

University of Vermont

UVM ScholarWorks

College of Education and Social Services
Faculty Publications

College of Education and Social Services

2023

Revisiting the synergy among values, logical practices, and research: The three musketeers of effective inclusive education

Michael F. Giangreco
University of Vermont

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/cessfac>



Part of the [Disability and Equity in Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Giangreco, M. F. (2023). Revisiting the synergy among values, logical practices, and research: The three musketeers of effective inclusive education. In N. Guatelli (Ed.), *Paths of inclusion: Philosophical, political, legal, pedagogical, and methodological reflections* (pp. 31-41). Artetetra Edizioni.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Education and Social Services at UVM ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Education and Social Services Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UVM ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact schwyrks@uvm.edu.

Giangreco, M. F. (2023). Revisiting the synergy among values, logical practices, and research: The three musketeers of effective inclusive education. In N. Guatelli (Ed.), *Paths of inclusion: Philosophical, political, legal, pedagogical, and methodological reflections* (pp. 31-41). Artetetra Edizioni.

Revisiting the Synergy among Values, Logical Practices, and Research: The Three Musketeers of Effective Inclusive Education*¹

di *Michael F. Giangreco*

The motto of the Three Musketeers is legendary, “All for one and one for all!” The result of their unity was triumph! To triumph in the realm of meaningful and effective education, we too need to rely on an inseparable triumvirate: values, logical practices, and research. The order in which this trio is presented is purposeful. Effective education begins with values and proceeds to logical practices. Research informs the selection of our logical practices and helps us determine their effectiveness and impact.

Societal Values

Educating our children and youth begins with what we value. Without an affirmative value orientation upon which to base our practices and research, they are at best haphazard, and at worst, dan-

* An earlier version of this chapter was published as a foreword in the book, *Including Students with Severe and Multiple Disabilities in Typical Classrooms* (in J. E. Downing, *Including students with severe and multiple disabilities in typical classrooms*, 2nd ed., Paul H. Brookes, Maryland 2002). This updated version was undertaken with the express written permission of Paul H. Brookes Publishing, the copyright holder of my original work. A key aim of this revision is to shift from the original American-centric focus toward more international perspectives, while retaining a set of foundational ideas that I believe have stood the test of time and remain vital in our collective quest for better inclusive education and a more equitable and just society.

gerous. At the broadest level, I am referring to values deeply embedded in our societal ethos and aspirations, such as those espoused in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD)¹. Key exemplars include:

... to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity (Article 1).

... to ensure the full enjoyment by children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children (Article 7, item 1).

... ensure that children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realize that right (Article 7, item 3).

... ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning.. (Article 24, item 1).

Around the world, the laudable aims of the *United Nations CRPD* (2006) elude too many people with disabilities and remain largely aspirational, yet its aims illuminate a path forward if individuals with disabilities are to enjoy appropriately supported equal access to the same opportunities and experiences available to those without disabilities.

Historically, people with disabilities have been on the receiving end of many practices based on restrictive, exclusionary, and ableist values², often under the guise of helping³. We now recognize these

¹ *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, December 13, 2006, disponibile al link <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/crpd/pages/conventionrightspersonswithdisabilities.aspx>.

² T. Hehir, *New directions in special education: Eliminating Ableism in policy and practice*, Harvard Education Press, Cambridge 2006.

³ E. Van der Klift - N. Kunc, *Hell-bent on helping: Benevolence, friendship, and the politics of help*, in E. Van der Klift - N. Kunc, *Being realistic isn't realistic: Collected essays on disability, identity, inclusion, and innovation*, Tellwell Talent, Victoria 2019, pp. 149 - 183.

practices as interfering with the pursuit of living a meaningful and self-determined life in the community. Unfortunately, people with disabilities have been, and continue to be, institutionalized, sterilized, segregated, subjected to aversive procedures, denied access to medical treatment, devalued, and discriminated against in virtually every aspect of community life. These practices are now widely recognized as inconsistent with what our global society claims to value. It has taken us a long time to own up to this realization — we still have a long to go to set things right.

