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Imagining and Reimagining the Future of Special and Inclusive Education

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Abstract: "Reimagination" is required to create a new vision of education that better serves individuals with disabilities. Imagination is a way of conceiving possibilities and probabilities. The future of special education is imagined within the limits of possibility and probability of "appropriate" education for children with special educational needs and disabilities. Education is reimagined for full inclusion without special education and an alternative reimagination of inclusive special education. Particular attention is given to the administrative structure of public education and to the training of teachers for the imagined approaches to special education. The importance of imagining special and inclusive education being based on science and rationality and the limitations of proposed approaches to including students with disabilities in education are explained.

Keywords: imagination; reimagination; inclusion; special education; relativism; science; rationality

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1. Imagining and Reimagining the Future of Special and Inclusive Education

Special education is currently being "reimagined" in ways that will significantly shape the future education of individuals with disabilities. A significant challenge in any endeavor, including the education of all children—and including those with disabilities—is using imagination to conceive how it could be improved. Imagination helps us understand what is possible and probable. Liao and Gendler (2020) [1] suggested that imagination is used to engage in counterfactual reasoning, perspective taking, and planning for the future, among other things.

Reimagination is needed to create a vision for the futures of both special and inclusive education. A constructive, vivid imagination guided by an empirical perspective balanced by a commitment to social validity can help determine the course the field takes in providing both special and inclusive education for students with special educational needs and disabilities.

Current calls for educational reform, transformation, radical change, or deviation from present practices require us to imagine how change might develop or be different from the way things are presently—the *status quo*. Furthermore, if someone does *not* recommend specific reforms, then they must imagine how *not* engaging in those changes could affect the future. Either way, including various combinations of *status quo* and reform, we are required to try to imagine what various options portend. Thus, completely avoiding

imagining and reimagining education's future is impossible, for one must imagine a future that includes the education of exceptional children in some form.

Imagining and reimagining are not new for education. Education reform is nearly constant (e.g., [2,3]). Some of the issues related to special education are perpetual, ones that each new generation of educators has to reimagine and sort out [4,5]. Imagination is required to try to envision slow, incremental changes that could lead to a "new normal" for special education [6].

Both special and inclusive education and the alternative known as full inclusion have often been depicted as having arrived at a crossroads, at which there is always more than one path we could take [7–12]. Multiple movements are now afoot to replace the very idea of special education, to drastically reconceptualize educational disability, and to alter where and by whom special education and related services are provided. Therefore, the purpose of this essay is to consider the role of imagination and reimagination in creating a vision for the education of individuals with disabilities. In imagining the different paths that might be taken, we explore how public education, special education, and inclusive education may be shaped by the imaginations of those charged with their development. Thus, we examine trends in an effort to answer the question, "Where are we going"? We attempt to imagine the future of these trends without being prophetic. As sociologist Mills (1959) [13] pointed out more than half a century ago:

> The future of human affairs is not merely some set of variables to be predicted. The future is what is to be decided—within the limits, to be sure, of historical possibility. But this possibility is not fixed; in our time the limits seem very broad indeed. (p. 174)

Our overall objective is to try out, in our imagining, possible configurations of education that include educating children who are exceptional (i.e., either have education-related disabilities or special gifts and talents or both) as well as more typically developing children. In doing so, we consider these topics: (a) the promise and danger involved in what is imagined, (b) competing visions of the future, (c) the problem of prediction and differences in difference, (d) the nature of the problem of educating all children, (e) administrative structures, (f) pliability in determining education and legal rights, (g) teacher education, and (h) what we believe are major features of a realistically imagined future for special education, as well as the limitations that go with any speculation about school reform. Finally, we offer our conclusions.

Unlike typical reviews of literature regarding a research question, this article presents a professional viewpoint. Our position is that special education is needed to ensure the appropriate education of all children, including the exceptional. That is, our position is that imagining appropriate education for all without special education is untenable. Obviously, this is not the opinion of everyone, and our arguments need to be recognized as such. We do not claim to be unbiased or necessarily correct on every point, and we understand both the limitations of our position and the existence of counter-arguments. One more explanation of our intent is important. As the lead article in a Special Issue of this journal, focusing on future development of special and inclusive education, we are hoping our commentary will stimulate discussion of the issues and encourage submission of additional articles with further commentary, research, and perspectives.

2. Imagination in Education: Promise and Danger

Universal public education as an emancipatory institution is not many centuries old, and has undergone marked changes during the past century. The provision of special education as an emancipatory institution for students with disabilities is an even more recent development. The creation of an organization or structure that serves *all* students identified as having a disability was a monumental challenge a century ago, and it remains that today.

People have been attempting to improve, change, or modify special education, and these attempts span many decades. Within the last three decades efforts have been largely

influenced by the inclusion movement, particularly the full-inclusion movement [14] that is now worldwide [15–18]. A better, more responsive, and more inclusive environment for students with disabilities requires reimagination of how schools may best respond to the nature of disability and the ways in which schools and programs might serve students with special educational needs and disabilities.

One option being promoted is the denial that children have *special* educational needs (e.g., Slee, 2018 [19]). It is possible to assert that *all* children need the same basic things (e.g., love, respect, opportunities, etc.) and because of that, either all children may be considered special or none may be. Some have suggested that students with exceptional educational needs cannot be distinguished from those who do not have special needs, as all children differ from each other and therefore cannot be sorted or separated into categories based on their abilities or disabilities. Although it is also assumed or argued that individuals can be sorted by ancestry, culture, gender, color, economic status, and other forms of diversity [19,20]. Opposition to recognizing categories based on abilities or disabilities suggests the possibility of reimagining public education without special education.

Thus, we see possible dangers in both special education and its alternative. With special education, there is danger in mis-identifying children, expecting too little, stigmatizing and separating children unnecessarily, providing education that is ineffective or worse. Without special education, there is the danger of ignoring exceptionalities in the press to make education serve the masses, teaching that is appropriate for most but not all children, and, therefore, probably serving exceptional children very poorly [18,21].

In any case, there appears to be no dangerless way of imagining the education of exceptional children [22]. All ways of imagining it hold promise, and yet all are dangerous. Our task, as advocates for the appropriate education of all children is to try to imagine what is most promising and least dangerous.

Proposing and promoting the full inclusion of all students with disabilities (SWD) requires imagining many things. It requires, first, imagining that they are all within the purview of public schools. Remember that a century ago, many children with disabilities were not considered eligible for public education and were legally excluded from public schools. The federal law passed in the United States in 1975 required imagination before it became a reality (the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*, EAHCA, also known as Public Law 94-142, since 1990 as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* or IDEA; see [23].

