



The Think Inclusive Podcast

Season 6, Episode 13

Renay Marquez | ParaEducate

Tim Villegas (00:00):

Have you ever thought about starting your own podcast? When I was trying to get the think inclusive podcast off the ground, I didn't know where to start. I had so many questions. How do I record an episode? Where do I find background music? How do I get my show on apple podcast, spotify, and all the other places? People like to listen? Where do I even find advertisers? The answer to every one of these questions is really simple. Anchor anchor is a one stop shop for recording, hosting, distributing, and monetizing your podcast. And Best of all, it's 100 percent free and 100 percent ridiculously easy to use. So if you ever wanted to start a podcast, go to anchor dot FM slash. Start to join me in the diverse community of podcasters already using anchor. That's anchor dot FM slash start. I can't wait to hear your podcast

Tim Villegas (01:26):

recording from Beautiful Marietta, Georgia. You were listening to the think inclusive podcast episode at 28. I am your host, Tim Vegas. Today we have a fantastic conversation with Rene Marquez. Uh, but first let's do some announcements to ways you can support. The podcast is on an anchor. We've talked about this before, but any monthly contribution helps pay for the production and in transcription costs for the podcast, the transcripts that we have that are available right now or on the website. So think inclusive.us on the podcast tab to check those out. Also, um, we are providing inclusion coaching and educational consulting via our services tab on the website. So if you want more information about that, go ahead and go on to think inclusive.us. Subscribe to our think inclusive weekly email and we'll be providing a discount code for those services. Today on the podcast, we have para educator slash blogger, extraordinary renamed Marquez. We talk about the story of her starting paraeducators, educate and resources to help pair educators modify curriculum and inclusive classrooms. We also talk about what steps educators can take to help move inclusion forward wherever they are. Also, if you liked the podcast, help other people find us by giving us a five star review on apple podcasts or wherever you listen to the inconclusive podcasts. Until your closest friends, we love word of mouth promotion, so without further ado, here's the interview.

Tim Villegas (03:16):

Hi Tim. Hey Renee. Right. You want to try it again?

Renay Marquez (03:25):

Hi, you're on the conclusive podcast and this is her named mark has with paraeducators.

Tim Villegas (03:33):

Fantastic. Hey everybody, this is Tim Vegas, your host of the inclusive podcasts. Uh, I would like to, welcome. Finally, after all the technical difficulties, Renee Marquez, cofounder of paraeducators. Uh, he is a graduate of the University of Southern California School of architecture. She has worked as a para educator since 2003 with the same district in California. Previous to being a para educator, renee has worked for several government agencies and education groups. Renee currently spends her work days modifying curriculum, collecting data, and investigating technology for students. Thank you so much for being on the podcast. Renee. Thank you for having me, Tim. Fantastic. Okay. So we're just talking before we officially started recording. We have never had a conversation other than on online, so this is fantastic.

Renay Marquez (04:40):

Yeah, no, everything's always been about, uh, when we're. When you, and I've previously been together, everything's been about like trench support teachers or getting curriculum out or try to figure out how to branch into that administrative level to make them understand what inclusion is. But, uh, uh, you and I, when we first started it actually when paired, you guys started at the same time, almost the same time as thinking inclusive. We, uh, we were about the boots on the ground.

Tim Villegas (05:09):

Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. So I think it's been great to, to see how peer educate his grown and now we're still doing what we're doing. Yeah. So, um, that's fantastic. So, um, you know, many of our listeners and readers have probably are familiar with your name, at least renee or paraeducator, um, but I'm not sure if many of the know what, uh, what you do or what Perry educate debts because I know that you do have some resources and books that are available and also you do training. So why don't you just fill us in on what education is and um, and we can go from there.

