

**Forty Years Towards School Inclusion in the United States:
Lessons Learned and the Promise of the Future**

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Before there were children with disabilities in typical schools in North America, there was only hope and need. Before the creation of highly specialized plans of education, individualized instruction techniques, methods of differentiating group instruction or regulations mandating the adherence to government regulations, there were only families, children with disabilities and institutions.

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Preamble

In 1948, Joseph and Elizabeth Calabrese walked with their two sons to their local neighborhood school to register them for the first grade. The Calabreses and their two sons, Larry and Don, were turned away. Children with disabilities were not welcome at that school, or at few others. Larry and Don were thought to be incapable of learning, unable to grow, and unable to take advantage of typical schools or community life. The only options for care or assistance were the institutions, ready and willing to keep the two boys apart and away from the neighborhood, family, and home community for the rest of their lives. The Calabreses refused to institutionalize their sons, and they built a place for Larry and Don to attend school. It was called Laradon Hall (Laradon Hall, 2013). For 1949, when education for children with disabilities was an impossible dream, this was a radical change from warehousing people with disabilities in institutions. This superbly bold move later came to represent a part of the problem that we live with today in trying to build an inclusive society, and we can learn valuable lessons about how we might proceed from here.

Historic and Historical Change

The history of inclusion in the United States has moved along a rough continuum from institutions towards fully inclusive schools, although the reality and promise of true inclusive education in the United States remains a distant dream held by advocates, change agents, and reformers. Important mileposts along the way included a bold movement of parents (Minnesota Council on Developmental Disability, 2017a) in the 1950's and 1960's. As the civil rights era made powerful steps towards advancing the human, legal, and political rights of women, minorities and other marginalized groups, we were able to apply the lessons learned for social and political action from these reformers, and apply a strong social justice platform to advance the position of people with disabilities. This resulted in the disability rights movement (Syracuse

University, 2013) of the 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's and even up to today. Although this movement has primarily been led by people with physical disabilities, the effectiveness of their campaigns towards accessibility, anti-discrimination, and consciousness-raising among the citizenry have not been lost on other groups of people with disabilities and their advocates and supporters. In particular, this movement towards civil rights led to laws to support both great hopes for a society where all people belong, as well as the need to create space within our society so that everyone can contribute. Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (United States Department of Labor, 2017) called for all federally funded buildings to be accessible for people with disabilities, including all publically funded schools. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (United States Department of Education, 2017) was the first law to mandate the rights of children with disabilities and guarantee a free and appropriate public education. The education act was updated and titled The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1989 (Wikipedia, 2017) in order to enhance effectiveness. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (United States Department of Justice, 2009) was passed in order to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability. These laws demonstrate both progress and a strong intention, but they do not tell the complete story as the struggle toward inclusion in the past 40 years is both gifted with effective teaching practices (Land, 2017) and also burdened with bias and assumption (Anti-Defamation League, 2017) carried forward from times of eugenics mindsets (Eugenics Archive, 2017) and mass institutionalization.

We have also learned to apply learning technologies and empirically based methods in typical inclusive settings for the most positive outcomes. In the 1970's, Dr. Marc Gold combined science and humanity in his Try Another Way (MCDD, 2017a) methodology, which is known today as Systematic Instruction. Dr. Gold started from a firm understanding that, "The behaviors our children show are a reflection of our incompetence, not theirs" (MCDD, 2017a). This

fundamental truth is the nominal starting place of inclusive education today. To presume competence in typical classrooms with typical students allows for the application of methods that work (Biklen, 2013). Correct methods in incorrect settings results in unwanted and unintentional outcomes – a simple fact that has been consistently ignored and trivialized by many parties.

Reflections of a Mother and Educator on 40 Years of Change-Agency

Elizabeth Calbrese had the benefit of a mother's love, combined with years of operating a residential school designed for her sons and occupied by hundreds of other children with disabilities. The residential school, which she founded so many years ago for her sons, had served as the school for many hundreds of children with disabilities over her long career as an educator and administrator. It continued on as an "institution for life" as some children grew up and stayed, living their whole lives there, a lifetime both congregated and segregated, apart and away. After 40 years, Mrs. Calabrese retired from her labor of love, and was able to reflect on all that was learned. She said, "I learned more sitting here (in my home), by myself, then I did in all those years of working at Laradon Hall...I couldn't learn then- I was too busy doing"(Calabrese, personal communication, 1992).