Some children with disabilities are statistical outliers in educational performance (which is one of the reasons they are often referred to as *exceptional* children). These children are atypical in education-related characteristics that form the construct of disability or difficulties in learning, and these characteristics are often multiple, sometimes clustering together as multiple disabilities. Furthermore, these education-related characteristics are often described as continuously distributed, ranging from so mild as to be barely discernable or hardly detectible to so severe as to be truly extreme or profound. Thus, "cut points" in statistical distributions of education-related variables are required for identification and classification [22]. This is simply a mathematical reality that will not go away, regardless of the number of tiers or levels education may have [24–26].

Atypical conduct or problem behavior, adaptive skills, or some other characteristics of emotional or behavioral disability, especially those considered severe or extreme and those combined with other disabilities, are often the most problematic in attempts to include students in typical classrooms with meaningful benefits [27]. One of the reasons this is so is that these disabilities are almost always episodic, not constantly present, as are most other disabilities [28,29]. Furthermore, they are more difficult to measure accurately and objectively.

Accurately predicting what the future might look like is usually, at best, an approximation, often proving wrong even though some aspects of what is imagined are correct. Our imaginations always include "blind spots" and "blank spots", things we do not know [30] and other things that we do not know we do not know. Imagination can mislead, be blindly

unrealistic, and draw on the unreason and/or opaque, unfruitful ideologies lumped together in what is often called postmodernism, as Wolin [31] and Bunge [32] suggest. It can suggest something infeasible, extremely unlikely, or flatly impossible (at least in the foreseeable future or without a wider societal breakthrough). Often, the further we project what is imagined into the future, the more we encounter variables that we did not or cannot imagine or conceive. Those variables will influence what is possible or impossible, highly probable or improbable.

Imagination is needed to work towards what one might conceive as the highest form of the good, the true, and the sublime. However, imaginations can also be used in dark and sinister ways. We note that imagination is required for accomplishment of some of the greatest evils of our world, including such things as racism, genocide, and torture. In short, we note that imagination "cuts both ways". It can lead to delight and human flourishing, or to horror and dehumanization.

Imagining what is possible for SWD holds the promise of significant progress. Nevertheless, imagination can run aground and become delusional [33]. Many have warned of the corrosive effects of postmodernism's and related cognitive relativisms' effects on thinking and truth, both political and professional, including the education of SWD (e.g., [31,34–40].

An example of such an imagination applied to the education of SWD is provided by Brazilian education, which attempted to implement a system of full inclusion in the late 1990s based on the postmodernist theories of Bourdieu [41]. The closure of special schools and inclusion of SWD into general education schools was viewed as being democratically organized, but it resulted in a selective and stigmatizing process that legitimized inequality and led to internal exclusion of SWD within the school system. Wolin [31] (pp. xi–xii) contended that,

> In retrospect, postmodernism's contention, most pointedly expressed in Michel Foucault's work, that the institutionalization of 'reason' and 'progress' leads to enhanced domination rather than emancipation seems overtly cynical and empirically untenable.

Wolin describes how "Foucault praised the 'sovereign enterprise of Unreason'" [31]. (p. 6) He details how Foucault and other proponents of postmodern/post-structural cognitive relativism rejected science and rationality. Such philosophies and imaginations or proposed policies based thereon work only to justify social injustice, abuse of power, and regression to brute force. Such philosophical propositions do not bode well for the future education of SWD. Furthermore, such philosophies do not suggest that the consequences for SWD are considered or that, if they are, the intentions of those who hold them are good.

We note here that philosophical propositions might have been only one of many reasons for the demise of special schools. It is also possible that perceived lack of appropriate instruction or low student achievement or lack of resources contributed to their closure

A great problem in making judgments and predictions is knowing where one's imagination will lead and whether the outcomes based on such imagination will be good or evil. Intentions alone are not a reliable guide; unintended consequences can foil the best of intentions [42,43]. Many movements are formed or fostered with very good intentions but disastrous consequences. Deinstitutionalization is one example. It was based on a heartfelt attempt to close inhumane institutions, and it certainly had some good effects on some individuals. Deinstitutionalization may have been well-conceived, well-intentioned, and successful for some institutionalized people, but it has not turned out as originators first imagined, in many ways because of blind and blank spots in their imaginations (e.g., [25,30]). Realities that advocates of deinstitutionalization did not include in their imagination doomed it to failure for many. The same might be said of prohibition and other extreme and oversimplified social policies [25,44].

Moreover, just because someone imagines or *intends* to do something does not mean they can or will. The law known as No Child Left Behind (or NCLB) did not actually mean that no child was left behind. Furthermore, the special education law of 1975 (EAHCA, now IDEA) does not mean that all individuals with disabilities *now do* receive an appropriate

public education [45]. Imagination and efforts to make the imagined a reality are wonderful and necessary for progress, but they ensure neither that progress will be made nor that what is considered a "work in progress" will actually be effective in bringing us closer to the goal we have. To be most effective in bringing us closer to a goal we seek, imagination must be tempered with realities.

3. Competing Visions of the Future

We see competing visions for the education of exceptional children, including those with extraordinarily advanced abilities, those with educationally relevant disabilities, and those with both. Most imaginings of future public education see students grouped by geography (i.e., school districts defined by geographic boundaries), age, and grade, but *not* by gender, ethnicity/ancestry, religion, or other differences unrelated to educational ability or instruction. The problem or question at hand is how and where SWD are to be grouped, if at all, and how grouping by educationally relevant disabilities might differ from other grouping.

Many different or competing visions regarding the education of exceptional children may be constructed, and many variations of all visions are possible. However, two contrasting visions of how exceptional children could be better served by public education are described as follows:

A. *Full Inclusion with no Special Education*. This is imagination of a single public education system with no subunit, facilities, or resources known as special education and no grouping related to disability of any kind. Differentiated education is provided for students (perhaps with tiers of supports as deemed appropriate or judged to be needed by any student). Education is largely defined by a "universal curriculum", and *all* students of the same age are included in a single place or classroom. All educational services are available to all students, and special placement is necessary for none. That is, no services or resources are reserved specifically for any subset of students, and placement is universally in classrooms serving all students regardless of any differences among them related to ability.

B. *Inclusive Education with Integral Special Education.* This is imagination of a single public education system, but with a subunit or facilities and educational resources named *special* (or a proxy name for special). Some students receive special education, but most do not. Some students identified as exceptional are placed in typical classrooms with those not identified as exceptional, but some are not. Parents, teachers, and specialists use their judgment in determining what is most appropriate for the individual student regarding both instruction and placement, and a full continuum of alternative placement options is considered. A special unit of the public education system (i.e., special education or a proxy name) exists and is dedicated to the appropriate education of exceptional students, but not to the education of students who have not been identified as having special educational needs or disabilities. Grouping SWD is neither prohibited nor mandated; decisions regarding grouping are made on an individual basis.