Despite the slow pace of change, we are headed on a path in pursuit of values that affirm the inclusion, participation, self-determination, and support of people with disabilities in education, employment, community living, health care, economic independence, personal relationships, and recreation. These are values that, when put into practice, are good for people with disabilities, their families, our communities, and society. Like a canary in a mineshaft, how a society treats its citizens with disabilities can be an indicator of its overall health.

For most people with disabilities, their families, and friends, the lofty rhetoric of society's values is distant and somewhat removed from the joys and struggles of daily life. On an individual level, these broader societal values are played out in more practical terms. The following valued life outcomes⁴ are neither surprising nor are they unique to people with disabilities. Self-advocates and their families tell us that they value people, practices, settings, and supports that allow them to:

- be safe and healthy (physically and emotionally),
- have a home in which to live, now and in the future,
- develop a range of meaningful relationships with other people,
- have choice and control within their lives (suited to their age and cultural),

⁴ M.F. Giangreco - C.J. Cloninger - V.S. Iverson, *Choosing outcomes and accommodations for children (COACH): A guide to educational planning for students with disabilities* (3rd ed.), Paul H. Brookes, Maryland 2011.

- engage in meaningful activities (e.g., employment, recreation, education), and
- participate in the full range of places available to other citizens.

These valued life outcomes, as well as others, can be pursued through a combination of: (a) skill development on the part of persons with disabilities, (b) changes in the environment (e.g., removal of physical and attitudinal barriers; assistive technology, design for universal access), and (c) individually determined supports for persons with disabilities. Most of us have come to expect that we will have opportunities to pursue our interests and aspirations in ways that we find personally satisfying and that hold potential to be of value to the broader community. Sadly, too many people with disabilities and their families are compelled to wage a battle to attain the same opportunities many citizens without disabilities take for granted.

Logical Practices

Bridging the gap between values and reality requires the development and utilization of practices that logically lead to the realization of those values. In this context, logical practices refer to actions taken to educate our students that make sense. For example, if we want students with disabilities to learn how to interact with peers who do not have disabilities, it is logical to provide ongoing opportunities for them to be together and participate in shared educational and co-curricular activities. If we want students to learn important skills (e.g., literacy, numeracy, activities of daily living), it is logical to explicitly teach those skills, provide repeated opportunities to practice and apply them in natural contexts, and provide ways for students to get feedback on their learning. If we want students to make reasonable choices, it is logical to provide a range of reasonable options, teach them a range of communication and self-advocacy skills that allow them to indicate their choices, and then honor the choices they make.

Illogical Practices

Globally, while more people are espousing inclusive values about educating students with disabilities, our practices reflect an odd mixture of the seemingly logical and illogical. Too much of our inclusive rhetoric is without corresponding substance. Our messy mixture of practices is not as successful as they could be because too many of them are aligned with values from past eras that did not adequately engage or support individuals with disabilities. As a result, illogical practices persist.

If we want students with challenging behaviors to have positive models of constructive behavior, it is illogical to place them in classrooms where they will only interact with other students who exhibit challenging behaviors. If we want students to learn how to treat others fairly and with kindness, it is illogical to use methods based on humiliation, threats, or punishment. If we want upper/secondary grade students to have opportunities to form chronologically age-appropriate friendships with classmates, it is illogical to teach them recreational skills meant for much younger children. If we want students to be part of the classroom community and receive competent instruction from highly qualified teachers and special educators, it is illogical to assign them a one-to-one assistant to provide most of the instruction and potentially create an inadvertent barrier to connections with peers and teachers⁵. If we want students to lead regular lives, it is illogical to make everything we do with and for them specialized and disability different.

