

## Think Inclusive Podcast • Episode 8 with Dr. Julie N. Causton



*Recording from my living room in beautiful Marietta, Georgia, you're listening to the Think Inclusive Podcast, Episode 8. I'm your host, Tim Villegas.*

*Today I will be speaking with Dr. Julie N. Causton, an Associate Professor in the Department of Teaching and Leadership at Syracuse University and creator of the website [Inspire Inclusion](#), which has a 10-part video series about inclusion for parents of children with disabilities. I had the pleasure of visiting with her one evening in November of last year.*

*Julie and I discuss the necessary steps for schools to become more inclusive, which include professional development, reimagining the school district service delivery model, and using the law as leverage for systems change. This is one of the most interesting conversations on the podcast to date, so please, if you can, listen to the entire episode.*

*So, without further ado, let's get to the Think Inclusive Podcast. Thanks for listening.*

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**Tim:** Joining us today on the Think Inclusive Podcast is Dr. Julie N. Causton, and she is an Associate Professor in the Department of Teaching and Leadership at Syracuse University. She's also the creator of the website [Inspire Inclusion](#), which includes a 10-part series about inclusion for parents of children with disabilities. She also has been involved with research on inclusive practices, including the landmark project, "Schools of Promise." Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us today.

**Julie:** Oh, it's my pleasure, thank you, Tim.

**Tim:** Let's go ahead and dig right in. The reason why I wanted to get you on the Podcast was because of the work that you did with a research project called *Schools of Promise*. And I know that was a while ago, but I was hoping that we could talk a little bit about this particular research and tell our audience about your involvement and if you agree that this was a good example of how inclusive education can be possible for all students.

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**Julie:** Yeah, definitely. So, *Schools of Promise* began a while ago, almost maybe eight years ago, and my colleagues at Syracuse University and I were teaching about how to create inclusive schools with our undergraduates. So we teach teachers how to teach general and special education in inclusive settings. And, we were placing our students in city schools nearby Syracuse University and we were finding that we weren't seeing very good models of inclusive education locally.

So what the concern was that we were teaching them something that they couldn't see in practice. So right away we decided that one of the best things to do would be to begin to look at the schools where we were currently placing our students and look to see if we could work with the schools to become more inclusive. And so what we did is we went to the superintendent of the Syracuse City Schools at the time and we asked if anybody was interested in being involved with our project. We ended up getting a lot of schools that were interested and we worked with those schools that had 80% or more of the teachers really on board with becoming more inclusive, and we had done some surveys and things to figure that out.

So we ended up starting with two different schools in Syracuse. Basically when we say school reform, what we mean is that we worked with the entire school staff. And it was a pretty typical school, Tim – a school that had pull-out classrooms where kids would be pulled out like in resource rooms, and then there were segregated classrooms in most schools, and there were also some classrooms that were more inclusive. In order to be involved in the partnership we said that they would be willing to get rid of their segregated classrooms and their resource room pull-out program and all children with all disability labels would be included in the general education content curriculum.

And so we began to work with those schools and we spent about three years – well, more than that – three to five years with each school and we worked alongside them as they restructured their school and they got rid of their segregated or pull-out programs and all the kids with disabilities were in the general ed classrooms. The work that we did mostly was about professional development and teaching teachers how to create inclusive classrooms, how to differentiate content, how to support kids with challenging behaviors, and how to collaborate effectively with their colleagues. So that was the work that we had done, and it was great work, and the schools looked different in terms of no children were segregated any longer. But what surprised us with the research were the academic results.

So we went in, much like you Tim, kind of at your gut level you think inclusion might be the best idea for children. On lots of different levels I knew that to be true. But what we didn't expect in our research was that there was such a great big academic gain for not only children with disabilities, but their peers without disabilities did better in these classrooms. And so, that was kind of the bigger

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surprise in our research study: across reading, across math, across social studies, across science, across state tests – everything. We found that kids actually did better academically when they were included. So this research project took us from kind of the social justice reasons of including kids to really academic performance reasons in terms of including kids.

What's interesting is that since the *Schools of Promise* schools, the schools have been recognized as Schools of Excellence and things like that, which is great, but the thing that has been really interesting is that we've been able to replicate those same results in multiple schools across the country. We're not calling it *Schools of Promise* but we're doing a lot of school reform work like that, and we're finding the same academic achievement results. And so now, what's interesting is, a lot of times when I'm talking to administrators about why to include students I'm actually using the academic achievement gains as the number one reason to include kids with disabilities.

