THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM MODEL IS NOT EFFICIENT OR EFFECTIVE:
AN EVALUATION OF ESSENTIAL ASSESSMENTS/AUDITS
AND ESSENTIAL DELIVERABLES

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Abstract

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142) mandates free public education to all students with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 further augmented legislation so students with disabilities would be placed in a “least restrictive environment” for learning. Social engineers have used these legislative acts to drive a movement toward inclusive classrooms without regard for rationale. The Essential Deliverable of education is not a curriculum for which all students are contained in singular classrooms, but rather the basic purpose and appropriate goal of public education needs to remain in the business of optimal academic success for all students. Exerting the efforts of general and special education teachers—thus usurping the valuable and expensive resource of human capital—to develop sets of instructional methods suitable for a myriad of student needs, in and of itself, will only result in dissonance between the essential assessments/audits and the essential deliverable of optimal success for all students. This paper uses systems thinking to examine the relationship between these essential assessment/audit and essential deliverable elements. The paper also includes an analysis of these elements using the CX Tool.

Author Biography

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An Argument Against Inclusion

Inclusion and co-teaching have become staples as contemporary professional development topics for educators. However, opposing opinions and philosophies relative to the various needs of learners are headily debated, as is the basic purpose and appropriate goals of public education. Advocates of the inclusive classroom take the position that homogenous grouping impedes equal education for all. Agne (1999) asserts, “Heterogeneous grouping has occurred for reasons having nothing to do with the fundamental purpose of schooling. These changes have occurred because of the insidious clamor of social-political directors” (para. 17). While education has become a forum to address social issues, its main goal needs to remain in the business of optimal academic success for all students.

Inclusion reformers maintain they are compelled by evidence of research, but studies actually show that low-achieving students in mixed-ability classrooms become self-conscious when working alongside classmates with higher ability. Rather than becoming encouraged about learning, students with lower ability become withdrawn and rely on the more proficient students to be participatory and provide the answers. Loveless (1999) states, “The mixed-ability classrooms that result from de-tracking may force low achievers into daily comparisons with their more able peers, conditions hostile to the development of self-confidence” (para. 16).

Mixed-ability classrooms are also more difficult for teachers to manage. Students that have lower ability than their classroom peers have a tendency to be less self-directed, less focused, less engaged, and thereby are more likely to cause
interruptions. Students with these limited capacities require consistent stimulation and motivation, demanding more of the teacher's time and effort. These particular students need smaller teaching steps and more remediation—an entirely different method of teaching. In comparison, higher functioning students can become bored and also begin to exhibit behavioral issues. Teachers can utilize techniques for differentiated instruction, and adjust the scope and sequence of concepts to accommodate the needs of different students, but not simultaneously. The most efficient way to teach and learn is to group students by ability. This allows students to learn at an optimal intensity and pace. “Ability grouping not only provides increased motivation and excitement about learning for each student; it also affords teachers the opportunity to function at their best and the ability to cover concepts thoroughly, by approaching them one level at a time” (Agne, 1999, para. 9).

With grouping, it is more likely for the majority of students to benefit from a single presentation which is specifically designed at an appropriate level. Matching the presentation to ability level could result with student questions that are more suitable to the general membership of the group—thereby reducing the time spent to clarify several degrees of misunderstanding, while freeing up time to spend with students individually as needed. The more time a teacher spends with students who are at a similar ability level, the more skillful, efficient, and effective the teacher will become.

On the flip side though, teachers who face a classroom consisting of students with a wide range of ability levels are in jeopardy of teaching to lower skill sets than they might otherwise. In addition the teacher is placed in a position to find time and effective methods for remediation of students who may only gain a partial comprehension of the
concepts. Inherent with this is the task of identifying what is missing and the degree of remediation for individual students. For students who’ve acquired the concepts, the teacher has to expand upon what was taught and introduce new, relevant concepts. Even for a most experienced teacher, effectiveness and efficiency will be lost.

Loveless (1999) surmised “one way to narrow the gap between high and low achievers is to boost low-ability students' learning while either holding steady or lowering everyone else's” (para. 8) and noted research indicates “high- and average-track students of all racial and economic backgrounds lose out under heterogeneous grouping” (para. 9). Agne (1999) wrote “Mixed-ability groupings essentially deny the existence of student differences altogether. Low achievers fail to get help sufficient to learn effectively, while average and high achievers remain underchallenged and bored” (para. 42).

