

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE U.S. AND EFFECTIVE CURRENT PRACTICES

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The United States is often viewed as a leader in education, but American educators have not always pursued progressive policies. There is a dark side to American history of special education that few outside academia are aware. Before the 1970s, American children with disabilities were either taught in special schools or were not educated at all, as they were considered uneducable. Students with disabilities did not have the same educational rights as other children and were typically isolated in institutions calling themselves “schools,” but in reality were simply warehouses for unwanted children. One such institution was Willowbrook State School in New York.

The conditions at Willowbrook were horrendous. The children were often chained to their beds, locked in dark rooms in isolation or spent hours lying on filthy floors. Visitors to Willowbrook were disturbed by the continual screaming and crying. Neglect was rampant, as basic needs such as toothbrushes and toilet paper were rarely provided (Rivera, 1972b). In his groundbreaking television expose, the young journalist Geraldo Rivera (1972a) lamented, “It smelled of filth. It smelled of disease, and it smelled of death.” Without consideration of ethical practices, children were deliberately exposed to hepatitis during experimental studies, in which doctors injected the virus directly into their bodies to study the effects of the disease (National Institutes of Health, 2009).

Unfortunately, Willowbrook was part of a general educational trend in the U.S. It was not the only institution subjecting students with disabilities to inhumane conditions. Similar levels of abuse and neglect were common in many other institutions for children with disabilities. Violation of the rights of children with special needs was pervasive.

While this history is certainly tragic, the aim is to show that positive change is possible, even under the most difficult of circumstances. Beginning in the 1950s and continuing through the early 1970s, a series of influential events and court cases culminated in federal legislation that made illegal the educational isolation of children with disabilities. One impetus for positive change was the Civil Rights Movement, during which people of color fought for the right to vote, receive an equal education and participate fully in society. The courage of early civil rights leaders inspired others to advocate for equal rights of individuals with disabilities. If it is wrong to discriminate against individuals on the basis of ethnicity, then it is wrong to discriminate on the basis of any other physical characteristic, such as disability (Turnbull, Turnbull, Stowe & Huerta, 2006). The 1960s and 70s saw many protests by individuals with disabilities who demanded access to public transportation, community services, equal employment and safe housing. People also fought for the

rights of children with special needs to receive the same quality of education as children without disabilities.

During the turbulent decade of the 1960s, there was a major paradigm shift in American attitudes towards children with disabilities as people rejected Social Darwinism and embraced an attitude of equal protection and rights of all people. Americans began espousing the belief that everyone has the right to live in safety and dignity, and all children have a right to an equal and appropriate education. Additionally, scientists were proving that students with even severe disabilities could learn. Numerous scientific studies proved that education could help all children with disabilities.

As Americans' attitudes changed, politically powerful families began to talk publicly about their own sons and daughters with disabilities. Congressmen with children with special needs became leaders in the fight for the rights of individuals with disabilities. John F. and Robert F. Kennedy's sister Rosemary had cognitive disabilities, and Robert paid a visit to Willowbrook insisting that the school reform (New York Times, 1965). But the school refused to reform, and eventually, a furious public outcry forced the permanent closure of Willowbrook following Geraldo Rivera's publicized investigative television report, in which he brought cameras directly into the infamous institution (Rivera, 1972a). Other similar institutions were closed, as well, ending a tragic and notorious chapter in the history of American special education.

In response to widespread discrimination, parents and advocacy groups filed numerous lawsuits against schools that refused to provide equal educational opportunities to all children, and generally, the U.S. Supreme Court sided with the parents and children. One of the most influential cases was *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. In 1954, Linda Brown, an African American girl, was barred from attending an elementary school with white children in Topeka, Kansas. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that separate educational facilities are unequal and racial segregation violates the 14th Amendment. Segregation makes children feel inferior and is psychologically damaging. The significant implications of this case are that segregating an entire group of children on the basis of any characteristic, including disabilities, is unconstitutional (Turnbull, Turnbull, Stowe & Huerta, 2006). If separating children based on ethnicity is a violation of their civil rights, so, too, is separating children with disabilities.

In 1971, the Supreme Court heard arguments in the case *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*. Children with cognitive disabilities were being denied education in Pennsylvania. The state argued that children with mental retardation cannot learn and therefore cannot benefit from schooling. The Supreme Court ruled that all children ages 4-21 must be provided free public education, because all children can learn (Turnbull, Turnbull, Stowe & Huerta, 2006).

One year later, the Supreme Court listened to arguments in *Mills v. Washington, D.C. Board of Education*, another landmark case. Seven children with learning disabilities had been refused admittance to public school in Washington,

D.C. The school argued it did not have enough money to teach the children, but the High Court ruled that insufficient funds is not an excuse for refusing to educate children and ordered the school to accept them and provide an appropriate education (Turnbull, Turnbull, Stowe & Huerta, 2006). The Supreme Court reiterated previous rulings that all children with disabilities have a right to an education (Turnbull, Turnbull, Stowe & Huerta, 2006).

In 1992, the Supreme Court heard *Holland v. Sacramento City Unified School*. In this case, a school district claimed that a young girl with moderate cognitive disabilities could not be educated in a general education classroom and argued for the right to place her in special classes for children with disabilities. The High Court disagreed and held that she had a right to be educated in a general education classroom. This milestone ruling affirmed that children with disabilities have a right to be educated in an inclusive education program (Turnbull, Turnbull, Stowe & Huerta, 2006).