Competing visions involve imagination and prediction. Imagination and prediction should be seen as different from expectation. Imagination involves assumptions about what *could* be in the future, given certain changes or developments, whereas expectation refers to the future, given what exists *now*.

Our assumption is that what we describe as vision A and vision B are the two most prominent visions or models of providing education. Indeed, our imagination is limited by what we perceive to be competing descriptions.

4. Imagination, Prediction, and Differences in Difference

Prediction is in many ways the game of fools or blockheads [46]. However, it is also a game that forward thinkers are forced to play. By definition, forward thinkers are anticipators of change and imaginers of futures. However, forecasters can also limit the

range of time under consideration and "hedge their bets" by stating their assumptions about related developments or conditions, such as "within the next year" or "if almost all cognitive functions are understood".

We were struck by something Fuchs et al. [8] stated about imagination and its role in children's education, which also has implications for prediction:

> We must make our children (all our children) a priority instead of a campaign slogan. If we do so, we can imagine more informed, resourceful, accommodating general education classrooms. What we cannot imagine is that general classrooms will become capable of teaching *all* SWD. We cannot imagine this because we know it to be unrealistic and dangerously naïve. Many SWD need something different than general classroom instruction.

Imagining general education classrooms that are more accommodating of more exceptional children is extremely important, and we think imagining such improved accommodation is both realistic and likely to improve the education of many children. We surmise that the above statement predicts the impossibility of meeting all students' educational needs in a single environment and the eventual failure of attempts to devise a system of general public education that serves all children in a common environment [47].

We think that the idea of inclusion can be taken too far and that failure to address its limitations is ultimately destructive of an otherwise good idea [12,16]. Imagined change such as described by Fuchs et al. [8], such that general or regular classes become more informed, resourceful, and accommodating, is eminently possible and desirable, we surmise, based on our knowledge of schools, teaching, and disabilities. Still, there are the lingering questions about the extent of this possibility. Full inclusion as promoted by SWIFT schools [48,49] and Slee (2018) [19] suggests that "all means all". But does *all* mean *each and every one, with no exceptions*? If not, then how and by whom are exceptions, if any, to be made, and what alternatives are to be provided for those exceptions?

Ultimately, too, we must consider whether imagining that general education classrooms will become capable of teaching *all* SWD appropriately is truly unrealistic and dangerously naive, as Fuchs et al. [8] suggest. Is it truly a possibility, if not a current reality in at least some public schools? Many advocates of full inclusion (meaning *all* children, regardless of any exceptionality, will be in general education classrooms) do not mention exceptions or fail to address issues of how such exceptions may be made. Therefore, we assume from their rhetoric that they admit none, that no one is or will be, in their view, empowered to make a judgment call about providing education somewhere other than an ordinary classroom.

We have noted that Slee (2018) [19] and others (e.g., SWIFT Schools [48]) have said that "all means all". Moreover, we must recognize not only the failure to mention or discuss the matter of exceptions but failure to discriminate the differences among differences and the mixture of differences, apparently under the assumption that all diversities have the same import for education. Here, we provide a quotation that illustrates both the absence of exceptions and the listing of all kinds of difference as if all diversities are equal. Slee (2018) [19] states regarding inclusion of all children in general education, "And by *all*, they really do mean *all*", and he then goes on to mention some examples:

> The child who can't see, the child whose family has been displaced by war and don't speak the school's home language, the child who has difficulty with mobility, the child who doesn't hear, the child whose behaviour is very different or difficult, the child who will be absent for periods of time because of chronic illness or is from an itinerant family, or the child who can't communicate in the way that most other children do. This is an abbreviated list for all children. (p. 29)

Another example of failure to deal with the issue of exceptions is provided by Schifter and Hehir [20], who did not describe the circumstances or conditions that would allow an exception. They comment that "Researchers should seek to understand how we can improve inclusive education rather than whether inclusion has gone too far". Surely, we

should seek improvements in inclusive education, but we also believe that separate special education will always be required for some, and it also needs improvement. Moreover, in our opinion anything can be taken too far. Any good ideas can be ruined by extremist ideology, and we think Gilmour [21] was fully justified in posing the question of whether inclusion has gone too far [16,25]. Certainly, exclusion went too far in the past, and inclusion is not immune to the abuse of extremism.

Also often at issue in the matter of inclusion is the nature of the difference and the legal and moral problem of how to respond to it. The United States Supreme Court decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* striking down racial segregation has been used for decades to argue that, just as differences in skin color or ancestry cannot be used as a pretext for discrimination, disability as well cannot be so employed as an excuse for separate education (e.g., [50]). Besides the arguments that *Brown* and IDEA call for different remedies, the term "segregated" rather than the more apt word "dedicated" has done much to tarnish the image of special education [51].

Careful legal and conceptual analyses indicate that equating *Brown* and IDEA is a "red herring" argument that has mislead many [52]. Moreover, the conceptualization of differences and the intent of the legal issues involved in in *Brown* and IDEA are completely different. Harden [53] provided what is likely the clearest distinction between *Brown* and IDEA—the *prohibition* of treating a classification or category differently (anti-classification) and the *mandate* to treat a classification or category differently (anti-subordination):

> The alternative to the "anti-classification" [e.g., Brown] approach to discrimination law is the "anti-subordination" [e.g., EAHCA] approach, which focuses on raising the social status of certain marginalized or oppressed groups and preventing the formulation of an underclass. In contrast to anti-classification, which forbids differential treatment, anti-subordination allows for positive differential treatment. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), for instance, takes an anti-subordination rather than an anti-classification approach. Under IDEA, children are held to have an equal right to a "free, appropriate public education". In designing an appropriate education, school systems are not only allowed to consider certain differentiating information about the individual student, they are, in fact, mandated to consider that information for accommodation and planning purposes. (p. 245, italics in original)

Too often, rhetoric about inclusion considers neither the nature of differences nor the degree of learning differences [54]. Indeed, we think, it is not true that all differences are equal and that at some point differences, depending on just what they are and the degree of that difference, become difficult if not impossible for most or all teachers [24]. Moreover, diversities differ in the extent to which they are important for a particular activity. Teaching and learning require things distinctly different from many other activities, such as presence in a classroom or other space such as a street or store or mall [55]. Imagination is important, but it needs to be bounded by certain realities regarding human beings and their activities or by social circumstances (e.g., teacher-pupil ratios, available or projected public funds) if it is to avoid becoming delusional.