Pursuing Logical Practices Requires Creativity

In pursuing actions that make sense, there is a danger the pursuit of logical practices might be interpreted too narrowly. Some people might limit what makes sense only to what *is* rather than what *could*

⁵ M.F. Giangreco, "How can a student with severe disabilities be in a fifth-grade class when he can't do fifth-grade level work?" *Misapplying the least restrictive environment*, in «Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities», vol. 45, 1/2020, pp. 23-27, disponibile on line su <https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796919892733>.

be. For example, some people might think it does not make sense to include students with disabilities who have the most intensive support needs in academic classes where most other students are working on objectives that are substantially different or advanced⁶. It is not uncommon to hear a teacher say, “I don’t understand! How does it make sense to include a student with such severe disabilities in my class?” Limiting ourselves to what currently exists restricts the boundaries of our thinking. These artificial limitations have led some people to wrongly assume that: (a) all students in the same class must have the same learning outcomes, (b) the instructional format of a class (e.g., lecture) must stay the same when the range of student diversity has been extended, or (c) all students must demonstrate their learning and be evaluated in the same ways. Re-examining practices that might appear illogical when viewed from a “what is” perspective can actually provide fertile ground for creative problem-solving when we approach them as “what if” situations⁷. When we challenge our existing practices to include students with disabilities, invariably we identify changes that improve educational practices for many other students who do not have disabilities, often by making instruction more individualized, participatory, and cooperative.

Research

Where does educational research fit into an approach that begins with values and proceeds to logical practices? Within this framework, educational research serves at least two important purposes. First, descriptive research, both qualitative and quantitative, can help us deepen our understanding, reframe our questions, challenge our

⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷ M.F. Giangreco - C. Cloninger - R. Dennis - S. Edelman, *Problem-solving methods to facilitate inclusive education*, in J. S. Thousand- R. A. Villa - A. I. Nevin, *Creativity and collaborative learning: A practical guide to empowering students and teachers* (2nd ed.), Paul H. Brookes, Maryland 2002, pp. 111-134.

thinking, and extend our insights⁸. Second, educational research is well-suited to helping us evaluate our practices to determine the extent of their effectiveness and impact on desired outcomes. Both purposes can inform our selection, development, and utilization of logical practices that match valued life outcomes sought by students with disabilities and their families.

It is important to recognize and distinguish between helpful and unhelpful research. Helpful research aids us in better understanding or pursuing valued life outcomes for students who have disabilities. Unhelpful research offers trivial findings, interferes with innovation by sustaining the status quo (even though it is ineffective for some students), or hinders efforts to advance valued life outcomes for students with disabilities. Sometimes unhelpful research unnecessarily or artificially pits two or more valued outcomes against each other by suggesting that only one can be pursued at the expense of another.

An example of this unhelpful, either-or, false-choice thinking exists when people want to pit inclusive classroom placement against high-quality instruction, as if a choice must be made between them. While it is true that some students who are placed in general education classrooms receive inadequate instruction and some teachers may struggle to conceptualize and implement quality instruction when the diversity of students' functioning levels vary substantially, starkly different options are available to address these challenges. The traditionalist, status quo, approach may attempt to justify segregation as the cost for providing quality instruction, which they argue requires a specialized/separate educational placement. Alternatively, inclusion-oriented educators who challenge the status quo seek new ways to design (e.g., universal design for learning)⁹ or modify curriculum and instruction (e.g., , multi-level curriculum, curricu-

⁸ M.F. Giangreco - S.J. Taylor, "Scientifically based research" and qualitative inquiry, in «Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities», vol. 28, 3/2003, pp. 133-137, <https://doi.org/10.2511/rpsd.28.3.133>.

⁹ L.L. Nelson, *Design and deliver: Planning and teaching using universal design for learning* (2nd ed.), Paul H. Brookes, Maryland 2021.

lum overlapping)¹⁰ to ensure students receive *both* the benefits of available in inclusive environments and the high-quality curriculum and instruction they deserve. Helpful research has resulted in more students with disabilities acquiring and applying skills resulting in improvements in valued life outcomes that would not have been considered priorities or possibilities in past decades.

Few issues are more contentiously debated than the inclusion of students with the full range of disabilities in general education classes. Some people ask, “Where is the research supporting the inclusion of students with disabilities within general education?” Whether the inclusion of students with disabilities within general education should be supported at the level of social policy and school-based practice is not a question for research to answer—it is a question of values. It would be more helpful to pose research questions that help us to clarify and advance valued outcomes.

- How do students with disabilities and their families experience and think about inclusion and exclusion?
- How can we successfully include a wider range of students with disabilities in general education classes?
- What curricular and instructional approaches are effective for teaching heterogeneous groups of students who may be pursuing different learning outcomes?
- How can schools and classrooms be organized to account for greater student diversity?
- What are barriers to effective inclusion, and how can they be overcome?
- How can school personnel be supported to successfully teach students with and without disabilities?