Renay Marquez (05:56):

So 2011, uh, one of my coworkers left to spend quality time with her. Then one year old son and we, my, my department went into basically a tailspin because we couldn't replicate Meghan. Meghan is amazing. Um, and then there was this conversation about, well, what happens when renee goes, we definitely can't clone her day. Um, and at the time had only been at paraeducator for eight years and it's not something I thought it was going to go in and do for like a career or build off of this. It's not something people think about really. It's like gap filler job. Um, so we started writing this book called Para educate to hope give paraeducators the same footing is that everybody else did, uh, it give them some basic background knowledge that a lot of districts just don't have the time to give to their educators. Um, there are a lot of districts that don't call paraeducators para educators. Some of them are instructional assistants, some are paraprofessionals. And just trying to get that, that base level to everybody to help provide inclusive environments for students with disabilities, uh, out is that we realized that we had been creating for the better part of almost 10 years at that point curriculum at other supports for students with disabilities and educate. We were able to offer that to a variety of people.

Renay Marquez (07:35):

And so now we have a, we still have our book paraeducator on Amazon, both a digitally and available in paperback and we have variety of books that are primarily for a curriculum modification or a curriculum adaptations to be used as is in classrooms.

Tim Villegas (07:56):

So the, the book that you originally wrote, and I, I think I remember when the book first came out, um, something that, that we said about it was that assumed an inclusive environment, um, whereas, you know, as, as you know, it still isn't, um, inclusive environments in public school. Just that they're just not that common. Um, especially for students with more complex needs or significant intellectual disability. Um, so are, are you seeing where, you know from your vantage point that it's gotten better maybe in California or you know, with the people that you work with or, um, is it, is it pretty much the same?

Renay Marquez (08:49):

Again, it's a state by state a phenomena unfortunately, and it then it becomes a district by district phenomena. Um, it's getting better, but unfortunately what I see a lot on social media is, are all these mentions of places that I will not say directly all relating to particular states that have these horrendous outcomes because they haven't had inclusive environments or there is such a segregated population for whatever reason. Some of them can be, honestly, it inherently they started out as good, good ideas. Um, we just because the segregated population things have turned out badly or even an inclusive environment, uh, things have turned out badly. And um, it, it does sometimes take a little bit of a, a bad publicity to get the right things going. Unfortunately. Sometimes.

Tim Villegas (09:53):

Yeah, I hear that. Um, and, and, uh, it always, it bothers me a little bit when I hear educators say that inclusion doesn't work because of the barriers. So because while the teachers didn't want to teach the students or the district wasn't ready to do something like that and it was implemented badly. So what, when I hear that, I hear, well, you know, you never actually had inclusion. You had, you had something that maybe they were trying to get at, but because it implementation, uh, it failed, you know, and I think, you know, I think teachers are, uh, in, in district administration, um, uh, they're worried that if they do something like that, then there will be that, there will be that, those negative consequences.

Renay Marquez (10:59):

Well, those very small things like, um, I'll come across a teacher who will have, who will have successfully included many students. But because of the nature of inclusion, I'm like, when tests come up is the students get misplaced during the testing process for the classroom test. Because I didn't, I have 12 kids with IEP is, I don't know where that student's test is because it could be in the resource room, it could be in the library, it could be in their backpack. And I'm trying to serve as, as a classroom teacher, 12 different students and their 12 different needs. Now I feel this is failing and that's not a true failure necessarily. It's hurdle. Right,

Tim Villegas (11:50):

exactly. Yeah. And you know, it, the inclusion in the broadest sense, um, or even if you, if you take it down to, you know, you want to have, um, students spending 80 percent of their day outside of, you know, a segregated or self contained environment, nothing's gonna work perfectly. So, um, um, I think that the assumption though that certain students should get or that don't belong because of a particular disability label, I think that's really the biggest thing that I know that we're trying to say no. Like that's just because a student has down syndrome or autism or, you know, whatever doesn't mean that they need to be in a particular place. I'm like, that's not, that's not the reason. Uh, so if we're looking at special places, um, let's have, let's have a different conversation. The other thing that people or the I find people think when I say or we say inclusion or inclusive education is that all students are educated with all, all, all students with disabilities are educated in general education classrooms 100 percent of

the time. And so I think that that's a misunderstanding. I'm not sure, you know, we've never had this conversation before, so I'm not sure how nuanced your take is on, on this.

