significant disabilities.

To estimate how long it will take for students with significant disabilities to have an equal chance of being educated in inclusive (80% or more of day) and segregated settings (40% or less), we used linear regression to create trend lines.

1) ID: we’d need to project out to the year 2030 for the inclusion index to be 0 (equally likely to be in inclusive and segregated settings).

2) DB have fared slightly better, with erratic but positive growth in the II. Almost 2x more likely to be educated in restrictive settings in 2000, and if current trends continue, will be equally likely to be in inclusive or segregated settings in 2017.

3) ASD have experienced the greatest gains in access to general education settings, but it is still scarcely greater than 0 today, meaning they are only slightly more likely to be educated in inclusive settings. There is also concern that the trend towards increasing inclusion has slowed, with 2010 and 2011 rates below the growth trend established in 2000.

4) MD. This group has shown almost no growth in their Inclusion Index, and are still predominantly placed in the most restrictive settings with almost no improvements. We’d need to project 123 years, to the year 2138, before students with MD have even an equal chance of being in inclusive and segregated settings.
Those disability groups that exist on a spectrum (ASD, ID, DB) seem to fare better - likely because those with less support needs or "milder" variants of disability are being included.
1) Before the passage of P.L. 94-142, there was a placement continuum that stretched from self-contained residential and day treatment programs to all-day general education classrooms, and placement on this continuum was directly linked to the severity of a student’s disability.

2) While providing a right to FAPE in public schools, P.L. 94-142 only indirectly addressed the existing linkage between specially designed instruction and placement. In fact, in many ways the law, by permitting a variety of settings to be considered based on a student’s unique learning needs, inadvertently maintained the pre-existing placement continuum.

3) Clearly, the practice of placing students with disabilities in self-contained settings has changed little over the last four decades (Ryndak et al., 2014; Smith, 2007).

4) Yet this continuum is full of problems. In 1988, Steven Taylor argued there are serious flaws in this LRE principle.

For example, it legitimizes restrictive environments – implying some degree of restrictiveness is actually appropriate for students with disabilities!

The LRE continuum also confuses segregation on the one hand with intensity of services on the other.
This continuum is also problematic because it is based on a “readiness” model in which students need to prove they are ready to move to a less restrictive setting – quite unlike what any other US student is required to do!

finally it directs our attention towards physical settings, rather than the supports and services people need to be full, meaningful members of their schools and communities.
How and why students get placed in various education environments remains unclear, but the idea of the need for a continuum persists.

Interviews of pre-service and mentor teachers and university faculty, defining inclusion using the terms “as much as possible” and “when appropriate” persist (Kurth & Foley, 2014), reinforcing the common misconception that restrictiveness is both appropriate and that some other, restrictive setting is needed for students with disabilities.

1) Once a student is placed in a setting along this continuum, they rarely move (White et al., 2007).
2) Many assume child factors, like severity of intellectual disability or intensity of problem behaviors drive placement decisions, but a growing body of research suggests something other than child characteristics or family preferences is at play.
3) For example, a number of researchers have found striking state and regional variations in placement rates for students with disabilities, suggesting there are enduring policy or cultural factors impacting how children are placed in settings along this fabled LRE continuum.
4) Further, Brock and Shafer (2015) have found urbanicity predicts placement, with students in more urban areas more likely to be in more restrictive placements than children in rural districts.
5) In a study of ASD, I found states that have a higher proportion of White citizens and lower poverty rates are also more likely to have more students in inclusive settings than states with a higher proportion of Black citizens, more students receiving free and reduced lunch, and more citizens living in poverty.

Together, these hint there is something other than presumed student need driving placement.
So if many assume there is a need to restrict students, there must be assumptions that this restrictiveness benefits students with significant disabilities in some important ways.

1) For example, some assume only self-contained settings can provide the types of instruction that students with disabilities require (e.g., Kauffman et al., 2002).

2) A further assumption is self-contained settings have highly qualified instructors who can create high quality learning experiences for students with disabilities (e.g. Ayres, Lowrey, Douglas & Sievers, 2011).

3) Another assumption is students with severe disabilities would be better served in self-contained settings rather than being “dumped” without supports in general education classrooms (Ryndak et al., 2010), assuming this “dumping” occurs because teachers and systems are not ready.