Local Research

When people talk about research, they usually mean the kind they read in journals. Typically, this is research carried out some-

¹⁰ M.F. Giangreco, *Expanding opportunities for students with intellectual disability*, in «Educational Leadership», vol. 74, 7/2017, pp. 52-57.

where else, by someone else, with someone else's students. While identifying an ever-evolving set of research-based interventions is vitally important to our field¹¹, how we think about research need not be limited to studies in journals. There is an old saying, "All politics are local." In much the same way, I would like to suggest that "All research is local".

Although it is helpful to know that a practice has been successful elsewhere, ultimately, when relying on research to make decisions about whether a particular practice makes sense, the decision is a local one. Just because something is published in a journal does not mean it necessarily makes sense in your situation. Sometimes published intervention research is conducted under different conditions (e.g., personnel availability, personnel skill sets, class size) than may be available locally or with populations of students who have different characteristics than yours. Of course, not every intervention, even ones considered to be research-based, are necessarily effective with every learner -- therefore we need access to a variety of intervention options and need to make data-based decisions about the effectiveness of interventions for individual students¹².

Conversely, just because evidence is still emerging on a specific intervention or support, it does not mean a practice that makes sense to an educational team should not be considered or attempted. Do not be held back by the age-old conundrum, "We can't implement an innovative practice because we don't have enough research supporting it. Yet, we don't have enough research because not enough people are implementing it". What matters is whether the practices under consideration make sense for the specific students for whom their use is proposed and your local context. Once team members have decided a proposed practice is logical and consistent with the valued life outcomes being sought, they have sufficient reason to move forward with initial implementation. At this point, educational

¹¹ B. G. Cook - M.G. Tankersley, *Research-based practices in special education*, Pearson, Londra 2013.

¹² B. F. Chorzempa - M.D. Smith - J.M. Sileo, *Practice-based evidence: A model for helping educators make evidence-based decisions*, in «Teacher Education and Special Education», Vol. 42, 1/2019, pp. 82-92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406418767254>.

team members become researchers to study the effectiveness and impact of the practices locally to see if they are effectively achieving desired outcomes for their students. This means establishing important questions and developing valid systems to answer them. To be accountable for decisions about practices we utilize, we must collect and analyze data to determine if students are achieving reasonably established objectives. We should extend our evaluation of impact to ascertain whether achievement has resulted in strides toward valued life outcomes¹³. For example, having a student learn social skills (e.g., expressing greetings, sharing with others, taking turns) is commendable, but ultimately, these skills are only useful if they result in the development or enhancement of personally meaningful relationships and constructive social interactions with other people.

Sequence and Synergy

Espousing inclusive values without implementing logical practices and learning from research is of little consequence and is unlikely to yield positive results. Implementation of practices without emancipatory and inclusive values can lead to misuse or abuse; segregation and use of aversive procedures are two prime examples. Values and logical practices without research leave us with too many unanswered questions about effectiveness and impact. Used together, values, logical practices, and research can have a positive and synergistic effect on education and the lives of students with disabilities and their peers. Our field's challenge is proactively to create the conditions and inclusive service delivery models (e.g., class size, caseload size, natural proportion of students with diverse needs, personnel preparation, personnel utilization, supports) that allow school-based teams to implement effective, evidence-based, and innovative practices¹⁴. This represents a “what is” for some fortunate students and

¹³ M.F. Giangreco - C.J. Cloninger - V.S. Iverson, *Choosing outcomes and accommodations for children (COACH): A guide to educational planning for students with disabilities*, cit.

¹⁴ M.F. Giangreco - J.C. Suter, *Precarious or purposeful? Proactively building inclusive special education service delivery on solid ground*, in «Inclusion», vol. 3, 3/2015, pp. 112-131. <https://>

the promise of “what could be” for many others. Our collective pursuit of a better future is rooted in the synergy of values, logical practices, and research – the Three Musketeers of meaningful and effective inclusive education.