Those are the words of Elizabeth Calabrese as she sat in her living room in 1992 (note that all subsequent quotations are from Elizabeth Calabrese are personal communication, 1992). Forty-four years after the Denver Public Schools turned away the sons of the Calabreses, Mrs. Calabrese and I sat together and reflected on what her life was like and what she would have done differently to design desirable futures for Larry and Don. I was curious about what her initial vision was as she worked to establish a segregated school in 1949. I knew the practical reason, but needed to know what her dreams were at the time, what she thought "could be" for people with disabilities. I knew her husband Joe as a tough and driven man with heart. I can imagine that the words of the Denver Public Schools administrator, "I am sorry, but we simply

don't have any place for your sons," were enough to put Joe on a quest. He was truly a man not to be denied. When Mrs. Calabrese was asked what her big intentions were in establishing Laradon Hall, "I don't know" was her quick and firm reply. She thought for a while, and added "If they could play with other children they would get better...I don't think we knew what we were doing, ...but I had some ideas from my own childhood playing with kids at home."

I pressed Mrs. Calabrese for a heartfelt vision, something she truly yearned to accomplish with this venture. "I did not have any idea about a dream or vision...I worked too hard...After a while, my vision was to get out."

When asked if she could travel back to 1949, would she do it again, a firm "no" was the answer that came, swift and sure. She clarified, "Neither Larry or Don were happy with Laradon Hall...When I ran it I could not fend for them...I was too busy feeding this kid or cleaning that kid." It was obvious that Elizabeth Calabrese had given her life and her heart for children from many families. I asked her what she would do if she considered only the needs of her sons. "I would have quit Laradon Hall and taken care of my boys at home. Larry never wanted to go to Laradon...he did not like doctors...and loved his home"

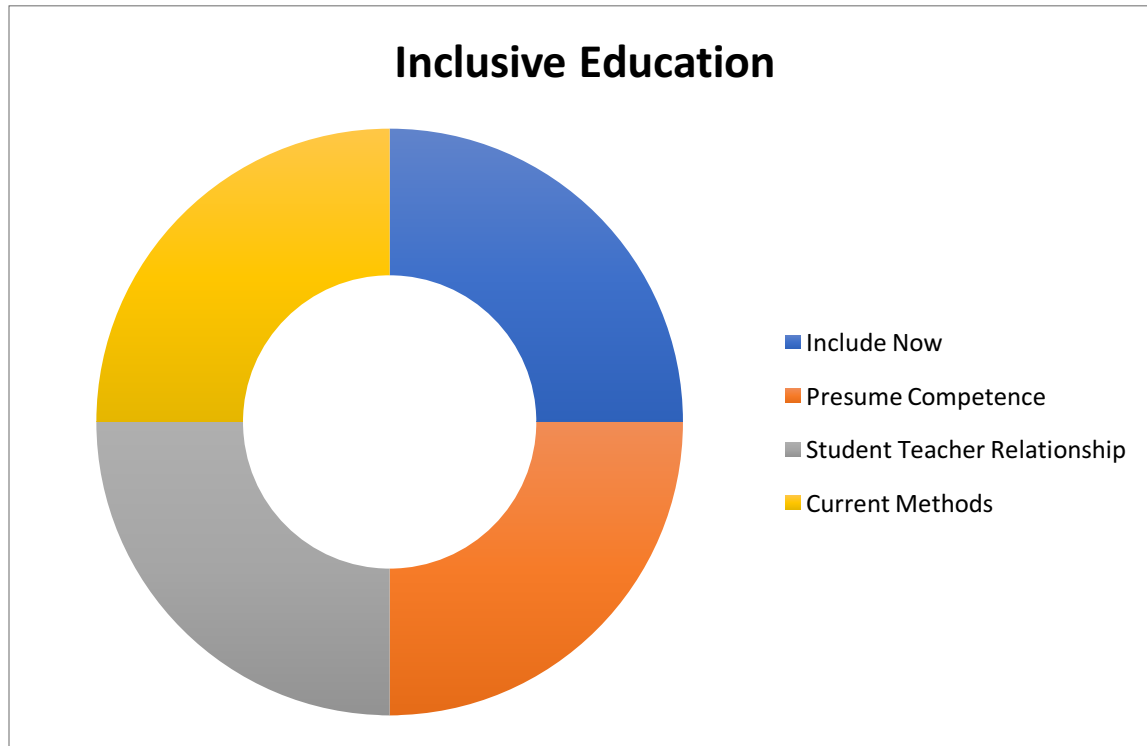
Elizabeth Calabrese did just that a few years before Larry died. "The doctors said Larry had six months to live and I should put him in a nursing home...I refused, took him home and he lived for seventeen years after that." Elizabeth went on to explain that Larry required twenty-four hour care. "Larry took twenty-four hour care but it was the people we hired to help that wore me out...they didn't love him and couldn't do it right."

The Lessons from Our Past

One powerful lesson which could be learned if we choose in the years since 1948, is that technical strategies and methods are only effective in the long-term when applied within the places of typical community – regular schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, houses of worship,

and places where people recreate. The idea of a “preparation for inclusion” or “readiness for inclusion” is viable only in theory. Once removed from ordinary classrooms, children with disabilities seldom return to community life. Decreases in knowledge, social competencies and friendships are common outcomes of exclusionary educational and social settings.