**Tim:** Do you find that that is more effective at convincing some administrators?

**Julie:** Yeah, definitely. Everybody right now is interested in the bottom line – their test scores, their cut scores, the Common Core – making sure everybody has access to that. So when we can actually show with real numbers and real children in real schools – and I don't want to say these schools are perfect, they're still not perfect; they're decent schools with great teachers working hard.

But the point is, I'm getting a lot of leverage around inclusion because we've got hard data that shows that children do better when they're in inclusive classrooms than they do when they're sent down the hall or when their day is really segregated and separated where they're in for an hour and then out for another hour and then back in and then back out, because what we find is students miss so much during those transition times in and out of the classroom. And so it only makes sense, right, that students that spend their days in the Common Core, learning along with their peers in really creative and interesting ways, are going to do better academically.

**Tim:** Did you have a strategy to deal with... I guess I'm not just talking about the early *Schools of Promise* but with the schools you've been working with recently. What strategies were you using with the teachers to deal with challenging behavior? Because that is probably the number one reason that supervisors and teachers will give me about why a student cannot be included in general education.

**Julie:** You're right – challenging behavior is one of the reasons that students are segregated. Probably the number one reason that students are not included in general education. What we do is, we spend a lot of time talking about why students behave the way they do. And when you create a community where students feel like they belong as real members of a general education classroom

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and you provide differentiated instructions, students usually behave much better than in schools where they're segregated and separated out. So that's a piece of it – right? Creating that community feel, so students feel like they belong. And then the other thing is we talk a lot about why students behave the way they do.

One of the things that we find is that, I often ask teachers, "What are the most challenging behaviors you see? What are the most dangerous, concerning, challenging behaviors you see in your school?" And they make this long list, like swearing, kicking, hitting, biting, running, threatening, threatening staff, threatening others, screaming... all this kind of stuff. And the funny thing is, I write this list on the board or on the computer – wherever I'm doing the presentation – and then I say to them, "Okay, look at this list. Has anybody in this room participated in any of these same behaviors yourself as an adult?"

And so sheepishly hands go up at things like swearing and biting and running and shutting down and crying and screaming and these are all on the list, right? And so everyone raises their hand in the room. And so I always make a joke like, "Look around. Your colleagues – yes your esteemed colleagues – have the most dangerous, concerning challenging behaviors we've seen in our school." And then I say to them, "Now honestly, when you have these challenging behaviors that you're admitting to me right now, what do you need?"

And then they say things like, "I need someone to listen to me, I need a hug, I need love, I need connection, I need empathy, I need space, I need time, I need a food, I need water..." They often jokingly say, "I need a glass of wine."

And so I tell them, "What you've just done? You've written the best behavior plan that's out there. Right? What you've explained..." Oh, and the other funny thing is, I say to them - after I take all of the things that they need after they have this challenging behavior - I take them all and I write them down. And then I say something like, "Well, how come nobody's said they just need a sticker checked?"

**Tim:** (Laughter)

**Julie:** I've done this same activity in hundreds of school districts around country, and nobody said, "I just need a sticker checked." And yet our number one response to behavior in school is a sticker checked. And so that's an interesting question and people have a lot of great answers to that.

Obviously one of the biggest answers is because you're not addressing the actual student need, right? You're just sort of masking it and dealing with it in an external fashion as opposed to kind of intrinsically responding to the student's need. And so instead, they list all those things that they need - time and space and care and love and comfort and all that kind of stuff – and I say, "You've just done it. You've just written the best behavior plan I've ever seen." Because

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essentially, human behavior is no different for children, and one of the things we have to really think about is what kids need in the moment, and how we can give them what they need in terms of support and kindness and love and connection compared to exclusion.

And so the typical responses are sticker charts, exclusion - meaning you've misbehaved, out you go – and we know that creates a cycle. And so one of the things I do is kind of get them to understand the behavior – the actual human response – and it means something. And if we don't deal with that we're not going to get to kids who behave well. That in conjunction with tons and tons of strategies and ideas about how to make learning fun and engaging and how to differentiate so students aren't working at their frustration level all the time, in concert with really effective community building, creates the recipe for classrooms where students don't have a lot of challenging behaviors.

