



## The Least Dangerous Assumption is to Presume All Students' Competence!



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Heart of Illinois Down Syndrome Association  
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## Possibilities for People with Down syndrome - 1970



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## Old Assumptions

- Intelligence is something that can be reliably measured; therefore, significantly sub-average intelligence can also be reliably measured.
- Students who are judged to have significantly sub-average intelligence can't learn much of the general education curriculum, and even if they could, why would they need to?

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## Old Assumptions

- Students who can't learn much of the general education curriculum won't benefit from being in general education classes and should be taught functional life skills.
- We can assess what students currently know and what they might be able to learn based on their ability to communicate in *typical* ways. We can assume that students with difficulty communicating will be unable to learn or demonstrate what they know.

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## 40 Years of Research and Experience

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## Negative Effects of Segregation

- Creating school cultures of "us" and "them"
- Poorer quality instruction in academic skills
- Poorer quality IEPs
- Lack of generalization of learning to regular environments
- Disruption of opportunities for social relationships
- Inefficient use of resources based on labels or other eligibility criteria creating "silos" of resources that don't coordinate

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## Negative Effects of Segregation

- Decrease in confidence that general education class teachers have for teaching diverse learners
- Puts a “condition” on belonging...i.e., you need to perform in a certain way in order to be part of the mainstream of school life

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## Benefits of Inclusion

- Higher expectations
- Better performance on reading and math tests
- Fewer days missed from school
- Fewer problem behavior referrals
- Value-added benefits to the general education classroom
- Students who receive their educational program with same age peers without disabilities have greater access to the general curriculum
- Opportunity to develop social relationships
- Promotes the value of diverse community for all students
- Best preparation for adult life

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## Research Citations

The National Center on Inclusive Education at <http://iod.unh.edu/PriorityAreas/inclusive-education/ncie-resources/research-publications.aspx> - “Outcomes and Insights from Researchers on Inclusive Education: For Families and Teachers” and “Rationale For and Research on Inclusive Education: For Professionals and Researchers”

TASH at <http://tash.org/advocacy-issues/inclusive-education/> - “Frequently Asked Questions About Inclusive Education” and “Dispelling the Myths of Inclusive Education”

SWIFT SCHOOLS – funded by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs - <http://www.swiftschools.org/>

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"There is even a growing body of scientific evidence suggesting that integrated service models for students with disabilities (all disabilities) enhance educational outcomes for *all* students."

Wayne Sailor, Ph.D. University of Kansas. Congressional Briefing on Inclusive Education. July 9, 2009.

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## New Assumptions

- Intelligence is not a single measureable characteristic.
- All students have different talents and skills.

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## New Assumptions

- Students learn best when they feel valued, when people hold high expectations for them, and when they are taught and supported well, and when they are included in general education classrooms.
- When students can't currently communicate that they are intelligent, presume that they *are* and develop their educational programs based on that assumption.

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## Possibilities for People with Down syndrome - 2012



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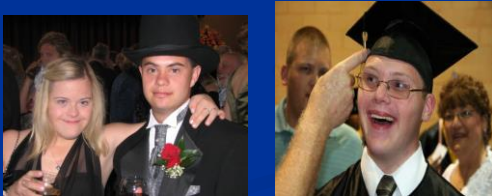
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**Presuming competence may be the single most important belief that supports learning, an inclusive education, and an enviable adult life in the community.**



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## Presuming Competence to Do What?



To learn grade-level academic knowledge and skills

To communicate in ways that are commensurate with same age peers without disabilities

To make and sustain reciprocal relationships

To fully participate in age-appropriate social activities.

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## #1 Why Presume Competence

"Simply put, when teachers expect students to do well and show intellectual growth, they do; when teachers do not have such expectations, performance and growth are not so encouraged and may in fact be discouraged in a variety of ways."



James Rhem on the "Pygmalion effect."

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## #2 Why Presume Competence

Traditional assessments of people with disabilities are seriously flawed. Those that purport to measure students' intelligence and adaptive behavior usually measure what they **can't** do, rather than what they **might** be able to do with the right supports.



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## #3 Why Presume Competence

Research shows that a growing number of children labeled "retarded" show they are competent when they have a means to communicate.