We think of our own teaching in institutions of higher education, particularly in teacher education, and can hardly imagine having no concern for the prior experiences, qualifications, interests, or goals of our students. We wonder whether the imagination that there will be no specific courses of study or prerequisites for teachers would be an advance or a regression. Perhaps imagination could include the medieval idea of *universitas* in which place or campus was not important. Instead, a university was, in medieval times, a band of individuals (of considerable diversity) with a common interest in learning something, and classes were taught in whatever space was available. Were universities defined that way today, classes would be taught in whatever space is available (including digital spaces nowadays). We end up asking ourselves questions like these:

- At what point, if any, does teaching become difficult enough that the nature of learning differences makes a difference in the nature of education and where it is best conducted?
- Could it be that the value and meaning of what we call inclusion depends on age, activity, purpose, and degree of separateness?
- Is teacher education not inclusive, or is it "segregated" from other programs in universities because it includes only particular university students who meet in particular classrooms?
- At what point and in what ways, if any, does the idea of inclusion in any group or activity become silly, bizarre, unhelpful, or even counterproductive or destructive?
- Why do people fail to address the issue of exceptions when they suggest that inclusion cannot be taken too far or be over-emphasized as a universal goal for all students?

We consider many other questions about public education of children and adults to be appropriate and to constrain the imagination of adults, but we do not pursue them all here. It is surprising to us that many of these questions seem not to have been asked, or not to have been thought about carefully but instead have been avoided or evaded, perhaps purposely.

5. Nature of the Problem of Educating All Children

The major challenge regarding inclusion in education seems to be one of judging whether there are limits to inclusionary education and whether special education or special needs education is and will be needed. The ethical and moral issues are not exclusive to special education but are quite similar to those in many other fields of study and policy and are critical in trying to imagine special and inclusive education's future:

Kauffman [22] suggests that special education is a type of ethical and philosophical problem commonly encountered in the formation of social policy. It begins with a proposition about an issue under consideration, typically one considered very important. Let us call it proposition X. The proposition might be considered noncontingent (yes, *always*; no, *never*) or contingent (it depends, yes under certain conditions or circumstances, no under others). If the matter is considered contingent, then those contingencies are at issue.

> Contingencies present further problems: (a) What are those exceptions? (b) How are those exceptions determined? (c) Who is empowered to make those exceptions? In short, contingency allows, indeed requires, further, difficult, arguable decisions. The Law may provide guidance in making those decisions (e.g., IDEA in the case of special education), but law is open to interpretation and subversion, and ethical interpretation and implementation are not guaranteed. Moreover, contingencies may be so narrowly drawn that they are tantamount to the absolute, and so restrictive that choices are essentially nonexistent. ([22], pp. 6–7)

A critical aspect of any competing visions of special education's future is imagining not only whether a feature of the law governing it is contingent or noncontingent but also the administrative structures under which education operates. Operationalizing special education requires imagining the flow of both money and authority. That is, one must imagine a structure or framework for funding, making decisions, assigning responsibilities, and judging accountability—even if one imagines an adhocracy.

6. Administrative Structures and Special Education

Special education often draws fire (and ire) because it is visible and considered "separate" or not fully "integrated" into the system of public education. Two points regarding what people imagine are important. First, the imagined separateness of special education is, we believe, in some ways illusory, an imagination of something that does not exist. Second, the dedication of a special unit is inherently necessary, some have suggested (e.g., Goodlad [56] in any administrative structure. Imagination departs significantly from reality when something is deemed particularly important, yet there is no imagined administrative structure to ensure it. We see proposals to make education both general and special for

all children as an example of the unmoored, delusional thinking described by scientist Smil [57].

6.1. An Illusion of Separateness

We note that special education is already a part of the public education system of many nations. In the USA, federal special education law has as its preeminent requirement the free, appropriate *public* education of all children with disabilities [56]. That is, the *public* must bear the cost and establish the administrative structure of special education. Parents cannot be expected or required to bear the cost of such education; any cost of special education is to be paid with public taxes that support public schools. Furthermore, such education is to be administered under the auspices of the public education system by an administrative unit of the public education system dedicated to special education. That is, it is an administrative unit accountable to the system or structure to which all other, general education programs report. In reference to accountability, then, in the USA, special education is much like special units devoted to sports, music, art, science, or any other special function or program. Imagining how special education might be further integrated seems to require its dissolution, its disappearance or negation as "special". Decrying the separateness of special education for students with special needs because it is specified and visible is, as we see it, a delusion and denial that special education is just as legitimate as other special programs such as those involving athletics or a marching band.

6.2. The Necessity of an Administrative Unit Dedicated to Special Education

All administrative organizations (including not just public education at all levels but also municipal organizations, public safety, commercial entities, etc., even adhocratic organizations) have special subunits dedicated to do specific things. If these units do not exist, then the thing(s) they do tend to get lost or, as Goodlad [56] called it, get "orphaned" and are at high risk of being neglected or forgotten.

The fact that special administrative units, departments, forces, committees, commissions, and so on *other than special education* are called "dedicated" or are "charged", not called "segregated" or considered somehow illegitimately "separate", reveals rhetoric aimed at eliminating special education. Those calling for the elimination of special education as a separate entity (e.g., Slee [19]) may well have pure motives, but their motives do not make their suggestions less morally questionable.

Comments regarding special education as a unit in public education are relevant. In a nonconformist chapter of a book on integrating general and special education, Kauffman and Hallahan [58] observed that special education, like teacher education, must have certain things:

> To flourish, a program of education must enjoy visibility, status, budget, and personnel—those things that give it borders and identity. Without these, the program inevitably becomes increasingly derelict in both intent and accomplishment. (pp. 96–97)

In an earlier book on teacher education in the context of the idea that preparing teachers should be the job of everyone in a university, not a special program, Goodlad [56] had written of teacher education's status and role in a university:

> And these resources [for educating teachers] must be made secure for the purposes intended. That is, they must be earmarked for and assigned to a unit with clear borders, a specified number of students with a common purpose, and a roster of largely full-time faculty requisite to the formal and informal socialization of these students into teaching. Put negatively, these resources must not go to the larger, multipurpose unit of which teacher education is a part; there they run the danger of being impounded by entrepreneurial program heads and faculty members. (p. 152)

The resources (e.g., money and personnel) as well as special places in which the activities of preparing teachers were to occur, Goodlad [56] noted, were important, but so is the administrative structure:

> First, the farther down in a university's organizational structure teacher education finds itself, the less chance it has to obtain the conditions necessary to a healthy, dynamic existence. Second, the farther down in the hierarchy teacher education finds itself, the less likely it is that it will enjoy the tender loving care of those tenure-line faculty members universities strive so hard to recruit. Who, then, speaks for teacher education? Who speaks for those who would become teachers? (p. 277)

We might wonder, in an administrative structure where lines between general and special education are erased, who will speak for students with special educational needs and those who would become special educators? We wonder, as well, just how and by whom the students with special educational needs will be taught if special education is folded into the mission of public education with no separate, special designation.