**Tim:** Right, right. I know where you're coming from, and when I hear you talk about behavior and, I guess, unmet needs as kind of the core of where challenging behavior comes from, I get that. But how do you have professionals, educators, who don't have that prior knowledge of how behavior works... how do you get people to understand? Because it's a different way of thinking about behavior, it's a different way of looking at it, because so many educators will hear that and say, "You're coddling those children. You are creating little monsters."

**Julie:** Right. It is interesting, because it actually flies in the face of what we think to be true about behavior, right? So what we think to be true to end student behavior is a consequence. Apply a consequence because of the behavior and we'll reduce that negative behavior. And it absolutely kind of flies in the face of that way of looking at behavior.

I mean, you could look at it through the antecedent, but instead you really just look at it as what might the student need. And actually the number one strategy that I suggest for teachers is to ask the student, "What do you need right now?" and to name the behavior. "When I'm looking at you right now it looks like you might be really frustrated because you're banging your head, or because you're yelling, and I'm not sure – are you frustrated?"

We start there, you just figure out what's happening. "Are you angry?" You know, you just try to get a sense of that. And then you ask the students themselves what they need.

So your question, Tim, is how do I get teachers to sort of see this in a different way? I have the very good fortune of getting to spend tons of time educating teachers, so a lot of it happens in my professional development with them. Very often in professional development sessions – in fact, this week I did a big professional development class for the whole school district about behavior. And

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what I did is I started out with a behavior chart that had the red, yellow, green – have you ever seen one of those charts before?

**Tim:** Yeah.

**Julie:** So these teachers walk in to their PD (Professional Development) session and their names are big in the front of the room with – they all start on green – so green picture, kind of a stoplight system. If our listeners don't know what it is, a green light means you're doing fine, and a yellow is a warning, and a red means you're in trouble.

So as these teachers file in to the Professional Development session, they see their name, publically, up front, and they see that they're all on green. And so I explain to them that throughout this presentation I'm going to be needing to monitor their behavior because, to be honest, teachers are some of the worst audience members. I jokingly say that but there's some truth to that, right?

And so as I start right away, as soon as people are talking – side conversations or whatever – I'll go tell them to pull a card. That means move from green to yellow, and then again from yellow to red. What I tell them – it depends where I am – at the University where I'm teaching if they get to red they have to write a five-page paper that includes all the readings from the semester, and if I'm in a school district I tell them that if they get to red they're going to need to have a meeting with me and their administrators to discuss their behavior, right?

So we do this, and what's super fascinating is, I can get human beings to behave. And by behave I mean sit tall and be quiet and not fool around essentially. But after about 20 minutes of me doing this behavior system, and I'll usually call many people out on their behavior and there's a lot of laughter and nervous laughter and stuff, but, after about 20 minutes I say to them, "Okay, we're going to stop with the behavior charts." I ask the group a question: "Did it work? Did that behavior system work?"

And they'll say, "Well, I mean I was quiet."

"Okay, good. Were you able to learn better?"

"No, I was totally distracted by who was getting their name called and who was getting in trouble. I was so nervous I just kept my eyes down." Those kinds of things.

What often happens is really fascinating, Tim – people start to call each other out. So they'll start to say things like, "She's talking, too!" or whatever, and I start to create this sort of community of competition.

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That's one of the most powerful tools is to actually simulate what happens in K-12 schools across the country, which is behavior management through a public display of humiliation. And I'm very, very serious when I talk to teachers afterwards - because it's a very funny conversation because everybody admits how they felt - and I say, "Did it work? Did it work? I just want to know, does it work?"

And they say, "Well, it works to create silence and compliance, but it does not work to create community, does not work to create an environment for learning to occur."

And it's a really big a-ha moment for most educators - that we're kind of going about this in the wrong way. And so, a lot of the different things that I do in Professional Development, I would say, are very, very instrumental in getting people to rethink what specifically we've done for kids with disabilities and kids without disabilities in public schools related to behavior.

**Tim:** Do you think that Professional Development is really the only thing that needs to happen for us to move forward with inclusive schools? And let me just add one more thing, because there are a lot of barriers to inclusive schools. Not even at the top of the list is attitudes.