Research strongly suggests homogeneous grouping is actually necessary for gifted students. Gifted students are not adequately challenged in mixed-ability classrooms; thus these individuals, with their own intrinsic needs, might never even be discovered. Highly proficient learners tend to become unpopular in regular classrooms, not only rejected by classmates resentful of their ability, but occasionally by teachers resentful or intimidated when they’re put on the spot for being wrong. With behavioral characteristics specific to gifted individuals, such as asynchronous development, over excitabilities, and idealism, these students are highly at risk of receiving referrals for behavior, and more problematic, of being misdiagnosed with pathological behaviors such as Asperger’s Syndrome, ADHD, anger diagnoses, ideational and anxiety disorders, and mood disorders (Amend, Beljan, Goeross, Olenchak, Webb, Webb, 2005).
Undoubtedly, gifted children are subjected to deep emotional harm by being placed in environments where they are not learning at their ability with like-ability peers. Kulik (1993) concluded “the damage would be greatest… if schools, in the name of de-tracking, eliminated enriched and accelerated classes for their brightest learners… American education would be harmed by the wholesale elimination of programs that group learners for instructional ability” (p.9).

It should also be noted that students of other countries with higher achievement ratings than the U.S. are most often tracked. The Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) reported that American eighth- and twelfth-graders placed last among the sixteen countries tested, even when considering only students who took advanced courses in physics or math. “That is, even our brightest could not compete with students of other top nations of the world” (Agne, 1999, para. 6). When comparing schools of Germany and Japan with those of the United States, TIMSS follow-up case studies and video observations revealed teachers in the United States had more demanding obligations with less time for preparation, as well as reduced prestige and compensation (Stevenson, 1998).

According to Agne (1999) inclusion may nominally benefit only low-achieving students, as potential losses in achievement for average and above-average students become much more austere. She contends:

“Parents and teachers have watched with dismay as, one by one, public schools hop on board the inclusion-detracking train, seemingly in full compliance with the dictates of radical egalitarians who, using public schools to drive their political agendas, are bent on what they believe will save us all. The growing fear among
parents and teachers is that the lifeless body of an already ailing public school system will be found in the wake of these agendas” (para. 60).

Homogeneous grouping is not necessary for all subject areas. Subjects such as art, music, physical education, and vocational classes are good candidates for inclusion. Mandating inclusion for all content, particularly core academic areas, reduces student potential and requires impractical and unattainable expectations on teachers. Valid research indicates highest achievement for core academic subjects is best accomplished by keeping students with similar learning needs grouped together. The social ideals perceived with heterogeneous grouping may seem appealing, but in reality it stifles achievement among average and above-average students, and suppresses student achievement for basic skills at all levels (Brewer, 1995).
References


| **Relevance:** | The rational and logical approach of best practices in global education needs to replace emotional arrogance that prevails in American education. The reality is not that students need to get used to heterogeneous groups. The reality is that U.S. education consistently ranks lowest in comparison with other countries. If the United States does not reprioritize its approach to education (e.g. inclusion), our population will not be prepared to compete in the global economy presented by formerly third world countries. |
| **Efficiency:** | Congruence is not created between the Essential Assessments/Audits (EAAs) and the ED simply by examining populations that are not making progress on specific standards—the causes can be broad, requiring an impractical number of adjustments in order to meet all instructional needs. The time used by teachers to meet this requirement could be better used in other capacities: narrowing what needs to be adjusted for instruction to specific needs of tracked students will result in better use of human capital. |
| **Effectiveness:** | It is prudent to break prevailing mental models that exist only in the United States and explore/utilize best practices identified on a global scale. Every student does have the right to a free, public education; this is not congruent with mandating inclusive classrooms. |

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| **Relevance:** | Low achieving students do need to be exposed and understand as much of the curriculum as possible, but this may require more time and different emphasis than more proficient students. The increase of student achievement for all stakeholders means instruction in any given classroom needs to be relevant to its targeted audience, not that of a broad spectrum of learning abilities. The American educational system is very different philosophically and in practice from foreign countries, and it should not be assumed that it is the best. Tracking is practiced by most educationally successful countries, and needs to be seriously considered despite prevailing attitudes in the U.S. |
| **Efficiency:** | Students are not all motivated the same way, no matter their ability level. Average to above average learners would make progress, but at the cost of more teachers to allow for ability grouping. It should be noted that homogeneous grouping is not necessary for all subject areas. Subjects such as art, music, physical education, and vocational classes are examples of good candidates for inclusion. |
| **Effectiveness:** | To believe emergence of all students into the same classrooms for instruction as the only way to increase achievement is a narrow and inefficient vision for education. The supports required to implement inclusion so all students can be successful can waste limited resources available to schools (time, money, and human capital). Although examples of viable co-taught classrooms are identified by proponents of inclusion, the costs associated with these models is not likely to be the most efficient. Valid research clearly indicates to attain the highest achievement in core academic subject areas, students need to learn with others who have similar learning needs to their own. |
Summary:

The Essential Deliverable is not a curriculum for which all students are responsible contained in singular classrooms, rather the basic purpose and appropriate goals of public education; the main goal of education needs to remain in the business of optimal academic success for all students. Exerting the efforts of general and special education teachers—thus usurping the valuable and expensive resource of human capital—to develop sets of instructional methods suitable for a myriad of student needs, in and of itself, will only result in dissonance between the essential assessments/audits and the essential deliverable of optimal success for all students.