We can, indeed, imagine public education with no special education, for we had it in many schools in the world (and still have it in some), including many schools in the USA prior to 1975. The argument may be that things are different now, that imagination is required to see the democracy of a single appropriate education for all without distinct subsystems and programs (presumably a single base curriculum, none completely different, and a single placement, no options). Though he was writing of climate and energy and related noneducational matters in science, the words of Smil [57] apply to the present discussion:

> Much of this unmoored thinking comes out as intended—ranging from scary to wonderful—and I can see why many people are taken in either by these threats or by unrealistic suggestions. Only the imagination limits these assumptions: they range from fairly plausible to patently delusionary. This is a new scientific genre where heavy doses of wishful thinking are commingled with a few solid facts. All of these models should be seen mainly as heuristic exercises, as bases to thinking about options and approaches, never to be mistaken for prescient descriptions of our future. I wish this admonition would be as obvious, as trivial, and as superfluous as it seems! (p. 200)

6.3. Creating and Maintaining Administrative Structures

Goodlad suggested that those responsible for teacher education must have clear focus, identity, and authority. Otherwise, teacher education becomes "an orphan, dependent on charity and goodwill" (Goodlad [56], p. 153). This is as true for special education as it is for teacher education. The interests that are now competing most overtly for special education's resources are (a) concern for underachieving students who are at risk for greater failure and, most obviously, the idea of tiered general education that is not special education and (b) higher academic performance of all students, universal standards that all students are expected to achieve. General educational interests will, of course, seek to co-opt special education's resources by arguing that those resources must be reallocated to serve not only children with disabilities but the common good of all students, that what is good for one is good for all. Kauffman and Hallahan [58] concluded the following, obviously referring to the landmark achievement of EAHCA in 1975:

> After a long period of struggle, special education has finally achieved the status of a normal part of public general education and been integrated into the fabric of our thinking about students' special needs. It has done so only by recognizing the realities of which Goodlad speaks, and it will remain such only if it is successful in fending off the entrepreneurial interests and irresponsible attacks that threaten its hard-won position. (p. 98)

Creating, naming, and maintaining administrative structures, including those involving special education are critical [15]. Of course, destroying is much easier than creating, and this is true of both administrative structures and facilities.

Among the structures that can be created or destroyed are legal rights. In the present discussion, the rights of exceptional children to education are at issue. Right to education determined by children's diverse characteristics is an important issue in all cases, but here the discussion is about diversity of a specific kind—the diversity we call disability, which is quite unlike any other diversity when it comes to teaching and learning (see [22,52]).

Ambiguities and pliability are difficult for many to accept, hence the appeal of extremism in which they do not exist. As Kauffman, Burke et al. [52] suggest, these make many choices regarding education of exceptional children difficult.

7. Pliability and Imagination in Educational Rights

One can make the case that all rights are social constructs, and imagination has played an important role in giving legal "standing" to inanimate entities as well as human beings. Kolbert, for example, has discussed the possibility of giving legal rights to bodies of water and other nonhuman entities [59]. Moreover, educators must consider just what legal rights are involved in education—that is, to what does a student with disabilities have a right and, if more than a single right is involved, what is the hierarchy of those rights? What right is more or most important, and why does one right take precedence over another [22,60]? Further, what role does imagination play in creating and ensuring rights to education?

There is no escape from the moral and ethical dilemmas humans face. Absolutes produce instances of injustice, simply because they allow no exceptions based on best human judgment. They force mistakes by their rigidity. However, contingencies demand weighing positives and negatives, advantages and disadvantages, and force human judgment. They allow mistakes by flexibility or contingency, because human judgment is fallible. It is a way of allowing mistakes, and although they are not made forcibly we know that they are inevitable.

Some imagine that disability affecting learning can be undone completely. Additionally, that disability could become an insignificant marginal phenomenon if only it were accepted by society and accommodated in schools. This includes elevating external barriers to be the decisive factor. "Disability is no longer present if, in connection with pedagogical reforms, the school is changed in such a way that even children with impairments are not excluded in their normal environment and are given the opportunity there to find an accepted social role even with reduced ability" ([61], p. 110). This quotation has lost none of its relevance to this day.

Every child has a right to be recognized and accepted as a person, and whether the child has a disability is irrelevant. However, recognition and acceptance must not lead to the fact that disability is made nameless because of an exaggerated fear of discrimination, which is taken as the all-determining factor. Special educational support categories must be maintained so that adequate support can be provided. Children also have a right to this special, individualized support. If disability is made unrecognizable, if already "making a distinction . . . is equated with a morally reprehensible social practice—the humiliation and exclusion of persons", then it is "practically impossible to speak of disabled persons as concrete persons with certain characteristics at all without exposing oneself to the suspicion of wanting to devalue them" ([62], p. 41). The right to appropriate education is then endangered. The teachers' hands are tied. Teachers are then asked to give away an important tool, a specific expertise, a clear language that names what really is. Neither teachers nor children are helped by a ban on naming and diagnosing. Both are important for the realization of robust interpretation of the right to inclusive education [18].

The very concepts of appropriateness of education and least restrictive environment (LRE) are pliable, as Laski noted more than three decades ago [63]. The fact that the concept of least restrictive environment is pliable—contingent and not absolute—is a complaint of some and a lament that inclusion cannot be taken so far that it becomes counterproductive

(see [20,21,64]). Refusal to recognize and embrace both the pliability and the necessity of the LRE concept regarding special education portends counterproductivity [16,52,65].

Policies that do not take exceptions into account inevitably result in neglect of some individuals with disabilities (e.g., see [66]). Universal, no-exception policies about education, regardless of intent, risk disregard of the appropriate education of individuals. Choice certainly allows mistakes and cruelty, but it guarantees neither in any case. No-exception policies preclude choice, guaranteeing both mistakes and cruelty in some cases. However, nuance always creates ambiguities, and some people cannot abide them. Neither a rigid ideology of full inclusion nor the elimination of special education is helpful in designing appropriate education for *all* children [45]. Both guarantee that mistakes will be made and that some children will be neglected.