4) These assumptions become unquestioned myths – but when we shine a light on actual practices, these myths are easily busted!

1) We know that just dumping kids in a classroom is actually better than keeping them in a self-contained setting (Ryndak et al, 2010)

2) Last year, Kurth and Born completed ecobehavioral assessments of high school classrooms serving students with severe intellectual disability with these myths in mind. We visited 5 high schools in the Midwest, with 19 students and 9 teachers participating. About 1400 minutes of observations were completed. We wanted to know what happened in these classes that would make them “better”.

Self-contained HS classrooms for students with severe disabilities reveal few opportunities to respond, passive engagement, poor quality instruction, and were replete with distractions.
3) Students were predominantly taught by paraprofessionals in passive activities, with no evidence of individualization.

4) Teachers were usually found working at their desks, and when they did teach, they were instructing the whole group.

5) Interestingly, although about 15% of the participating students had complex communication needs, we rarely saw students using or learning to use communication supports, and when they were provided, staff didn’t know how to use them.

6) The curriculum in use was almost never individualized, and all curriculum was either alternate (like “unique learning” – 64%) or there was simply no curriculum in place (33%). Much of the curriculum consisted of worksheets that did not seem to have any scope or sequence.

7) Finally, the level of distraction in these classrooms was significant. While all classrooms are distracting at times, these classrooms usually had almost an equal number of adults and students present, with adults having conversations with one another (34% of all observations) and other students making noises or engaged in off-task behaviors (such as breaks).

8) The takeaway from these observations – kids in these classrooms had no social communication partners with which to develop social communication skills aside from adults, who were too busy talking with one another. They had poor instruction in distracting settings, with no evidence of individualization or curriculum that was sequential or tied to the general education standards.
So how do students with significant disabilities fare in inclusive settings?

There are compelling descriptive and comparative studies spanning 40 years of research demonstrating consistent benefits of inclusive education across important school and life domains.

We also know from comparative research that there are consistent benefits to inclusive education, and the place to access general education curriculum and activities is the general education setting (Jackson, Ryndak, & Wehmeyer, 2008).

This leaves us at a point when justifying segregation and separation is increasingly problematic.

We have in the past set up these false decision points— for example, IEP teams were asked to choose Door A for highly qualified teachers, or Door B for greater opportunities for social interactions, or Door C for intensive individualized instruction.

1) But with our emerging technologies for supporting students with severe disabilities in inclusive settings, such as embedded instruction, universal design for learning, co-teaching and all of the technical assistance activities of SWIFT, we no longer are in a position to have to make these forced choices.
2) All students can go through the same door and have their needs met, with intensive instruction, social skills, all needs met, in inclusive settings.
So what do effective inclusive schools do? Last year, a group of us visited 6 of the SWIFT KDS sites and asked staff there to allow us to observe a student with significant disabilities who was successfully included. A number of key variables were present across these sites.

1) While students were primarily part of large-group instruction, they still received individual supports and instruction from teachers, paraprofessionals, and peers.

2) Personnel used non-traditional teaching arrangements to support student engagement, including frequent use of co-teaching.

3) In fact, in most observations the special and general education teachers were present instructing all students, thus benefiting all students, and frequently collaborated with one another using formal means (e.g., consulting notes) and informal means (e.g., drop-in meetings).

4) Students were engaged using a variety of supports, ranging from classroom fidgets to peer buddies to AAC supports. [Example from kindergarten classroom with box of fidgets at the carpet]

5) We regularly observed students using modified curriculum and materials to support their learning of grade-level content, including i-Pads and other technology for students to communicate, write, and read adapted books.

6) The classrooms themselves were supportive, with materials like fidgets and visual aids readily available, along with personnel able to assist all students.

7) Students enjoyed interactions with people across the campus, including peers in reciprocal social activities, peer tutors, special and general education teachers,
and school staff including office staff and paraprofessionals. In short, these schools pooled their resources and talents to make the school better – together!
We learned valuable lessons in the SWIFT KDS schools about how a diverse group of K-8 schools facilitated inclusion for students with significant disabilities.