Our US laws in support of the full participation of people with disabilities in everyday life came with high hopes of meeting the needs of all people. In 1975, there was great celebration as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was passed. Empowered advocates and families marched to the schools and demanded they open their doors and welcome their children into the classroom. In some ways, these hopes have been realized. But as regulations were developed from the laws, negative bias and assumption crept in to re-create modern forms of institutionalization and exclusion. Today’s advocates, teachers, administrators, and families can guard against this within today’s inclusive school environments. Four clear directives and a few pedagogical methods work together to guide the most successful inclusionary practices of today. These four directives, taken together, result in the best chances for true inclusivity and child growth. Taken separately, their impact is weakened.



- 1) Do it now and in ordinary settings
- 2) Presume competence
- 3) Rely on a strong teacher-student relationship as a basis for responding to the individual ways that each child learns
- 4) Use current methods as transformational to what is being done now with what must be done to educate all children together

Current Methods – A Few High-Value Examples

Differentiated Instruction

As put forth by Concordia University (2018), differentiated instruction as a model requires teachers to be flexible in their approach to teaching and adjust the curriculum and presentation of information to learners, rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum. The capacity to teach students from varying backgrounds, knowledge, and learning styles in the same classroom is the foundation of differentiated instruction. These methods provide the support that students with disabilities require, and form the building blocks of a transformational classroom.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a set of principles for flexible curriculum development that give all students vast opportunities to access rich learning. It provides a format to create instructional objectives, methods, materials, and assessments that can be customized and adapted for each student depending on their individual needs (Center for Applied Special Learning, 2017). Presenting information in varied ways, allowing for flexibility in how students can express what they have learned, and keeping all students engaged and challenged in learning means that students with widely divergent backgrounds, cultural and linguistic traditions, intellectual and physical disabilities and giftedness can all benefit from what is offered within the UDL framework.

Direct Instruction

All children can and do learn when the instruction is efficient, effective and systemic (National Institute on Direct Instruction, 2013). Direct instruction emphasizes face-to-face or small group instruction with skills broken down into units or sequences and taught with deliberation. The history of direct instruction can be traced from the work of Dr. Gold in Try

Another Way (MCCDD, 2017a). Direct instruction also creates an environment supportive of peer teaching.

Peer Teaching

Peer teaching or peer learning has roots that can be traced as far back as Socrates, and was strengthened through the work of Paulo Freire. When students teach each other the teacher-directed method is no longer required as the primary implementer of pedagogy.

Co-Teaching

When two teachers with different pedagogical skill sets work in partner-pairs, the quality of instruction and supports for students with disabilities increases. Effective Co-Teaching (TeachHub.com, 2017) has a set of strategies and classroom environments that accommodate each student as well as the goals of UDL.

One Last Essential: The Importance of Understanding Natural Distribution

A final essential component that underlies all of the above is understanding and using the knowledge that we possess about how human beings tolerate and accept ‘difference’. If we understand the social theory that underlies the innate human desire to ‘push out’ those who are seen as different in a negative way, we can capitalize on the dynamics that we know ‘work’ to cause acceptance. There is much to be said and learned from social theory in this regard, but one lesson may stand above all others. Human beings seems to be ‘hard-wired’ to tolerate and accept the amount of ‘difference’ that naturally occurs amongst our species. Therefore, we must avoid violating the natural distribution if we are to maximize the changes for acceptance of people with disabilities. This translates as follows: If there approximately 2% of the population experiences severe intellectual disabilities, our schools and classrooms are likely to be able to successfully integrate 2 children with significant disabilities into every group of 100 children. My daughter’s school, where 300 students are educated, will probably be able to most successfully integrate

about 6 children with severe intellectual disabilities. This is a simple fact of human behavior, one that we can capitalize on the ‘stack the deck’ for success.

Conclusion

The inclusion movement in the United States was led by hopes and guided by needs. The work of creating a legal framework was critical to the implementation of inclusive education, but has never held all the answers to working successfully towards an educational framework that includes all children together. As children begin to become important and valued members of their neighborhood schools and typical classrooms, methods of delivering learning emerged and developed as part of the science of education. The lessons of 40 years have shown that children benefit most when they remain in typical settings supported by teachers who know them and see the competence of each. We have seen the best classrooms developed through systemic processes of serving the child with a disability and make use of evolving teacher competence to transform schools. We know that these things must be done together and consciously in order to normalize inclusive education and prevent the influences of the narratives of disability bias.

Much remains to be done, despite the progress that has been made. By and large, children in the United States who have significant disabilities continue to be segregated within typical schools in a host of “special needs” classrooms. And yet, we have promising tools and methods, which can be powerfully combined to move us towards the vision that Mrs. Calabrese, might have had for Larry and Don.

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