8. Teacher Education

We consider further the right of children with disabilities to teachers competent in dealing with their special needs. Perhaps the greatest challenge to envisioning teacher education in a completely inclusionary system is the possibility that the idea of the special education teacher vanishes along with the dissolution of special education. If special education is no longer needed, then the special educator is certainly expendable. Consequently, special education teacher training would be discontinued, assuming that all teachers' training includes any needed specialization. Most likely, then, regular teachers' training would be assumed to expand to incorporate all features needed by any child.

Inclusion of SWD in general education classrooms is already changing the nature of the teaching profession as a whole. Currently, all teachers must deal with an unprecedented diversity of students' knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, and capacities. Still, studies consistently find persistent problems with teachers' preparation to deal with such diversity, despite any positive attitudes towards the presence of SWD in their classrooms (e.g., [67–70]. Are teacher educators insensitive to this challenge, or are strategies to deal with enormous variance in students' knowledge and attitudes yet to be found? How can teachers attend to the needs of SWD *and* the rest of the class? Can they do this and still avoid classroom disruption?

Teacher education for fully inclusive classrooms is at a crossroads [7,9]. On the one hand, keeping special educator training seems contradictory to the idea of full inclusion or abandonment of special education. On the other hand, any conceivable typical teachers' training in special education seems hardly enough for teachers to deal with the significant challenges of integrating *all* special students into their classrooms [71,72]. Indeed, integrating *all* students into regular classrooms is highly demanding and, in typical circumstances, unmanageable [27,65,73]. However, some writers, including some international organizations, see the matter quite differently.

> An important element of inclusive education involves ensuring that all teachers are prepared to teach all students . . . To complete this shift, education systems must design teacher education and professional learning opportunities that dispel entrenched views that some students are deficient, unable to learn or incapable. ([73], p. 1)

It seems that the UNESCO statement reflects a misunderstanding or a knowledgeable but purposeful mis-statement about *all* students and *all* teachers. When *all* is taken literally, it includes every teacher, including those with relatively little training and experience and every SWD, including those who are deaf or blind or deaf-blind and those with profound intellectual and/or behavioral problems. The credulous may accept any statement about teachers and students that comes from a reputable professor of education. However, we see it as not credible in the reality-based community, unless some SWD are not to have a right to education that is appropriate for them, although that education might be appropriate for most children. For example, is education of a deaf student likely to be more appropriate if the teacher is fluent in signing and finger spelling? Or is the education of a blind student more likely to be appropriate if the teacher knows Braille and orientation and mobility

skills very well or the education of a deaf-blind student more likely to be appropriate if the teacher understands very well how to communicate with deaf-blind persons? Some questions about the education of some SWD come to mind.

- Is it acceptable or fair for SWD to be present in the classroom with nondisabled peers and a teacher who has not specialized or is not fluent in the procedures demanded by the disability?
- Are all teachers to be competent and fluent in all of the knowledge and skills required to educate students with the most severe and complex intellectual and developmental disabilities and/or emotional and behavioral disorders? Additionally, if this training is going to happen, how and when will it occur? How will the appropriateness and sufficiency of this training be determined?
- If specialized teaching and services are to be intermittently "pulled in" to the general classroom by an itinerant, is that enough to meet the educational needs of every SWD (i.e., are no exceptions to be made for SWD who may benefit from more or more consistent specialized teaching, including most or all of the school day)?
- Given that all teaching is to be done in the context of a general education classroom, it that always the best place for it to happen? Will practical and ethical constraints of providing all instruction in one place be considered? If so, how?

8.1. Co-Teaching

Co-teaching (general educators and special educators teaching together in the same classroom) has long been advocated as an answer to most or all of these questions. Properly conceived and practiced, co-teaching could help answer these questions for many, but not all, SWD. Unfortunately, co-teaching has captured the imagination of inclusion advocates in a way that obscures the limitations of co-teaching and the many new questions raised by co-teaching. For example, co-teaching in classrooms having a wide diversity of SWD might require more than a single special education teacher, something seldom considered in the co-teaching literature. Additionally, co-teaching has been seldom a suggestion or topic of research for specific types and especially for the severity (degrees) of disabilities. Most concerning is a lack of adequate research to determine the conditions under which co-teaching is and is not appropriate and effective for SWD. Mavropalias and Anastasiou [74] found that deeper cultural characteristics may shape the co-teaching peculiarities in the Greek educational system. The Greek Parallel Support model is not a single case. The Italian co-teaching approach is also affected by administrative, organizational and collaboration challenges faced in practice [75]. Co-teaching models are sometimes a compromise between the high spirit of a demanding collaborative approach (i.e., team teaching) and the harsh reality of a low-collaboration school culture [76].

Schools have tried to deal with integration issues through co-teaching, the shared instruction between a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another specialist. However, co-teaching is also demanding for teachers, and its efficacy is controversial. Friend et al. [75] stated:

> Contributing to the admittedly equivocal evidence base for co-teaching are factors such as the still-emerging understanding of this special education service delivery vehicle, inconsistencies in definitions and implementation, lack of professional preparation, and dilemmas related to situating co-teaching in a supportive, collaborative school culture. (p. 9)

Eklund et al. [76] found that participants in their study supported co-teaching, but teachers also face the problems of extensive documentation and little time to support all students in class. In addition, regular teachers said that they appreciated their special education colleagues' support but lacked time for consultation. Several other studies come to about the same conclusions (e.g., [77–80]). Alnasser [80] noted the challenges of co-teaching: "(a) lack of shared vision of co-teaching; (b) lack of co-teaching planning time;

(c) lack of effective instructional supervision and establishment of clear expectations; and (d) insufficient opportunities for professional development". (p. 3).

King-Sears et al. [81] conducted a meta-analysis to compare the academic achievement of SWD in co-taught classes to the achievement of SWD in special education settings. The authors offer cautions "about widespread placement of SWD in either setting without monitoring that effective instructional practices are in place, and that students receive specially designed instruction as stipulated on their Individualized Education Programs" (p. 1). Studies generally show that most teachers are positive about co-teaching but not so optimistic about the efficacy of it resulting in the progress of special students (e.g., Shin et al., [77]). Most studies focus on implementing co-teaching, not on its effects on the students. Moreover, participants in these studies also reported the significant impact of personality on co-teaching. This aspect of co-teaching is particularly important because no training system can prepare future or current teachers for personality-matching.

One aspect found in most educational studies is the reference to shortcomings in teacher preparation. These shortcomings seem to affect both undergraduate and postgraduate training. In Shin et al. [77] and Sundqvist et al., [78,79], special education preservice teachers noted that they lacked content knowledge, whereas general education preservice teachers thought they needed more training in providing accommodations and modifications.

