Introduction

INCLUSION MEANS . . .

Educational, social, economic, and political policy often collides with classroom reality. The inclusive classroom is a wonderful concept, but also a complex day-to-day challenge for teachers. Problematic behaviors already disrupting classroom communities, specifically exclusion and bullying, may intensify with greater inclusion of child diversity. The reality of modern education means children with a variety of learning and processing abilities and issues are in the general classroom, often with more and different academic and behavior problems. Principles of an inclusive classroom to address the challenges of learning and processing differences are similar to principles addressing socioeconomic diversities of race, ethnicity, religion, class, and family composition. Caring adults hope that children naturally accept each other, interacting with respect, appreciation, and kindness. Everyone wishes that were true, but if wishes simply just came true, then we'd all have ponies! Reality as testified to by veteran teachers' experiences, however, is that it is much more difficult. Children with challenges often experience misunderstanding and mistreatment by classmates, especially those with aggressive tendencies due to their own issues. When teachers are able to create respectful classroom communities, they become a joy in which to learn and teach. Children learn to relate to classmates in healthy and productive relationships predictive of fellow citizens in society.

This book will focus on children with one or more of four specific challenges: children with learning disabilities or differences (LD), children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), children with Asperger syndrome (AS), and children with gifted abilities. The principles for supporting these children can be both derived from principles supporting all children and applied to children with various other challenges. Children with challenges are often in need of skilled and conceptually sound adult support. Diagnoses or labels represent higher or lower

extremes on normal continuums of abilities or challenges. The more teachers become aware of the knowledge, skills, and wisdom acquired working in the typical classroom with a familiar spectrum of child diversity, the more they can apply that to working with and supporting children with specific challenges. Conversely, the more teachers become aware of their knowledge, skills, and wisdom acquired working with children with LD, ADHD, AS, and gifted abilities, the more they can apply that to working with and supporting a diversity of children in typical classrooms.

A functional definition of culture is that it consists of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors that promote survival in a given context. The context of concern is a community with particular environmental requirements and challenges. The cultural adaptations in one context may or may not be cross-culturally effective in a new context. Specifically, moving from a supported environment such as home or a special education class to a general education classroom (or from one classroom to another), with new classmates or a new teacher will be cross-culturally challenging. Areas of survival include academic, social, emotional, psychological, and spiritual functioning. Children with LD, ADHD, AS, or gifted abilities may develop problematic attitudes, values, and beliefs for survival prior to and in the mainstream classroom. This may be expressed in sometimes unfathomable behaviors.

The book will examine the dynamic of adult attention, nurturing, and guidance for all kinds of children while focusing on the four challenges named above. Topics examined for typically developing children and children with the four types of challenges include the following:

- How to build powerful successful children
- Social emotional intelligence
- Resiliency
- Eleven reasons individuals may miss the social cues that facilitate interpersonal relationships
- The dynamics of victims and bullying
  - Specific issues for each of the four groups
- Relational aggression
- The Ninety-Second-a-Day Self-Esteem Prescription Plan

The classroom community exists to meet the academic needs of children. It also functions to facilitate emotional, psychological, and social development, whether or not that is the expressed intent of the teacher, school, or district. I am an educator-turned-psychotherapist who is still involved in education (training, consulting, and writing). I find that individual and group behaviors, emotional and psychological health, and children's individual challenges fundamentally influence academic development. I often assess children with coexisting behavior and academic problems. I usually find significant social-emotional problems along with learning and processing issues. Children with the greatest

problems almost always have a complexity of issues. Fortunately, issue by issue, and in combination, children's dynamics and functioning make sense. Thus, teachers and other adults, including parents, can address and support children's needs and foster their strengths while compensating for challenges. Generally, children who are ready to learn and be taught are happy children. And happy children learn more readily. Anything academically empowering or stimulating facilitates children's self-esteem, happiness, and social satisfaction. The diverse classroom must integrate prior academic and social-emotional strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures with current challenges for all its students.

INCLUSION MEANS MORE

More LD, ADHD, AS, and Giftedness

Special education services are often curtailed despite the mandates of the American Disabilities Act. Finding special education teachers is challenging.