One of the biggest things is money, or funds, or how we restructure the delivery model of how we serve all of our kids. For instance, we have a school district who wants to become more inclusive. How do they go about doing that when there isn't any more money than what they have, because of the economy and because of the housing market, property taxes, and all that stuff. How does a school district go about moving in that direction - and can a school district really do that if they don't want to do it? Because it sounds like the schools that you've been working with have wanted this.

**Julie:** I'm sure that you remember I said 80 percent or more, right, voted "yes" to a very lovely presentation about inclusion. So I'm starting with schools that are saying, for the most part, "Yeah - we're in. Okay, we're in." That's all they're saying.

It's honestly the hardest work that I do, and I'm often working with schools that are somewhat on board. Because we know in every school district, in every school, there's a very vocal minority, and they alone - that group - can really tank any major school reform effort. So it's a ton of work with the administrators to both expect people to disagree with the concept of inclusion and to prepare for the fact that they're going to disagree and want to slow it down, and want to wait, want to try it next year but not this year. And so there are all these different ways that people respond to change in general but I think especially change around inclusion.

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So your question was, “Is PD the answer?” Well, it’s a great start in our current school system. But PD doesn’t come... the most successful school reform efforts – we don’t start with the PD, we actually start with the school reform work where we take all the existing educators on a map. We create these maps – and by map I mean we show where all the teachers are and where all the students are. Who’s being pulled for what? Who’s being segregated, etc. and usually I bring it right to the teachers themselves and say, “Okay. So this is your current special ed model.” And it’s on one PowerPoint slide. “What problems do you see in the model right now?”

So people come up with those and we talk about what’s working in the model and stuff like that. And then I give them the challenge. “If inclusive education was our goal, if it were to be our goal, what would need to happen in terms of moving children and teachers?”

So, Tim, you bring up the financial piece, which is really fascinating because we’ve proven, and by “we” I mean many, many people have studied the fact that inclusive education is no more expensive than segregation. If we educate everybody in segregated settings, in resource room settings, we still have lots of special ed teachers, we still have lots of paraprofessionals, and in many cases segregated education is more expensive.

So what we do in these schools systems is we draw the map, we talk about the pros and cons of what’s happening and then we actually, kind of in a pretty democratic system, we have people redesign the model with their given teachers. It’s not like we add five more teachers, or ten thousand more dollars – there’s no more money, there’s no more staff. But we say how would you rearrange things if all kids went back to their general education classrooms?

So what that does is it ends up freeing up all these teachers that used to be working in segregated classrooms and resource rooms down the hall. There are teachers working in all sorts of funny little ways to support kids with disabilities. But when we say “all hands on deck”, everybody’s in general ed, and now you can pair general and special education teachers together and people can teach inclusively, which is a very, very different way of doing it.

So Professional Development is step two; step one is redesigning service delivery models. I guess the larger question is, “How do we influence inclusive education?” That’s one piece of it, but that’s with our existing schools. The other piece happens at the pre-service level, which is a lot of the work that I do, in preparing soon-to-be general and special educators not to think about services as a place, but instead services are portable and should be brought to children.

And so, right now every semester we graduate – at Syracuse University – we graduate about, maybe 60 teachers who enter the workforce and really don’t see that general and special education are different entities, but really see special

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education as a portable service brought to children in the context of general ed. And so that's the other piece that I think is really helpful to think about, is the more we educate our pre-service teachers not in those traditional, old-fashioned ways of thinking where you walk down the hall to receive your special ed service, or if you have a certain kind of disability you're educated in, a substantially separate location. We just have generations of teachers who don't think that way.

**Tim:** Actually, I'm glad that you said that, because my experience in my teacher training was much more in that vein of thinking where general and special education was, that we were expected to collaborate. But when I entered into the public schools, the schools were so far different from that line of thinking that there was a big adjustment period for me because I got hired on as a self-contained teacher. And so I had to take the things that I learned and try to apply them in a context that wasn't friendly to it. Do you see what I mean? I'm happy that I had that training – I went to Cal State University, Fullerton, and had some wonderful professors and got me rethinking how that service delivery should look.

The other thing I wanted to talk about – what you said about changing and restructuring the service delivery – is, I think I remember from reading the *Schools of Promise* research, that about 15 percent of the students in the schools that you were serving had IEPs or identified disabilities. Is there, in that restructuring, do you have students go to their home schools, and is that also a way of restructuring the service delivery model?

For instance, in my school, we have about 20 percent, actually, of our students with identified needs with IEPs. Now our school, all of our students, we are not their home school. So how exactly did that work and is that something you address?