The evidence suggests this: (a) teachers are not receiving enough undergraduate or graduate training to instruct every student, in the same place, for extended periods (e.g., [82–85]); (b) even special education teachers' training is often insufficient.

8.2. Teaching Assistants

Inclusive classrooms throughout the world rely heavily on teaching assistants (TAs) or paraprofessionals. This type of workforce has heavily increased in the past years [86]. Unclear roles and responsibilities, lack of training, lack of communication and cooperation between teachers and TAs may lead to a classroom teacher fully delegating responsibility for a child with special educational needs to the TA [87]. Without proper training, guidance from general education classroom teachers, and special education teachers, a model heavily relying on TAs does not ensure educational rights for SWDs. TAs can be highly effective members of a child's educational team. However, they are no replacement for better-trained special educators. At worst they are a cheap solution, leaving the least-qualified people responsible for children with the greatest educational challenges.

Unfortunately, there is a trend in some states of the USA to increasingly rely on teaching assistants for the education of children with disabilities. For example, in 2022 the governor of Florida announced alternate routes to teaching for persons who hold only a two-year associate degree and have served as teaching assistants—with the help of a teacher mentor—rather than a bachelor's degree that would include four years of college and knowledge of pedagogy, content knowledge and skills, classroom management skills, and other education requirements [87]. Speaking about special education, this *inter alia* signifies the inability of the special education field to legitimize its distinct place in society by the public recognition that it is an autonomous scientific discipline whose professional practice requires a certified set of specialized knowledge and skills.

9. Imagining Special and Inclusive Education That Serves All Students with Disabilities: Basic Principles of Our View and Their Limitations

This brings us to our own imagining, and we offer our own imagination of a realistic future for special and inclusive education. Although we cannot provide all the necessary detail, we imagine policy and practice that we think is consistent with the realities of teaching *all* SWD in the LRE.

It is possible to imagine policy and practice that combine the philosophy and values of inclusive education with strategies and programs from special education in order to serve all students with disabilities. An example of this is Inclusive Special Education (ISE) [88,89] and involves recognition that all SWD can be provided for appropriately

within education systems that combine effective general education schools with high-quality special education.

We do not deny the fact that some sound research showing the benefits of inclusion for some children with and without disabilities can be found. The issues being discussed here are whether false claims have been made about inclusion (e.g., research reviewed by [8,90–92]), whether inclusion should be the first or foremost concern in educating children with education-related disabilities [93,94], and whether full or total inclusion (i.e., all children, no exceptions) is feasible [9].

When Inclusive Special Education is implemented, mainstream schools are organized to provide effectively for a wide range of children with disabilities by using evidence-based programs and strategies that have been found to be the best practices for supporting the education of learners with special educational needs [88,95]. It considers that, although most children can be educated in mainstream classrooms, a relatively small number benefit more by being taught in resource rooms or special classes within mainstream schools or being educated at special schools, either on the site of mainstream schools or on their own campuses. Importantly, mainstream schools work closely with special schools to enhance support for milder degrees of special needs while also providing alternative places for children with more severe levels of disability or learning difficulties [12].

Thus, the vision of ISE is based on a commitment to providing excellent and equitable education, based on an integration of the best of special education and inclusive education [96,97], for all SWD in the most appropriate setting and throughout all stages of a child's education. Its focus is on the effective inclusion of SWD in mainstream schools as far as that is appropriate, along with the availability of a continuum of placement options from mainstream classes to special schools. It involves an ongoing, close collaboration between teachers in mainstream and special schools and classes to ensure equitable quality of appropriate provision and optimum outcomes for all learners. There are six key components of ISE, as follows.

9.1. Implementing Best Practices from Inclusive Education

Inclusive special education involves implementing well-established special and inclusive education practices, including: fostering acceptance of diversity; using well-coordinated and implementable IEPs to focus on students' strengths and challenges; and using evidence-based interventions such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. It also involves using both formative and summative assessment, as well as instructional strategies such as peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and meta-cognitive strategies, and closely collaborating with parents of SWD and professionals in culturally responsive ways [95]. These practices, if properly resourced, provide teachers with a sound base for working with children with special educational needs in order to ensure equity of provision and excellence of outcomes.

9.2. Continuum of Placement Options from Mainstream Classes through Special Schools

Inclusive special education is an equitable approach in that it is aimed at providing the best possible education for all SWD. It recognizes that, although the majority of children with disabilities can be effectively educated in mainstream classes, there are others with varying degrees of special educational needs who benefit more from being educated in resource rooms, special classes, or special schools. Therefore, it is necessary to have a continuum of placement options, from mainstream classes through special schools, to be available, as is currently the case in most developed countries [96].

9.3. Effectively Including the Majority of Children in Mainstream Schools

In inclusive special education there is a major focus on effectively including SWD wherever possible in mainstream schools, while supporting them to the fullest extent possible with quality provision of special education [88,89]. It is indisputable that making this possible is both complex and expensive but arguably a worthwhile investment in a nation's

long-term future. In order to achieve this, it is essential for mainstream schoolteachers to be appropriately supported in being able to recognize that it is genuinely achievable and beneficial for all. To that end, they will need to receive extensive training, not just in the instructional pedagogy necessary for meeting special educational needs appropriately, but in how to simultaneously balance the teaching strategies and skills needed for students with a range of SWD with the skills needed for teaching students with regular learning needs. They will need the comprehensive support and understanding of the school leadership, adequate advance funding and provision of appropriate material resources, specialist trained support staff with equal status and authority to work within the classroom, and allocated time to prepare thoroughly for the effective support of each child with special needs for each lesson.

In this way teachers will be supported in developing effective teaching of SWD in mainstream classrooms [96–98] as well as in developing values and attitudes supportive of the processes that are desirable for the inclusion of different types and degrees of SWD. Equally important is training for mainstream school-teachers to develop the skills necessary to work effectively with parents or caregivers of children with special educational needs and to be given the opportunity to work as part of a team with other professionals such as specialist teachers, special needs or learning support coordinators, and educational psychologists [88]. Provision for SWD should be individually evaluated for each individual child with special educational needs and coordinated by fully trained special needs (or learning support) coordinators in all schools. In addition, schools need to have in place practical policies and strategies and be led by a mutually supportive and coordinated leadership, providing whole-school support. It is also important that such strategies be appropriately supported by government funding and underpinned by evidence-based practicable and implementable legislative policies.