> Historically, teachers trained to work with children with special needs have been difficult to find. According to the group Recruiting New Teachers, 98 percent of school districts have reported shortages in special education professionals. A reason cited by several in the field is overall lack of interest from prospective teachers. (Gaetano, 2006, ¶ 5)

With the right to an equitable education, shortages of special education teachers, and more rigid criteria for special education services, the result is that many children with learning issues are now placed in general education classes. There always have been children with undiagnosed challenges in general classrooms (especially *that* kid in your classroom!), but now children with identified diagnoses are often placed into general classrooms without additional or minimal educational support. Greater diversity in many forms may increase percentages of children with academic and behavioral difficulty. Children with different or quirky behaviors have always been a part of classrooms. Teachers who never heard of high functioning autism (hfASD or HFA) or AS find children with these issues in their classrooms more regularly. Or they now have a diagnosis for the odd behaviors they have seen for years.

Children with gifted abilities are in classrooms with needs that challenge teachers. This occurs whether or not there are effective gifted and talented education (GATE) programs in the schools. The mother of a middle-school boy said, "They designated him as gifted long ago. But from early elementary school to now, they haven't taught him any differently from

regular education kids." She felt that he had not gotten any benefit from being identified as having gifted abilities. He expressed his gifts anyway (in particular, his creative verbal skills). Subsequently, he developed a reputation of being a nice kid who would not shut up! Other parents have complained it seems like children with gifted abilities are somehow expected to teach themselves. Meeting heightened academic needs, while providing appropriate emotional and social support, intimidates some teachers. This is in addition to dealing with parents aggressively advocating for their children.

> "Some teachers have an attitude of, 'That's not who I signed up to teach, that's not my problem, that's not my kid,' and that's an attitude problem," said Amy Dell, who is the chairwoman of the Special Education Department at The College of New Jersey. (Gaetano, 2006, ¶ 6)

Some overwhelmed teachers want fewer, not more, demands. Fewer challenges, fewer behavior problems, and less diversity translate into easier children, classrooms, teaching, and . . . less requirement to be outstanding teachers! Fortunately, most teachers want to be those great teachers.

INCLUSION MEANS LESS

Less Time and Energy, Fewer Resources, and *More* Responsibility

Children with significant challenges often disproportionately draw teachers' already scarce time and energy. Inclusion of children with special needs may mean overall less time and energy for many teachers to teach. This becomes especially true with current administrative and political demands for educational accountability and academic standards. Despite greater diversity, there are often fewer resources. Resource and specialty teachers may go the way of full-time school nurses, counselors, and assistant principals. Teachers and other educators suffer the greater demands and responsibility without greater resources in other countries as well. For example, from Great Britain, Steve Sinnott, leader of the National Union of Teachers states, "The inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools is carried out without sufficient preparation and resources" (Pupils "should penalise bullies," 2007, Special needs section, ¶ 3).

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE

Educational challenge is intensified with more students with varied aptitudes and challenges. Although federal and state laws mandate

mainstreaming children with disabilities, there are no minimum training standards for general education teachers for special needs instruction. In teacher credential programs, prospective teachers may take a course on teaching special needs students, or programs may integrate special education topics into general education courses. Training for experienced teachers may be as minimal as one day of continuing education, if that. Fortunately, experienced teachers often can make effective adjustments to established strategies and techniques for guidance and discipline to support children with challenging issues. Other times, however, there is something special about the behavior or children's underlying energy that render "regular" responses ineffective. Children range from gifted to very challenged in a variety of ways: artistic skills, creativity, musical ability, auditory or visual comprehension, reading, physical coordination, abstract thinking, deductive versus inductive reasoning, and more. Sometimes there is an expectation for children to perform in the mid-range of expectations and abilities. Children who have challenges are often minimized, ignored, or deemed de facto negative. Society loses the benefit of their creativity and energy, "outside of the box" thinking, and revolutionary perspectives. If continually frustrated, children accrue stress, self-esteem deteriorates, and acting out increases. Temper tantrums and other disruptive behavior become habitual, leading to long-term social and emotional damages and academic and vocational failure. Conversely, well-supported children, recognized and supported for their strengths and trained to compensate for challenges, grow in self-esteem and social skills. They become more successful.