Renay Marquez (13:34):

So it might be because my, my, my regular day job primarily has me working with students who fall in the, the, the end of the spectrum from moderate to severe disabilities. Um, the majority of my students, based on my case management load are in inclusion, are included in their Gen ed classes with their peers. Seventy five percent of their day. And this includes some of this stuff is yes, my speech and language can come in and push in in classes, but they're not necessarily going to push it in class. Were like art class or pe classes that are very hard to have that dialogue with the student.

Tim Villegas (14:21):

Um,

Renay Marquez (14:23):

actually have a student for the first time right now that I'm learning to work with, um, that inclusion does look very different than what we've had previously in a very, very long time. Um, and uh, it, it's uncomfortable really, honestly it is. Um, but we're it, but it's in the better interest of the student long term right now. But the goal, the eventual goal would be more inclusion all over that student's Day.

Tim Villegas (15:01):

Sure. But I think what I'm hearing you say is that you really need to look at the students need.

Renay Marquez (15:06):

Well, that's the whole point of the IEP.

Tim Villegas (15:08):

Right? Right. And so, and so what I tell people too is, look, I can't, I cannot make it just wave a magic wand and say, okay, everyone is in general ed for 100 percent of the day no matter what. Because that's denying kids fape. Me Making that decision in saying that that's how kids are being served, that, you know, that's, that is against the whole idea of an individualized education program. The idea of it is to look at a student and what that student requires and what services they require. Now, of course services are portable and they can be provided anywhere, but you also have to take a look at is that car going to be successful in that specific location? So it is, it is all part of it, uh, and to say everyone's in or everyone's out, I think that is a too simplistic of a, of a way. It's much more nuanced and like you said, you have to take a look at what the student requires. And A,

Renay Marquez (16:19):

we also matters to the, uh, to the services as well. I have met wonderful ape and put folks at, but at the same time, yeah, getting a student out of their wheelchair, even though it may be appropriate because it's a physical activity may not necessarily be safe at the moment because you all know the fire alarm could go off and trying to get that student back in to their chair under emergency circumstances may not be a great idea.

Tim Villegas (16:55):

Right, right. Um, I, I just, you know, I think, I think we all just need to be very thoughtful about how we provide the service, whatever it is and wherever it is, um, it, you know, um, because I take what I hear from, you know, the parents who either talk to me specifically or who comment on our facebook posts or getting emails or you know, however, and I think one of the biggest ways that school districts and educators can build trust with parents is, is just to know that we are thinking about what is best and not making decisions before, beforehand, you know, not only is that illegal to make iep decisions before a meeting or you know, anything like that, but just, just to be able to, um, be thoughtful about how we are going to be providing services for this student and whether that's academic or whether that is, you know, if you have a student with, um, with physical, uh, with, with physical or medical needs, how those are going to be provided. Um, I think that goes a long way. I'm not sure. Um, I'm not sure what, what the. I guess the tone is, you know, in, in your neck of the woods as far as why parents and families get upset at school districts because of whatever reason. But I think that, that, I think that tends to be a universal thing.

Renay Marquez (18:50):

Well, let's kind of, one of the beauties of being a paraeducator, uh, you are a pretty by default, you're pretty much insulated from that. Um, you might hear edges of it, of, of parental Scuttlebutt, but, uh, specifically as to why sometimes you just don't know. And there are a lot of reasons parents can be upset. Uh, I can't comment on them, most of them because I don't, I don't get to have that sort of relationship with the parents. My end is, is having those conversations between the Gen ed teacher, the case manager, and as appropriate the student.