But the question remains – how can we radically rethink and reimagine our schools to support all schools in this endeavor? In the next few slides, I’ll share a few ideas, and hope that it sparks some ideas for you to all share next.
Effective inclusive schools work on creating inclusive systems behind the scenes.

For example, McLeskey and colleagues (2014) found an effective inclusive elementary school set rigid schedules, with set times to teach key content such as reading, when supports such as co-teachers would be available, rather than allowing teachers to set their own individual schedules in elementary schools.

In secondary schools, this involves building a master schedule in collaboration with special educators and administrators which allows students with disabilities to take elective courses instead of only remedial academic courses, and scheduling courses at a time when school staff can be available to provide in-class supports and engage in co-teaching and co-planning.
The 1989 movie Field of Dreams is a fitting analogy for us in special education.

Kevin Costner is compelled to build a baseball diamond in his cornfield, knowing that when he builds it, the players will come.

In our schools, we similarly build classrooms and structures and have students come to them. We build self-contained classrooms, and fill them with students. Or perhaps we build a discipline room and allow teachers to send trouble-makers to that room. In the end – when we have a place to separate and segregate students – we use it.

So let’s not build special classes or schools. Where we already have them, let’s empty them! We could have no “special education” schools, classes, or teachers – but an array of supports for all students (Kleinhammer-Trammel & Sailor).

Instead have drawers or bins of modified scissors and manipulatives and visual aides distributed in classrooms, paraprofessionals and special education teachers traveling around schools working in general education classrooms and settings, in short, let’s NOT have a place to go other than the general setting.
Another suggestion is to pool our talents.

No one person is likely going to have all of the answers or all of the strategies. But together we most likely can achieve much more.

Setting aside non-negotiable times to collaborate and work together to problem solve is another effective strategy to promote inclusive schools. This would ideally involve setting aside 60 minutes for common planning and collaborating, but it may involve using time in innovative ways, such as scheduling “specials” at the same times so teachers can plan or even planning an independent activity (such as a film) when staff can quickly meet and plan on a regular basis.

This also includes designing our curriculum and activities in a universal manner, with proactive lesson planning to accommodate the unique learning styles and strengths of all students.
Think of the vast personnel resources at the school as a potentially underutilized resource.

Let’s not assign one-to-one, or even “special education” paraprofessionals and instead employ classroom paraprofessionals who can support teachers and all students.

Let’s identify the skills, talents and preferences of school personnel to see how they can help sustain and build inclusive practices.

Think of all the personnel who are part of this community – coaches, custodians, related services providers, librarians, office staff, teachers, parents, local businesses, and so on. What are the unique skills and talents and resources these people can offer to building an inclusive community? This makes all members of the school community involved in the inclusion efforts, building it’s sustainability and commitment.
This is a view of a traditional classroom – rows of desks and everything the same.

We don’t need our classrooms to look or feel this way. We could turn those desks into table groups and facilitate the social and communication development of all students. We could even add some adjustable height desks to accommodate wheelchairs and students who learn better standing.

Remember when we talked about taking the contents of special education classrooms and dumping them across the whole school? That makes classrooms look and feel different.

I was in an inclusive middle school in Arizona where the teachers did just that – they emptied the self-contained room. I was visiting a history class where a student was using therapy mats to do PT exercises while the teacher lectured. Other peers were also on the mats, stretching and listening. Other classrooms had yoga balls instead of chairs. The slant boards and wedge cushions which once belonged to special education were in all classrooms, with anyone who needed it using them. You can bet this was a change for teachers and students, but one that was quickly embraced as it helped all students pay attention and participate in a way never possible before. It also reduced any stigma about using equipment which was now seen as highly coveted by all students.
So think of the vast array of resources we have tied up in classrooms like sensory rooms, speech therapy offices, and special education classrooms. What would schools look and feel like if all kids could use them when they needed these resources?
We all remember the scene in Wizard of Oz where Dorothy misses her balloon flight home, starts to cry, and is subsequently notified by Glinda that with those fancy ruby slippers, she had the power to return home the whole time; she just needed to discover it for herself.

So as I end this presentation today, I want to remind you:

You're more powerful than you think. What are the strategies and hidden powers or supports in schools you are in that can be reimagined to support inclusive schools for students with severe disabilities?