EXCLUSION . . . AND BULLYING

Children with challenges often process and behave similarly to, yet differently from, others. Children with any of the four challenges share an important characteristic: They are often identifiably different from other classmates. Without affirmative adult guidance, children's differences may activate problematic social dynamics, specifically exclusion and bullying. Bullying may be overtly physical, but also can manifest socially and relationally. Children's identified differences sometimes are difficult to handle or manage within the classroom. This is especially true if teachers don't understand them or are unclear how to attend to them. Understanding, respecting, celebrating, and accepting differences can lead to healthier classroom communities. On the other hand, ignorance and inexperience may lead to prejudice or worse: exclusion, sexism, racism, classism, bullyism (the practice of irrational force on a weak opponent or supposed weak opponent to exercise power), ablism (discrimination in favor of the able-bodied; asserting people with disabilities as being unable), and so forth. Otherwise well-intended teachers can promote inclusive philosophies yet may be unaware of harsh realities without greater understanding and guidance about how specific challenges affect children.

COMPROMISING THE INTENT OF INCLUSION

The challenge of inclusion is not always well met. Three practices can compromise the intent of inclusion. *Invisibility* is the practice of keeping people out of sight. Sometimes well-intended teachers downplay, ignore, or pretend not to notice disabilities or differences. They may fear causing others discomfort or embarrassment. Unfortunately, this implies that differences are unimportant. The totality of who I am is much more than just being an American-born son of Chinese immigrant parents. However, denying my experiences as a Chinese-American (born in 1953 during the Cold War, raised primarily in Berkeley, California, in a predominantly black neighborhood during the turbulent 1960s, and attending integrated schools from middle school to high school) would deny formative experiences that have significantly influenced who I am now. Denial or minimizing can happen with ethnic or religious differences as well as with learning ability, attention, restraint, social functioning, and other differences. Children with special needs need to be visible. Otherwise, they cannot become self-loving and self-reliant. They cannot learn how to handle bullies and other life circumstances. Teachers promote this by identifying and celebrating the range of diversity in all forms in the classroom, the greater communities, and the world. However, celebrating only differences can be uncomfortable and can cause children to be targeted for the differences. Instead, teachers can reveal and explore the range of diversity, including what may be assumed to be "normal."

Infantilizing also defeats self-reliance. Infantilizing is treating individuals with disabilities or differences as fundamentally incapable and dependent like infants. Consistent infantilizing messages create learned helplessness. Overprotected children "fulfill" low expectations of caring adults by becoming incapable, vulnerable, and dependent. Children with challenges often function quite well by drawing upon their strengths and developing compensations. Successful functioning happens only if they reach adulthood without debilitating emotional damage. While infants are expected to gradually develop greater abilities, infantilizing individuals keeps them unable. When teachers understand the depth, breadth, and nuances of any particular challenge, they can counter the presumption of inability. Teachers can then direct children to accentuate strengths and develop compensating abilities. Teachers and all adults support children by requiring them to take risks—to do the exploration and experimentation necessary to develop skills and strengths. Teachers should expect a lot, while providing guidance and support.

All people with differences or challenges possess many other abilities, traits, interests, and individual personalities. *Objectifying* causes harm by seeing only differences rather than whole individuals. When children are objectified, they become fundamentally limited by their definition as the

label. For example, an African-American child should not be defined solely because of race. He or she is a child who has African-American ancestry and many additional attributes and experiences. Ethnicity or race probably has significant ramifications upon his or her emotional, psychological, and social processes, but not to the exclusion of other influences. In the same way, a child with LD can become characterized as a "learning-disabled child." That label implies he or she is predisposed to and functioning within some stereotypical spectrum of learning disabled behavior. Adults need to allow children to activate and develop in appropriate circumstances. Supporting children's diversity of skills and traits must be key principles in developmental and educational processes. Misunderstood, devalued, and frustrated, children with challenges become ostracized and misfits. Society loses their creativity, skills, energy, and other contributions.

CONTINUUMS OR LABELS

A label or diagnosis of having LD or being gifted, as opposed to serving to objectify a child, may activate or focus services or intervention. Understanding continuums allows for experience with "average" skilled children (the middle 68% in the two middle quadrants of a classic bell curve distribution) to aid diagnosis, intervention, and support for those on the higher and lower ranges (the highest 16% and the lowest 16%). Technical definitions by school districts or professional diagnosticians of what is considered a qualifying disability, disorder, or condition may be more restrictive than the 16% of each of the low and high ends of the bell curve quadrants. Such definitions are driven by a variety of circumstances and demands, including professional territoriality, educational, medical, legal, political, and not the least, financial considerations. Services that are activated by a diagnosis require expenditures of often-scarce financial resources. It is possible that children who need assistance and would otherwise qualify for a particular diagnosis might fail to receive the diagnosis. They could be designated as not extreme enough to warrant the diagnosis due to budgetary restrictions.