**Julie:** It definitely is. So, what we do, just like you're describing, very often is we begin to bus kids around based on the fact that they have disabilities. Which, that alone is fairly illegal, but that's a really common practice. And so in any school district that we're working with – absolutely. Returning kids to their home school is really the goal.

The problem for me comes in the actual... these families have been told that their children have to go on a bus and go somewhere else because of their disabilities. And so what I like to do with those families is to give them choice: either return to your home school or stay, because we've already made this mess for you. If you're more comfortable here, let's just finish your schooling out here. But what we don't do is continue that process. All the new kindergartners coming in, they no longer get shipped. They instead stay in their home district or their home school.

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So that's kind of how – because – on a very sort of student-by-student case you can understand that it's just not fair for kids who have finally gotten settled in a district, even if it's not their home district, to then make parents change again because of natural proportion. And so that's kind of how we've done it. And 20 percent – so the national average – I think we're at about 14 percent, which is what you'd expect in any one school, so you're a little higher in your district.

But what you do is, you also – so that's the first thing, is you think about who is here that shouldn't be and they're being bussed? And then you start to think about, well, do they want to return to their home school and if so we'll help them do that. But the other thing is, in any one classroom if 20 percent of your kids have labels, then in any one classroom you would never expect to have more than 20 percent of children with labeled disabilities.

And so that's the concept of natural proportions, which is really important in the redesign and the restructuring. Because so often, and you might have seen this before, people will say to me, "Julie, you've got to see our inclusive schools." So I'll go and I'll see it. And they'll say, "See those kids over there? Those are our inclusion kids." What?

If you have inclusion students you don't have inclusion. The truth is, we often see classrooms that are really, really densely populated with children with disabilities – so it might be 50 percent or 80 percent and they'll call it "an inclusion classroom." So it's really important to not only pay attention to the home school rules, that the children should attend the schools in which they would attend if they did not have a disability – that's a really important rule.

The other is, when you're doing this restructuring, look at your percentage – your actual percentage of kids who have disabilities and then follow that throughout your entire school. So no classroom would have any more than 20 percent of kids with disabilities.

**Tim:** That sounds great and I'm trying to ask questions, because I know that – like I said – I'm tracking with you and I agree with you. But I want to make sure that people who listen to this podcast, or when I have conversations with people and they bring up questions, how do we address the real challenges of getting there?

What if a school doesn't have that 80 percent buy-in, you know what I mean? I guarantee you there's plenty of schools out there that don't have that 80 percent. So I wanted to talk about legislation, about the law, and if what we have now under IDA is sufficient.

We talk about, in special ed, we always talk about least restrictive environment. Do we need something different or more to clarify and push forward inclusive

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schools, or is what we have sufficient as long as we fulfill it? Does that make sense?

**Julie:** Yeah, it makes perfect sense. I wanted to just back up really quickly with what you said that related to the fact that most schools wouldn't be 80 percent interested in becoming inclusive. You're 100 percent right – most schools are not that interested in becoming inclusive and those schools and *Promise Schools* were two examples of where we had a vote and all the other schools that we worked with – and I mean hundreds of other schools now – have not – they're just typical schools that people are not interested in becoming inclusive.

One of the things is to just ask yourself, from my position, whether you're an educator or administrator – whatever your position is – what do I have power and control over and how can I create a more inclusive school?

In some schools you've been invited in just because a group of educators had said, "Hey, we want to do this, and we need your help." And so we'll come and really work with them. Sometimes it's the ground level, it's the educators themselves saying, "Come help us do this."

Very often it's the administrators, and sometimes it's because of litigation, so often I'm invited in because of a district who has lost a due process hearing or a federal court case or a class action lawsuit and the remedy is training for inclusion. So there are lots of reasons that schools become inclusive, and the law is one very important reason, so it's a great question.

So the spirit of the law is very much on our side - our side meaning the side of inclusion. The spirit of the law is: *to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including kids in public or private schools, are educated with kids without disabilities*, right? And then the piece that really is useful to us is that: *removal happens only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplemental aids, supports or services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.*

So I know that's kind of wordy, but essentially it's this: you can only remove kids when you've exhausted all the supplemental aids, supports and services. And the beauty is, I happen to have a document that I think is like, 20 pages long, that's kind of every supplement aid, support and service out there. So whether it's extended time to pacing of instructions to using multiple intelligence theory to a scribe to... every adaptation, modification, accommodation that you can think of – it's on this list. And the beauty is, when you look at the law it suggests you can remove only when you've tried *all* those things first.

