

# It's instruction over place – not the other way around!

Advocates of inclusion, with their emphasis on the place of instruction as opposed to instruction itself, are putting the cart before the horse, according to the logic of the law.

By **James M. Kauffman** and  
**Jeanmarie Badar**

Suppose that every Olympic event had to be held in the same environment. No special environments for swimming, running, or soccer; no special grassy field or track marked with lanes. Sports are sports, the thinking goes, so to be fair, all competitions should be held in a single arena or stadium. Not only that, but all athletes are just that — athletes. So for swimming, say, there should be no competition just for the butterfly or the breast stroke; all swimmers should swim all strokes and distances.

Or suppose in hospitals there were no ICUs, no NICUs, or no maternity wards, none of that “special” stuff, just good hospital care for everyone because, after all, hospitals are hospitals, doctors are doctors, and patients are patients.

**The law did not envision special education as a single kind of place.**

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It wouldn't take you long to think these are really crackbrained ideas. Yet we let similar nonsense pass for innovation in education.

Many recent proposals to reform or transform general and special education have emphasized full inclusion — that is, moving all students with disabilities into regular or general education. The idea is that all schools and classes should serve all students so that no students are taught in special, dedicated environments (Brigham, Ahn, Stride, & McKenna, 2016; Gliona, Gonzales, & Jacobson, 2005; Kauffman et al., 2016; Kauffman, Ward, & Badar, 2016).



**Concern for social benefits must not come at the expense of appropriate instruction.**

For instance, take California's state plan for inclusion (The Special Edge, 2016). There, the place of instruction is what matters most; the assumption is that all instruction can and should be offered in the same place.

The idea of having all students together in the same schools and classes regardless of their needs for special instruction is taken seriously or even mandated by various legislators and administrators. But the fact is, this can make teachers' jobs impossible and place undue stress on both teachers and their students.

### **Double ironies**

Movement toward full inclusion reveals two remarkable ironies, one legal and one conceptual. The legal irony is that the U.S. Department of Education supports projects such as SWIFT (School-Wide Integrated Framework for Transformation) at the University of Kansas; the project's motto is "All means

all" ([www.swiftschools.org](http://www.swiftschools.org)). However, federal law requires a continuum of alternative placements, not full inclusion (see Bateman, 2007, in press; Martin, 2013; Yell, 2016; Yell, Crockett, Shriner, & Rozalski, in press). In fact, in spring 2016, a federal appeals court found that the Los Angeles Unified School District's abandonment of a continuum of alternative placements in favor of inclusion violated the federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Smith v. LAUSD, 2016). So the legal irony is that the U.S. Department of Education supports full inclusion projects that are illegal under its own law.

The conceptual irony is that although some have suggested that special education be reconceptualized as a service, not a place, special education never was conceptualized as a place to begin with. Blackman (1992) epitomized the growing emphasis on place almost a quarter of a century ago:

"Place" is the issue . . . *There is nothing pervasively wrong with special education.* What is being questioned is not the interventions and knowledge that has (sic) been acquired through special education training and research. Rather, what is being challenged is the location where these supports are being provided to students with disabilities (p. 29).

The place of instruction, not instruction itself, has become the central focus of the full inclusion movement. It's been made the focus by the very people who say it shouldn't be.

### **The illogic of full inclusion**

Attempts to transform general and special education to conform to the full inclusion ideal are not only illegal — they're also illogical. The idea that instruction can be improved simply by changing where it's delivered or that all instruction can best be delivered in a general education context is inconsistent with experience and careful thinking. We know that teaching environments that are relatively free of distraction are better than those with frequent distractions. We know that environments that are relatively free of stress are better than those in which stress is high. We know that learning is more likely when both student and teacher know that the student can accomplish the required tasks.

One common reason given for adopting full inclusion is that students with disabilities will be exposed to challenging standards and a rich general education curriculum. However, expectations that are higher than an individual can reach can be humiliating to that person. Good instructors realize that expectations can be beyond the reach of a given individual at a given time and that expectations far beyond a student's ability may be counterproduc-

tive. Further, the notion that exposure to a curriculum grants access to it is not founded in logic or reality (Fuchs et al., 2015). Logic demands that some special education needs require special curriculums.

Moreover, full inclusion raises the demand for accommodation or differentiation to unreachable heights for most teachers. “Ought implies can” was an ethical principle described by philosopher Immanuel Kant; that is, before we can suggest that someone ought to do something, we first have to know whether he or she can.

Most teachers cannot do what proponents of full inclusion assume they ought to be able to do. A few highly gifted teachers who expend extraordinary time and effort may be able to teach an extraordinarily learning-diverse group of children and do it well, but most teachers cannot and should not be expected to. Those demanding full inclusion ignore both the diversity of students’ needs and the diversity of teachers’ abilities.