Following years of protests, successful lawsuits by parents and a monumental shift in societal attitudes, the U.S. Congress enacted a series of laws to protect the rights of students with special needs. In 1973, Congress passed Section 504, which legislated that schools, colleges, and universities receiving federal money must provide architectural accommodations to make their buildings physically accessible to students with disabilities (Turnbull, Turnbull, Stowe & Huerta, 2006). In 1975, Congress passed the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, which required schools to provide a free and appropriate public education to all children and introduced the principal of “zero reject,” the legal concept that no child can be denied a free and appropriate education. It also mandated that educational teams must consider providing students with disabilities education in the least restrictive environment, i.e., inclusion in general education, and it mandated parental participation in planning students’ educational programs (Turnbull, Turnbull, Stowe & Huerta, 2006). The rights of children with disabilities were further strengthened in 1986, when Congress created a new federal program for infants and toddlers with disabilities. The law requires an education plan for young children (birth to 5) called an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), which is essentially an IEP (Individual Education Plan) for a family (Turnbull, Turnbull, Stowe & Huerta, 2006).

As a result of Supreme Court rulings and federal laws enacted by Congress, current educational practices favor inclusive education for students with disabilities. In the United States, most students with disabilities receive some level of educational services in a general education setting. In 2010, some 95% of 6 to 21 year old students with disabilities were served in regular schools and of these students, 60.5% spent eighty percent of their school day in an inclusive general education classroom with peers without disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

Inclusion refers to educating students with special needs in a general education environment with peers who do not have disabilities and consists of two levels: full inclusion, where students with special needs spend 100% of their day with peers without disabilities, or partial inclusion, where students spend part of their day with

peers without disabilities (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2011). For instance, a student may spend 75% of his or her day in a general education classroom and 25% of the day in a special class. The level of inclusion is dependent on the individual needs of the student.

Providing an inclusive education to children with disabilities achieves a number of significant goals, one of which is to develop students' independence to the greatest extent possible. Inclusion also provides students without disabilities opportunities to learn how to live and work cooperatively with children with special needs. They develop acceptance of their peers with disabilities, which encourages positive social interactions and successful integration within the wider community. Inclusion also provides greater access to the same curriculum for all students, facilitating successful inclusion at the post-secondary level. Students with disabilities have a very difficult time succeeding in higher education when they arrive at colleges and universities unprepared for the curriculum. Finally, inclusive education is a critical feature of a democratic society. How can a society claim to be democratic, if it denies an entire segment of its population equal access to education and, subsequently, the community?

Inclusion is a critical educational practice, but it takes careful planning and effort. Dr. Olga Krsek of Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University often reminds other educators that simply placing students with special needs in a general education classroom is not enough and does not automatically guarantee a successful educational experience. Students must be educated in a deliberately supportive environment that meets their individual educational needs. Educational supports for students with special needs provide accessibility to the curriculum and include: sign language interpreters for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, books and materials in braille for students who are blind, large print books for low-vision students, peer tutoring in which classmates without disabilities provide academic support to peers with special needs, peer note-takers which allow students with disabilities to focus on classroom discussions and lectures, graphic organizers which help students with cognitive or language disabilities learn new vocabulary or concepts and assist them in organizing ideas for essays or stories, and hands-on activities and visuals which make concepts more accessible to all students (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2011).

Additionally, inclusive education cannot succeed without collaboration between general and special education teachers who work together to solve problems and provide an effective education to students with disabilities. One example of collaboration is team teaching, which allows special and general education teachers to plan lessons together that both of them will teach in the same classroom for the benefit of both students with and without disabilities. Other examples of collaboration include special education teachers consulting with general education teachers, as well as teachers working together on Individual Education Planning (IEP) teams (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2011).

Two final critical supports for students with disabilities include accommodations and modifications (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2011). Accommodations

are changes to how students learn content. A few examples include extended time for assignments or tests; oral tests in place of written exams; supportive seating, such as placing a student near the teacher; and shorter assignments. Modifications refer to changes to what students learn. These include changes to the curriculum itself, rewriting tests at a lower reading level, requiring fewer assignments, reducing the number of vocabulary words, and changing types of mathematical operations to be learned.

Certainly, successful inclusion of children with disabilities is challenging and takes considerable effort, but that is not a reason to deny students with disabilities the same educational rights and opportunities as other children. It is important that all of us open our hearts and minds to each child, because all children deserve equal respect and opportunities to succeed at their greatest potential. As educators, we must maintain high expectations for all of our students, because all students have the potential to learn.

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INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES IN DISTANT LEARNING

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Education must always correspond to the requirements of the time and society. Today's urgent need is a new learning environment connected with both innovative learning technologies and innovative technical means. Distance learning can be defined as a result of rapid contemporary changes in education; it is learning via computer network. It was designed for those ones who, due to various reasons, such as lack of time, financial difficulties etc., do not have an opportunity to learn directly at a university under the supervision of a tutor, but seek to study independently. Psychologists are sure that only independent work with textbooks, manuals, reference books results in knowledge. Distance education develops skills of independent thinking, teaches to work systematically, to assess a learning situation, draw conclusions, and forecast. It allows you to read the latest information and makes it easy to navigate through the subject.