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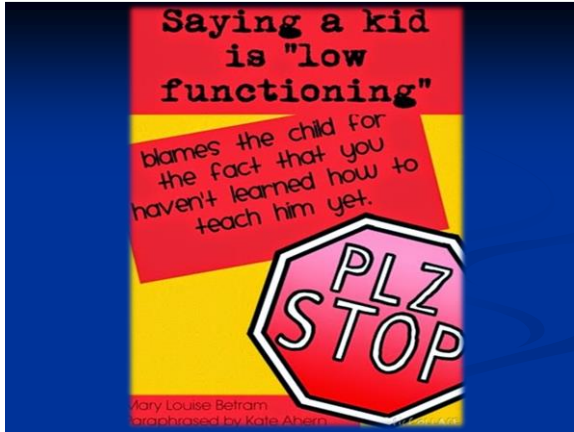
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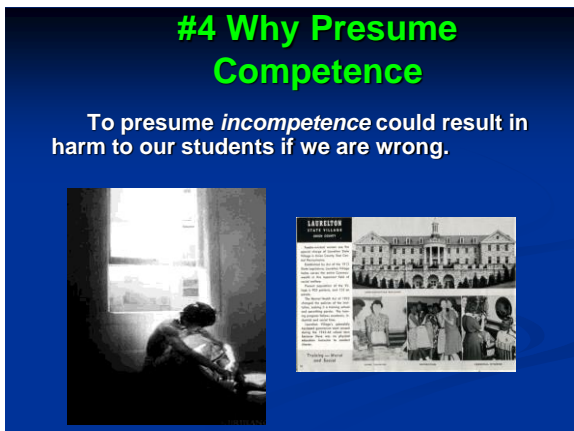
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## #5 Why Presume Competence

Even if we are wrong about students' capacities to learn general education curriculum content, the consequences to students of *that* incorrect presumption are not as dangerous as the alternative.



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## What Research Says About the Best Way for Children with Down syndrome to Achieve Possibilities

Students' academic achievement, communication skills, social relationships, and post-school outcomes (i.e., living in the community, being maximally independent, being financially secure, the number and quality of their social relationships) are **positively correlated** to the amount of time that they spend in a **general education classroom**.

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## What Does Presuming Competence Look Like Every Day in the Classroom?

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## Full Participation in General Education Instruction in the General Education Classroom



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## Definition of Inclusive Education

Transformation of school communities based on social justice principles in which all students (a) are presumed competent, (b) are welcomed as valued members of all general education classes and extra-curricular activities in their local schools, (c) fully participate and learn alongside their same age peers in general education instruction based on the general education curriculum, and (d) experience reciprocal social relationships.

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## “But What About Shakespeare?”

“Erin attended the State Thespian Conference with the Drama Club this past weekend...On Saturday night, we saw one of the best musicals presentations I have ever seen...of Les Miserable...Suddenly at intermission, she said that this was about what she had learned in history and made that connection...This reinforces for me again the need for all students to be able to access the general education curriculum.”

Barbara McKenzie. Reflection of Erin. 2008. [bmckenzie@columbus.rr.com](mailto:bmckenzie@columbus.rr.com)

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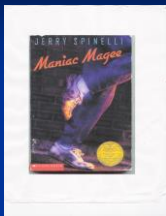
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Jeffrey Magee lived with his Aunt  
Dad and Uncle Dan. He was unhappy,  
so he ran away when he was eight  
years old.

Amanda asked Jeffrey where he lives.  
She knew he couldn't live near her.  
Amanda lived in an old black  
neighborhood, and Jeffrey was white.  
Jeffrey asked to see what was in  
the suitcase. It was full of books! He  
asked Amanda if he could borrow one.  
He promised to give it back.

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## Being Valued For Who You Are




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## Daring to be Different



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## Belonging in Family, School, Community



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## How to “Stay the Course”

- Believe that your child/student has extraordinary gifts to give
- See inclusive education first as a social justice issue
- Connect with other families/educators
- Establish and nourish partnerships
- Know the law and the research
- Celebrate success
- Take care of yourself

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## Keep Your Eyes on the Prize



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## How-To Resources

Jorgensen, C. *Inclusion is More Than Just Being "In: A Step by Step Approach for Students with Autism, Down syndrome, and Other Complex Support Needs.* Coming in January 2017 from Brookes Publishing.

*Meaningful Inclusion.* Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress.  
<http://www.mdsc.org/infojustforyou/EdManual.cfm>

Julie's Causton's Inclusive Education Series.  
<http://www.brookespublishing.com>

Paula Kluth's books and website – <http://www.paulakluth.com>

Buswell & Schaffner. *Connecting Students.* Published by the PEAK Parent Center <http://www.peakparent.org>

Thousand & Villa. 2005. *Creating An Inclusive School.* Published by <http://www.ascd.org>

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## "Don't Limit Me!"

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOWDfnoek6E>

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