Renay Marquez (19:44):

And I can tell you that if a student only says yes to everything you ever asked them, that that conversation is going to be very short.

Tim Villegas (19:53):

Right?

Renay Marquez (19:54):

Was occasional one was no, but mostly yes.

Tim Villegas (20:01):

Well, let's talk about the, I guess being prepared to move kids into more inclusive environments and um, the students that you work with and the teachers that are the peer educators that you work with. Um, what, uh, how do you prepare them to do well? What is needed, whether it's modifications or it's, um, you know, help with communication. How do you prepare them for going into more inclusive environments?

Renay Marquez (20:37):

Well, again, I am fortunate my district is considered, mostly inclusive. Uh, kids have been included since pre k straight through to secondary. Uh, so the hurdles of getting students prepared specifically already have been in place. So there are other, there are more, there are more background things that need to be put in place such as I'm pulling together vocabulary specific to units or um, classroom language that providing for students who need speech boards or other communication devices. So that would be, that would be a good, probably the primary way be preparing a student. But uh, as, as for preparing our

paraeducators, we kinda just kinda kicked them out the door and say, you can do it because we believe in you. And, uh, we try to pair at least one class a veteran and someone who's not had that many experiences in the classroom. I'm just so they can get an idea of how to move between students with disabilities and their general ed peers. I'm being mindful of the students who have less obvious disabilities to not just single them out and hover and air them. Um, uh, how to, how to approach conversations with General Ed teachers. Have of what does it mean? What is it going to look like when we have the student do this activity or um,

Renay Marquez (22:33):

a science class. Okay. All the other kids are making these wonderful, uh, rock cycle CD covers. And the students that I work with does not have any connection to music, let alone a cd but no longer exists in their world. Um, can he, uh, goes through and build his own rock cycle poster and just forget the, the, the musical component to it. And just being able to, like observed students figure out what the class, the classroom teacher's asking of them and being honest about the parts of the student with a disability can provide. And demonstrate to, to their classroom teacher.

Tim Villegas (23:27):

Right. So I hear, I hear that a lot of the modifications and is it, is it left up to the educator or is it in conjunction with the, the special education case manager as far as what modifications go on and in a classroom.

Renay Marquez (23:52):

So in the ideal world it should be the only, uh, the classroom teacher and the case manager, um, and with a reference to the para educator because even if the classroom teacher is really great and I'm really wants to get to know the student ultimately at some point it will be my job to help that student through either through study hall or through a pullout or to explain to a two parent because it's part of homework. Reality is reality is actually gotten a lot better. I'm more teachers I've seen are coming in that are able to address specific needs of students with disabilities, but they're better at mild to moderate and not so much the severe end. Um, and that is a challenge, but there's technically less students with severe disabilities with more language barriers based on being nonverbal to go around. So that, that's just the nature of, of exposure to students with disabilities. Um, right,

Tim Villegas (25:12):

right. So what do you think. Go ahead. I was going to say, um, because coming from the perspective of a, you know, have an inclusive district already. Um, do you still see that there are barriers to inclusion even in that setting?

Renay Marquez (25:30):

Uh, yeah, there is a lot of, it's, it's a lot of organization, a part of the General Ed teacher and it's not just my job to know all the, all the students who I'm responsible for helping or prodding in the academic direction. Um, I'm all, we're also addressing students with emotional and trauma needs probably at all different rate than when we had, we have been in the past past 10 years. And then I don't necessarily know that it's because we've become a trauma informed district. It's honestly that number of students who have those needs are, are, uh, showing up.

Tim Villegas (26:32):

Hm.

Renay Marquez (26:33):

Um, so it, it, the classroom has immense, become immensely complex. And I, I feel for Gen ed teachers, it is very easy for me to sit back and quarterback in the room, armchair quarterback in the room and go, well, I wouldn't do it that way, but I also don't always have all the information on every single student. I only have the information, all the students in which I support.