So one of my – kind of the most important idea is - I'm very often called to be an expert in due process hearings, always related to inclusion. And on the stand, when I'm working against educators who are saying, "We can't include this child."

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I have that list of supplemental aids, supports and services and I'm going through one after another after another in front of a judge, and saying, "Have you tried this? Well have you tried this? How about this? Have you tried it? Have you tried it?"

Inevitably, the district can't prove their burden, which is that they've attempted all of the supplemental aids, supports and services, therefore segregation is not really okay. I'm not saying this to toot my own horn, but I'm saying it to show you where we are in terms of spirit of the law. I've done nine cases since I've been here in Syracuse – court cases, I mean, Federal court cases – and we won all of them. And so the beauty is we're at this place in time where if you go to litigation it is likely you'll win based on the spirit of the law.

And so your question was, "What needs to change?" Well sure, would I love the language to change to be less wishy-washy because... "to the maximum extent appropriate?" Well, you see all that language – it's very difficult to prove, but when you really lay your case out in a due process hearing and show the district hasn't met their burden of proof, it's not hard to prove that children should be included. So that's doing a lot of the work that I really enjoy doing.

**Tim:** That's brilliant, by the way. I love the list of accommodations and modifications. I'll have to pass that on.

One thing that I've heard over and over is about students not being able to be included in general ed because it's not academically appropriate or that they are so far behind in either math or reading, or globally across grade-level content and, in fact, I don't want to name anybody specifically, but when parents want to have their students have one-on-one aids in general education, districts typically balk at that because they don't want to spend the money on that particular student to have the assistant to modify those activities or however they want to support that student because they feel that student is served appropriately, like IDA says, in another environment.

So what would you tell parents if they came to you and said, "I have a third grade student and he is not reading at a third-grade level, he's reading at a Kindergarten level. In fact, he's just working on number sense. But I want him to be included with his peers. And the district is telling me it's not academically appropriate for him to be in third grade because the curriculum needs to be modified so much that he has to be working on other stuff." How would you address that?

**Julie:** So nowhere in the law does it say that students need to be at grade-level or close to grade-level or no more than two grade levels below. There's nowhere that says that part. And I think it's really fascinating because it's very often used as a rationale to exclude because "your child can't keep up" or "your child is below grade-level academically."

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The whole point of special education is to provide portable services for children in the context of general education so that they can access general education content, age-level appropriate – age level, not chronologically appropriate – content and the whole goal of special education is accommodations, modifications and adaptations so that they can be successful at their level, right? So it is absolutely appropriate and okay to make modifications.

When I taught special education I taught elementary, middle, and high school special education and what's really important to hear is that I had 12<sup>th</sup> graders who were reading at a Kindergarten level, barely decoding, and I was still including them in high school English courses. And so the question is, "How would that happen?" Well, we pretty much at some point decide that decoding might not be in the student's near future for them, so we can no longer limit learning just to what they can decode, and instead we have to modify around the decoding problem and we have to be able to give them the information.

So it's as simple as, students will listen to the story, right, and still be expected to respond to some of the comprehension questions, be participating in the dialogue, create their PowerPoint presentation about the book... there's still a million things that they can do to participate. But when we limit learning to decoding skills we basically hold thousands and thousands of children back from learning what they're capable of learning. And so you just simply have to modify around those things. And there's nowhere in the law that says that kids have to be at a certain level in order to participate. Modifications and adaptations are the law, part of what you have to do.

**Tim:** Yeah, it is interesting, because I've never actually heard anyone say that, use IDA as saying, "Yeah, we're excluding a student because... and that is backed up by the law." It's mostly because, "This is what we do as a district. This is how we've decided to handle this." And so, thank you for addressing that. Because I think that's important for parents and for educators to know because when you are advocating for a student and you get those questions, you can say with full certainty, "There's nothing in the law that says this student cannot be included."

What becomes difficult, I think, is how the district or the local school decides to do that. How they practically do that and whether that is through the general ed classroom teacher modifying those things or it's a paraprofessional modifying those things or, in my case, I usually work with the general ed teacher and my paraprofessional and we work together to modify those things for my students who go into general ed.