Each of the four major challenges discussed in this book deserves extensive study and review by educators, parents, and other adults working with children. There are numerous resources beyond those cited in this book in journals, books, and on Internet Web sites dedicated to understanding and supporting children with challenges. This book is not intended to be a comprehensive resource or for diagnosis on these challenges, although experienced teachers will likely recognize the children from the descriptions.

To begin acquiring more extensive information, readers may refer to the references at the end of the book.

THREE PERSPECTIVES

There are three perspectives in the book of which the reader should be aware. First, in the discussion about children with the four major challenges, there is always the risk of unintentionally stereotyping children individually or as a group. Despite great care in avoiding stereotyping, it may seem that I am trying to define a particular group of children, teachers, or parents. Please remember that theories and concepts, generalities and principles are meant to be supportive of teachers and other adults, so that they can better understand and then support individual children. What is the difference between a generality, principle, or theory versus a stereotype? What is the difference between prejudgment and bias? A generality, principle, or theory is generated from observations of large groups of individuals, experiences, or data. Interested professionals and citizens use the generality to aid them in understanding something or someone of concern. As a prejudgment, they have some expectation that who or what they are investigating will be comparable. As they find prejudgment applicable or not, it may serve them in their work. It becomes a stereotype or bias, however, when they expect what they are investigating will be same, despite any evidence to the contrary. It becomes destructive if they "see" what they are investigating only as the generality predicts. As some information in this book is applicable to a child or to children with whom the reader is working, it may be useful. If it is not applicable, it will not be useful. I cannot make that determination.

Second, the book focuses on children with challenges who become victimized regularly and children who habitually bully others. When there is discussion about children with a particular challenge who are victimized or are bullies, there is no intention to characterize all children with a particular challenge as being victims or bullies. The sad reality is that these children are often more vulnerable to gravitate toward these negative behaviors or circumstances. None of the challenges determines children's behaviors one way or another. Rather than blame victims or bullies, I assert that appropriate adult support or intervention can and should reduce such negative outcomes. Hopefully, the information in this book will help teachers and other adults understand how and why becoming perpetual victims or bullies may happen and how to keep it from happening. The book will discuss how children may have been disempowered and how to empower them.

Third, I intentionally use examples, research, and statistics from preschool ages through elementary school, but also from middle school, high school, and adulthood. The target population to be addressed in this book is young children. However, the use of various ages serves to emphasize that all of the issues discussed—LD, ADHD, AS, gifted abilities, victimization, bullying, social-emotional development, support and intervention, and so forth—either are lifelong issues or have potential to be lifelong

issues. Being victimized or bullying also does not suddenly appear or disappear. Childhood experiences have great influence on whether individuals become powerful and healthy adults or become perpetual victims or bullies or other unhealthy adults. In addition, there are references to parent and family dynamics along with the focus on the classroom and school. The inclusion of information from a greater age span and of parent and family dynamics serves to emphasize that these issues are not isolated to early childhood or happen only at school. It infers a minimum need for information exchange between home and classroom. And it infers an optimal situation of full collaboration between parents and teachers to support children.

Chapter Highlights

- Principles of an inclusive classroom to address the challenges of learning and processing differences are similar to principles addressing socioeconomic diversities of race, ethnicity, religion, class, and family composition.
- The more teachers become aware of their knowledge, skills, and wisdom acquired working in the mainstream classroom with a familiar spectrum of child diversity, the more they can apply that to working with and supporting children with specific challenges.
- The more teachers become aware of their knowledge, skills, and wisdom acquired working with children with LD, ADHD, AS, and gifted abilities, the more they can apply that to working with and supporting a diversity of children in the mainstream classroom.
- Anything that interferes with or, conversely, supports emotional, psychological, or social stability affects children's readiness to learn and be taught.
- There always have been children with undiagnosed challenges in mainstream classrooms (especially, *that* kid in your classroom!), but now children with identified diagnoses are often placed into mainstream classrooms without additional or minimal educational support.
- Without affirmative adult guidance, children's differences may activate problematic social dynamics, specifically exclusion and bullying.
- Misunderstood, devalued, and frustrated, children with challenges become ostracized and misfits. Society loses their creativity, skills, energy, and other contributions.
- Understanding continuums allows for experience with "average" skilled children (the middle 68% in the two middle quadrants of a classic bell curve distribution) to aid diagnosis, intervention, and support for those on the higher and lower ranges (the highest 16% and the lowest 16%).