9.4. Collaboration between Mainstream and Special Schools

In inclusive special education there are two major aspects to the role of teachers in special schools and classes. First, they provide special education for children with high levels of special educational needs that cannot be effectively met in mainstream schools. Second, they provide guidance and support to assist teachers in mainstream schools to effectively educate children with more moderate levels of disability [99]. Special schools are well placed to fulfil this second aspect of their role because they have specialist staff who have expertise in dealing with a range of high level special educational needs that teachers in mainstream schools typically do not have [100,101]. The collaboration between special and mainstream schools is a key factor in ensuring the effectiveness of education for SWD in mainstream schools [101–103]. This collaboration is an important element of the philosophy and practice of inclusive special education as it ensures equity of provision and facilitates optimal educational outcomes [101,102].

9.5. Flexibility of Education in Most Appropriate Setting throughout Children's Education

An important consequence of having a continuum of placement options from mainstream classes through to special schools is that there can be transfers between the various options to ensure that an optimal education in the most appropriate setting can be provided throughout all stages of a child's education [88]. For example, it is possible that a child may begin his or her education in an early intervention program alongside other children with high levels of special educational needs and when school-age is reached be transferred to a mainstream primary school class, perhaps with transitioning support from a specialist support teacher or teacher-aide. Later, the child may transfer to a mainstream classroom or a resource room or special class within a middle school and later still transfer to a mainstream school or special school in order to complete his or her education. The most important issue is to have the flexibility to transfer within a school system that has a continuum of options available, in order to ensure that children are at all times being educated in the setting that best facilitates their learning.

9.6. Organization for Providing Optimal Education for All Children with Disabilities

Providing an excellent education for all SWD requires education policies and procedures in place in all aspects of the education system [88,89,98]. This includes having national legislation that clearly specifies the rights of children with disabilities and their families to have equal access to a special school or other special education program, or a mainstream school. It involves decisions about educational settings depending entirely on what is assessed by an independent body to be recognized as the most appropriate provision rather than being determined on the basis of local education authority budgetary constraints. It requires budgetary requirements for local authorities to fulfil their duty to meet the needs of SWD in their locality to be planned for in advance of a school year. These needs should be based on prior assessments of need made by an independent body of specialists, and not retrospectively, so that the necessary placements and programs of support are in place before a child starts or returns to school and therefore receives unimpeded, immediate support.

Procedures need to be in place for identifying and assessing children with special educational needs at the preschool stage and for providing appropriate interventions from as soon as possible after assessment for as long as it is deemed necessary. National legislation in each country should provide statutory practical guidelines, along with mechanisms to ensure that these are supported in such a way as to be implementable in practice at the regional and school levels.

Requirements should be made explicit, to include the number of hours of support, the programs and strategies to be used, as well as the precise qualifications and experience level of the staff required to provide that support. Ideally the impact of the support should be monitored over a two-year period by an independent body and not by school staff or the local authority. In addition, it is essential that schools have effective whole-school organizational procedures for meeting children's special needs, coordinated by staff who are trained in inclusive or special education, such as specialist teachers and special needs or learning support coordinators.

Furthermore, schools must ensure that school-wide practices are based on research evidence of effectiveness in facilitating the academic and social development of all children, including those with disabilities [88]. For example, they must have in place effective procedures for optimizing active parental involvement in their children's education [102]. Schools must at the same time ensure that strategies found not to contribute to optimal overall achievement, such as between-class ability grouping, are avoided where possible [95,104]. Finally, all teachers must be provided with suitable training to recognize the full range of special educational needs in children and to ensure that appropriate teaching strategies and techniques based on evidence-based practices, for example, cooperative learning and peer tutoring, are used to support them [95].

All six of these principles are limited in that they are arguable and based on views open to discussion. We see them as our best effort to combine inclusive and special education. As Kauffman [45], Kauffman, Burke et al. [52] and Yell and Prince [103] suggest, the choice before us as educators should not be whether inclusion or non-inclusion in general education is right in all cases, but what is the better choice for each individual. One limitation of this philosophical and legal position is that it does not provide an unambiguous answer to the question of placement. It is contingent upon judgment that is open to error and characterized by nuance.

All positions on the possible future of education are limited by their basic assumptions about justice and democracy. Surely, these can be cast as a matter that demands togetherness and systemic improvements. They can also be cast as a matter requiring that individual needs be met. Of course, it is possible to imagine that both are possible. Clearly that is true in some cases. An important question is whether it is reasonable to imagine that they always are.

10. Conclusions

Imagination plays a vital role in improving the education of all children. Its role in improving the education of all SWD is particularly acute. We see special education as an especially important part of making certain that all SWD have an appropriate education. Imagining appropriate education for all requires, we believe, the existence of special education. Therefore, we have suggested how special and inclusive education might be imagined, such that the importance of having both special education and inclusion is recognized.

Full inclusion and the imagination of education without special education are in our opinion detached from reality and the rigors of reason. Proponents of full inclusion without special education have tended to embrace cognitive relativism and to be suspicious or overtly antagonistic toward Enlightenment thinking, with its emphasis on scientific evidence and reason. Thus, acceptance of unreason has been considered legitimate by some in special education (e.g., see [34,36,39,40,105] for discussion of these).

We urge all educators to insist on enlightened definitions of science, reason, truth, justice, and democracy, and to refuse the seduction of unreason. SWD will benefit most from imagination and reimagination guided, by science and rationality, including the psycho-social theory of child development and the extensive research evidence base for the effective teaching of SWD (e.g., [95,105]).

Our reasoning, like all alternatives, is open to error and limitations. Inclusion in general education has its benefits and is appropriate for many children with education-related disabilities. However, the danger of imagining an education that has no special education is making the mistake of losing something very difficult or impossible to regain [106]. Martin [23] explains the enormous efforts of parents, legislators, and educators over a period of many years to secure the legal rights (in the United States) of all children with disabilities and their parents to appropriate education, regardless of where that education might best occur, whether in general education classrooms or special classes or special schools. If past is indeed prologue, as suggested centuries ago by William Shakespeare, then it seems likely that enormous sustained efforts would be required to re-establish special education if it is abandoned. However, we might also imagine this scenario: that full-inclusionists finally conclude that, in order to ensure equity and excellence for all students, including those with disabilities, it is important to view special education as an essential component of education systems that is fully integrated within an overall inclusive philosophy [107].

Our intention is to approach imagination of the future of special and inclusive education with open minds. However, we also realize that this means our minds are not open to each and every possible imaginary future. We believe, like physicist Lawrence Krauss, that "A truly open mind means forcing our imaginations to conform to the evidence of realty, and not vice versa, whether or not we like the implication" ([108], p. 140).

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