So it really comes back to that collaboration piece, kind of changing how people think about inclusion, how to deal with behavior and so forth, because most of the time it seems that administrators just can't wrap their head around how that's

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gonna look. They want to protect their teachers, so when you come to them, or when parents or advocates come to the meetings and they say, “We want this,” they just don’t know what that looks like so they shut them down.

Is there any, in your opinion, is there any research that you kind of think is the “silver bullet” as far as moving inclusive education forward? It seems to me that the research that you’ve done with *Schools of Promise* and going forward really sets the bar because, like you said – you go to administration, you go to the superintendents and you say, “Look. This actually increases student learning across the board.” Then you’ve piqued their interest. Is there something else, or is there another kind of research that you’ve found to be effective?

**Julie:** Sure, yeah. I have this really long list of research studies that I make my graduate students and undergraduate students read that I find to be really, really useful. But I think in the practical – I have a list of the “best of the best” in my opinion – minds and hearts aren’t changed because of research.

Because if people are not interested in creating inclusive schools I could give them a stack of 300 peer-reviewed research articles about why inclusion is better and it’s not gonna change their minds. It’s just not. I mean I am a researcher, and I do that work, and I find it to be really important and useful in making part of my claims and to kind of move inclusion forward, but I think ultimately it’s the work of hearts and minds.

I run a summer leadership institute at Syracuse with my colleague George Theoharis and we run this leadership institute and it’s for 200 or so superintendents and principals and special ed directors and they come from all over the country. We spend five days with them, and all our work is how to create and maintain inclusive schools.

The research part is just a tiny piece that we go over and talk about and they can learn more about if they’re interested but I can tell you this: there’s never been a school administrator that said, “I could see about five more studies to show me that it really works.”

It’s actually – I make this joke a lot: I have all these flags, and on the flags in small print, it’s just study after study after study after study that shows that inclusion is better for kids with disabilities socially. It’s better for kids with disabilities academically. It’s better for kids without disabilities socially. It’s better for kids without disabilities academically. It’s better for the school community. It doesn’t matter – just tons and tons of studies, right? And then I ask the question in the audience, “Has anyone ever seen ‘The Biggest Loser’?” And people will raise their hand – that show on TV, yeah, people have seen that.

I say, “Well, here’s the deal. I’ve seen every episode of ‘The Biggest Loser’ and I’m not really an exercise physiologist, I don’t study exercise science, but I think

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there's some research out there that suggests something like the fewer calories you eat and the more calories you burn, the more likely you are to lose weight." I jokingly say this. "Has anyone ever heard of that research? Has anyone heard of it before?"

And of course everyone laughs and their hands go up. And I say, "Okay, well, in education there is nothing more clear when it comes to research, like, there are lots of strands of research in education but one of the most clear pieces of research is that when kids are in general education, they do better. It's crystal clear in the research. And, I know how to lose weight. I know how, because I've watched the show 'The Biggest Loser', I've read lots of articles, I've read research in magazines and things like that, and I think the research is really clear there, too.

But the question is, when am I gonna get on the treadmill? And I think that it's the same in education – when are we gonna get off the couch? We know this is better for kids, and the research isn't gonna do that for us.

So, what does do it for us? I think it's a combination of inspiration, the law, and then lots and lots of practical and useful ideas. People know WHAT to do. So I can say, "Include a kid with Autism." Okay, great. I can tell you to do that. I can tell you the law says you should do that. But when you're the teacher, and you're looking at this kid who has interesting behaviors, who isn't verbal, and we're using the book, *Where the Red Fern Grows*, and I have to figure out how Adam is going to be engaged in this class with this model. Unless I've given lots of ideas and strategies to a team of people, they don't know what to do. Not because they don't have good intentions but because they just don't know what to do.

I worked with a team that I had been working with from one of the *Schools of Promise* schools recently and it was great because that exact problem came up. Adam, a kid with Autism – they were trying to figure out what to do with Adam during *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

The first thought was, he's probably going to need a break so what if we just did that? And someone said, "That doesn't really fit with our commitment to inclusion."

So right away it was a problem to solve. And this team who is really, really full of ideas now, after working with our team for a long time, they said, "Okay. He's gonna need a fidget. So let's give everybody a fidget. Let's put fidget bags on every table. Let's have the fidgets relate to the story. You know, he's gonna need to stand. What if we put graffiti paper on the wall? Not just for Adam, though, let's put it up everywhere."

