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# Introduction

IN THE UTOPIAN SOCIETY fictionalized in his book *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley's populace is separated at birth into categories of Alphas, Betas, Deltas, and Epsilons. Each classification delegates duties and honors to citizens in descending alphabetical order; the Alphas rule, and the Epsilons clean up. Our schools share a similar penchant for categorization and separation based on ability. In Huxley's novel, people are segregated to make their world a more orderly place. The educational rationale for categorizing and separating students is to meet individual needs. The principle of meeting educational needs is a worthwhile goal that is embedded in federal law, but so is integration of students with their nondisabled peers.

From 1999 to 2000, most students with disabilities spent the majority of their school day in the regular classroom. Others were educated primarily in special education classrooms. Students with specific learning disabilities and speech impairments spent the most time in regular classrooms. But only 3.2% of students with mental retardation, 4.5% of students with emotional disturbance, and .5% of students with autism were educated alongside their nondisabled peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Those who required social development the most had the least access to normal school experiences.

If the practice of segregating students by disability showed some success, at least the ends would justify the means, but signs of success are meager. A nationwide survey of “blue ribbon” programs for students with emotional disabilities found an overwhelming emphasis on behavior control and scant attention paid to educational needs (Knitzer, Steinberg, & Fleisch, 1990). The results are predictable. Approximately 50% of students with emotional and behavioral problems drop out of school (U.S. Department of Education, 2000); these forgotten young people are America’s Epsilons. The time is ripe for change.

## **WHAT IS INCLUSION?**

Inclusion is a federal mandate to provide special education services in the regular classroom, and the final stage in a steady progression of civil and educational rights for individuals with disabilities. It was not so long ago that the presence of a disability put a youngster on the fast track to life in an institution. This tragic practice went into decline in 1975 with the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Thanks to this groundbreaking federal law, students with disabilities have the right to a free and appropriate education in public schools. Yet for some students, access to a public school education has been at the expense of a normal school experience because of the widespread separation of students based on disability.

Sometimes students are categorized by disability and placed in separate special education classrooms where they remain until they exit school for good. Other special education students spend part of their day in a regular classroom but are required to leave their classroom for special education tutoring. Separation has fostered a slew of negative consequences. Stereotypes and

low expectations abound. The further away from the mainstream of a normal school experience, the higher the likelihood a student will fail. For every minute of special education instruction students receive, they lose a minute of regular classroom instruction.

It is likely that future educators will look back at the inclusion movement and wonder what took so long. In the future, the practice of separating students because of differences in ability might seem as undemocratic as segregation by race, ethnicity, or religion. During my 35-year career in education, I have had the opportunity to work in and visit hundreds of special and regular education classrooms. Throughout this time, I have observed a simple but dynamic principle: Good teachers are equally effective with both regular and special education students. Make no mistake, the work of teaching students with diverse abilities is difficult. Without proper administrative support, even the best teacher can lose heart.

Within this book, I have recorded teaching and administrative qualities that characterize successful inclusion programs. Much of this information is derived from research, and an equal amount is based on my experience as an educator. Throughout, the emphasis is on practical strategies for organizing and implementing inclusion programs.

This book is written for administrators, teachers, and parents who believe that for many students with disabilities, the regular classroom is the appropriate educational placement. Chapter 1 explains the meaning of inclusion and why it is a growing trend. Chapter 2 describes some of the history behind the inclusion movement and the passing of the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA). Chapter 3 delves into the legal requirements of federal and state law. Chapter 4 explains the organizational dynamics of successful inclusion programs. Chapter 5 identifies teaching strategies that have been proven effective within inclusion programs, and Chapter 6 explains how to deal with discipline and problem behaviors in an inclusive setting. Chapter 7 wraps up with a discussion of how inclusion programs benefit the entire education system.

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## Chapter 1

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# Inclusion Can Work

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT INCLUSION, a controversial shift in how students with disabilities are educated. Inclusion bridges the gap between regular and special education by minimizing the practice of separating students for special education instruction. Within inclusive classrooms, students with disabilities learn side by side with their nondisabled peers.