Another reason given for pushing the idea of full inclusion is that children with and without disabilities will socialize and learn from and about one another and that those with disabilities will see appropriate role models through behavior and learning. But concern

for social benefits must not come at the expense of appropriate instruction. Many parents of children with disabilities are probably more concerned that their children learn important academic and self-care skills than learn to socialize with those who don’t have disabilities. And just because a student with disabilities doesn’t socialize at school with students without disabilities doesn’t mean that he or she has no appropriate role models. The idea that children with disabilities can’t be appropriate models reveals the bias of those using this reason to promote full inclusion. Children in special schools and classes can have an active, meaningful social life; socialization can occur during noninstructional time, such as lunch, or in extracurricular or community-based activities.

Full inclusion is blatantly illegal under IDEA, regardless of the promulgation of inclusion by state or local administrators, university faculty, or federally funded projects (see Bateman, 2007; Bateman & Linden, 2006; Bateman, Lloyd, & Tankersley, 2015; Smith v. LAUSD, 2016; Yell, 2016). The first demand of IDEA is free, appropriate public education. The first requirement is not for a least restrictive environment (Bateman & Linden, 2012; Brigham et al., 2016). The same logic of the law has existed

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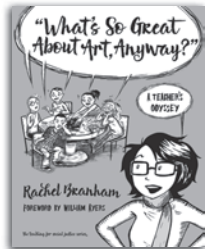
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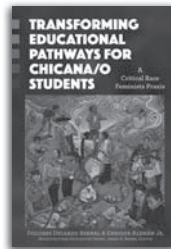
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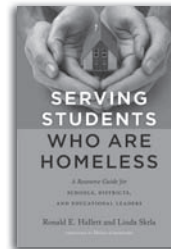
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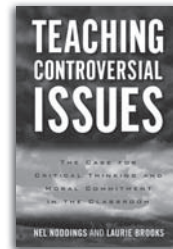
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since IDEA was first passed in 1975 — that “special education” means individualized special instruction and related services to be delivered in the most normal environment possible (Martin, 2013). The law did not envision special education as a single kind of place, and the assumption was — and is — that “least restrictive environment” must be determined after “free, appropriate public education,” and not before (see Bateman & Linden, 2014; Brigham et al., in press; Kauffman et al., in press). The logical sequence — the one that puts the horse before the cart and not the other way around — is getting instruction right, then deciding where it’s best offered.

### **Instruction first**

We’re not opposed to all inclusion, only to the irresponsible ideas that (a) all individuals with dis-

cial education is varied in explicitness, intensity, pace, size of the group being taught, duration and frequency of instruction in specific skills, immediacy of corrective feedback, and reinforcement appropriate for the individual and task. Instruction individualized along these dimensions simply cannot be done well for all students in a single environment.

Responsible inclusion means placing students with disabilities in general education when — and only when — that’s where they’ll receive the most effective instruction in the skills most important to their futures. Feelings of belonging, acceptance, and dignity are important, but these aren’t available only to those taught in general education. In some nations, inclusion refers to including students in public education, even if



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abilities should be included in general education, and (b) inclusion is the first or most important consideration. The “all means all” mantra and its demand of no exceptions imply that the place of instruction comes first and that appropriate instruction can always be delivered in general education. This is nonsense. Good, responsible thinkers and educators have described the major features of instruction in special education (see Pullen & Hallahan, 2015). Individualized instruction in spe-

this means placing some in environments not intended to meet the needs of more typical individuals.

Responsible inclusion requires meaningful, appropriate instruction of the individual; it doesn’t require that all students must be taught under the same roof or in the same class (Bateman et al., 2015; Warnock, 2005). It means that the nature of the instruction students receive is far more important than the place where they receive it. **K**

**Logic demands that some special education needs require special curriculums.**

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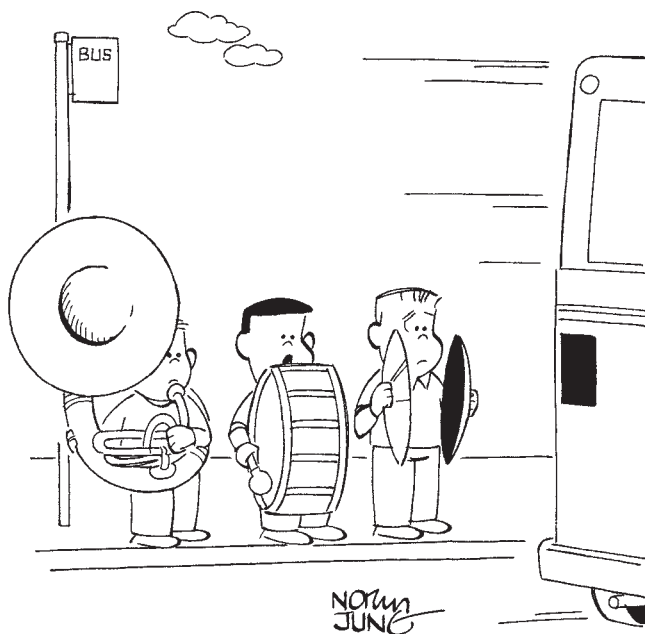
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“That’s funny. That’s the second bus that’s passed us by.”