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In, like, three minutes, they solved this problem of what to do with Adam during *Where the Red Fern Grows* and I happened to watch this actual lesson, and it was beautiful. The paraprofessional starts the lesson and says, “So there’s graffiti paper on the wall, so anybody who wants to write or draw or outline while you’re listening to the story, feel free. There’s markers out there.” And then she explains that.

And then as they were reading the teacher says - after they finished chapter four or something – she says, “Okay, everybody – go grab your fidget bags. Pull out something. How does it relate to the story at the moment?”

And I listened to two other kids, not Adam, but two other kids without disabilities and they pull out these little trees and they go, “This reminds me of the giant sequoia trees that the two dogs in the story were under, and blah blah blah blah...” and kids realized that by changing the lesson a little bit for Adam, the lesson became so much better for everybody else.

And so it’s a skill, it’s just a lot of the ideas. When they have those ideas, it’s amazing because then their story becomes their own inspiration as opposed to kind of listening to it from the outside.

**Tim:** That’s... awesome. I love that. It’s universal design at work, right? We’re running up to about an hour here, and it’s been a pleasure to talk with you. I want to make sure you have an opportunity to talk about your website, or if you are on any other social media or... what’s the best way for people to contact you if they would like to work with you?

**Julie:** So my website is [Inspire Inclusion](#) and that’s for parents of kids with disabilities who want their children included. So that’s a great place to turn. I have a Facebook page called [Inspire Inclusion](#), that’s a great place to go – I just put up lots of inspirational stuff there, and actually, Tim, I find your work to be really useful because sometimes I share things that you’ve said – so thank you for that.

And then I’ve written some books that I think are probably useful to this conversation: *The Paraprofessional’s Handbook for Effective Support in Inclusive Classrooms*. It’s available through [Amazon](#), and that’s for paraprofessionals out there who might be interested in learning how to better support students.

I just wrote a book called *The Principal’s Handbook for Effective Support in Inclusive Education*. And so this is a great book – parents often give it to their principals and it’s really useful in terms of how do I create and maintain inclusive schools? A lot of your questions today, Tim, related to the structure of schooling and the ins and outs of kind of how to make it work – it’s all in there.

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I've just written *The Occupational Therapist's Guide* and *The Speech and Language Pathologist's Guide to Inclusive Education*. So it's really how we do all those related services inclusively. And this year I'm writing *The General Ed Teacher's* and *The Special Ed Teacher's Guide to Inclusive Education*.

So those books will be really great reads for teams to read across – so every member of the team can have their own copy – it's really about their own role. So I'm really excited about that. So that's something that might be useful.

Another free thing that I have is called – it's an app called *I Advocate* and that's for parents of kids with disabilities who might be wanting to know what to say when their district tells them that their child can't be included. So what I've done is put all the reasons that districts are likely to say that their child can't be included and then how to respond and court cases that relate to that. So I kind of give parents a really, really nice tool and we've created that at Syracuse University.

And then my email is [julie@inspireinclusion.com](mailto:julie@inspireinclusion.com) and I take lots of requests for speaking engagements and those kind of things or also work on due process hearings through that particular email address.

**Tim:** Wonderful. Thank you so much for telling us about all those resources. I had no idea about the books that you had written, so that's gonna be on my list of things. Some really great stuff. Thank you so much for joining us and all the best in your future endeavors.

**Julie:** Thank you so much, Tim, and keep in touch.

**Tim:** Absolutely.

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*That concludes this edition of the Think Inclusive Podcast. For more information about Dr. Julie N. Causton, you can follow her on Facebook: [Inspire Inclusion](#), or on her website: [www.inspireinclusion.com](http://www.inspireinclusion.com). You can find the link to download the checklist of samples, supplemental supports, aids and services on the show notes page of the Think Inclusive Podcast. Remember, you can always find us on Twitter: [@Think Inclusive](#) or on the web at [thinkinclusive.us](http://thinkinclusive.us).*

*Today's show was produced by myself talking into USB headphones using a newly refurbished Macbook Pro, Garage Band, and a Skype account. Bumper music by Jose Galvez with the song "Press". You can find it on iTunes.*

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*planet. From Marietta, Georgia, please join us again on the Think Inclusive Podcast. Thanks for your time and attention.*