In the past, special educators were primarily responsible for providing special education; within inclusion programs, regular education teachers share that responsibility. Proponents of inclusion regard the movement as a logical continuation of the decades-long struggle to integrate individuals with disabilities into the mainstream of public school life. Others fear that regular education teachers are not suitably trained to provide appropriate individualized education to students with disabilities.

Inclusion is not for every student. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that students with special needs be educated in the “least restrictive environment.” “Least restrictive” is a relative, not an absolute, term. Every school system is mandated by law to offer a variety of special

education placements, ranging from full-time regular classroom placement (inclusion, the least restrictive) to residential placement (the most restrictive). Between least and most restrictive exists a variety of options, including pull-out programs for special education tutoring (the student spends the majority of time in the regular classroom), special education classrooms (self-contained classes populated only by students with special needs), and alternative schools (private or public school programs). The decision to place a student in an inclusion classroom is made when a student's family and school officials meet to design the student's individual education program (IEP).

## THE INCLUSION MOVEMENT

Several sources have spurred the inclusion movement. The federal special education law Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that the regular classroom be the first consideration when deciding on an appropriate special education placement. Many parents and advocates for students with disabilities argue that inclusion in school is the best preparation for inclusion in the community. In addition, a study by Baker, Wang, and Walberg (1994) reported that special education students perform better academically within the regular classroom, rather than in special education classrooms. Furthermore, many special education students express a preference for regular classroom instruction.

Some educators believe that inclusion saves money. The more time special education students spend in the regular classroom, the reasoning goes, the less need for special education teachers, supervisors, and administrators. The perceived cost-cutting opportunities involved in inclusion present an attractive option



to financially strapped school systems. It is true that well-conceived inclusion programs can save money over a period of time, but in most instances, inclusion is more expensive in the short term. Long-term savings come from reduced referrals for special education services, shared materials and resources, decreased out-of-district placements, reduced transportation costs, and a declining need for space to house special education programs. Short-term monetary increases occur because of the need to support regular and special education teachers through in-service training, planning sessions, and professional consultation.

Above and beyond educational considerations, inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the mainstream of American life is a nationwide movement with vast social repercussions. Forty-nine million Americans with disabilities constitute the single largest minority in the country. Individuals with disabilities exceed the combined populations of California, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming, (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1997). Sooner or later, nearly everyone is disabled through age, sickness, or injury. Disabilities are nothing to be ashamed of, nor do they limit an individual's potential. The author John Milton was blind. Composer Ludwig van Beethoven was deaf. George Washington had a learning disability. In more recent times such prominent figures as Henry Ford, Nelson Rockefeller, and Thomas Edison had learning disabilities.

Since the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1975, individuals with disabilities have made remarkable gains. Yet young people with disabilities still face a stiff challenge in schools. Negative stereotypes, inadequate teacher training, and one-size-fits-all instructional strategies create limitations

that are difficult to overcome. Perhaps more than anything else, individuals with disabilities are limited by the psychological and educational terms used to describe them. Consider some of the language used to identify students with disabilities: “handicapped,” “mentally retarded,” and “emotionally disturbed.” These terms, which open the door to special education services by identifying a disability, create stereotypes and imprint a perception of permanent inadequacy that is difficult to overcome. When people with disabilities are queried about their most difficult hurdles, they nearly always mention negative stereotypes that limit their opportunities as a first response (Taylor & Searl, 1987).

### **A SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY**

Several years ago, I supervised a student teacher who was mentoring in a self-contained class for students with intellectual disabilities. Most of the eight students had Down syndrome, a genetic disorder that at one time put children on the fast track to life in an institution. My visit was on St. Patrick’s Day. The school was festooned with green bunting and other Irish paraphernalia. When I entered the classroom, I saw seven of the eight students in odd costumes. The teacher proudly told me that the student teacher had done an excellent Native American unit and the students were going to do a “harvest dance” for me. A chair was placed in the center of the room, and with some urging from the teacher, the students began chanting and dancing around me. One student refused, and he was disciplined. I admired the young rebel. Clearly he was embarrassed, as was I, by the way the teachers displayed the children in beads, headbands, and feathers on the same day that all other students were dressed in green. I wondered how this