Tim Villegas (27:02):

Right. Yeah. Um, d, do you get a general ed teachers or. Uh, I'm not sure exactly, uh, how you, how you organize, how your organizational structure is. But, um, do you collaborate with General Ed teachers or is it more you collaborate with a special ed case manager and then, and then that's how you work with the students?

Renay Marquez (27:37):

Oh, it, it's all because we're inclusion. Uh, so our, our students are already in the class and they already have a seat in the classroom.

Tim Villegas (27:46):

Um,

Renay Marquez (27:47):

the instructions do come from the classroom teacher and so I'll look at the assignment and if it's not appropriate or if it's

Renay Marquez (27:59):

too much work for the students that I support, I'll go back and talk to the General Ed teacher and say, can we try something like this instead? [inaudible], um, occasionally if I'm really stuck in a bind all provide Hala, go back into my digital archives, I'll pull out something and print it out, run it by the teacher usually a and say this is more appropriate for the student and provide it to them or the s. But I've got a lot of teachers who are even, who even understand how to you actually do now understand how to do that and are aware enough that when they make an assignment, they're, they're making several different varieties of this assignment for all the different students in the classroom.

Tim Villegas (28:50):

Do you have, um, like a goto kind of basket of analog tools, you know, that, that you use to modify curriculum, um, your assignment? Yeah, like examples of some things that are in.

Renay Marquez (29:06):

So a highlighters, what I'm going to go through is I might not necessarily highlight instructions for some students, but also highlight words that might help them find the vocabulary in their, in their textbook or I might find words that are, they would find in their, uh, in their notes to help them start to associate things like that. Uh, I will, uh, partner up with a couple of kids, usually general ed kids in the same zone as my students and I'll teach them how to mark text. That's an avid method. Are you familiar with avid?

Tim Villegas (29:54):

I am familiar with avid. I'd never specifically used or are taught with it. Uh, but I know barely

Renay Marquez (30:02):

what is working the sex would be, you'd get all the students. We get a handout of a specific reading was looking at the class will be doing together. Marketing the text has a few phases that gets them to interact with the text. The first step would be to go through a number, all the paragraphs and then the next thing would be to just do a cold read of the reading. Uh, and that's usually an independent, considered independent activity. But if I get involved with three or four students, I might read it to them even if they're capable of reading just to mask. So my student can start hearing the words that are in the reading. And then the next step would be to go back through and read again. Uh, this time in like two to three paragraph chunks and we're going to start underlining or highlighting either vocabulary words we don't know or vocabulary words we think are important and this is where it's really nice to have two or three different colors because then you could leave the self. A key towards the top is to help identify and tell me I could get the students thinking about the topic so they'll be able to refer to, Hey, in paragraph 12, they used this word differently and use it in paragraph six. Now a student with a disability may not necessarily pick up with that, but then they can refer to the reading as their peers are reading it and having this discussion around them and being able to at least make a note of that.

Renay Marquez (31:34):

So yeah, pens, highlighters are pretty much big. Okay. Um, what else? The cheap whiteboard. So you get a get a high quality actually, um, binder slept. So these, they make these little plastic sleeves for that can go into binders and the clear. So you get a good buy a pack of them for like 300 at Costco or something and they usually tend to be pretty good. You slide a piece of white paper or even binder paper and then you can write on this board as a whiteboard with a whiteboard marker and that can help students who need, who just need someone to scribe for them. So they'll write somewhere else in their own handwriting.

Tim Villegas (32:28):

Right? Yeah. Like that. Yeah. You can also do that if it's just a, um, some sort of other worksheet, you can slip it in there and they get other. It can use that marker.

Renay Marquez (32:41):

Yeah. It's a student who is identifying letters and it's not a, it's not a critical reading or the reading is so dense and just pick out a few letters or even pick out a few key words and have them go circle those words.

Tim Villegas (33:00):

Yeah. Yeah. I like that. So we've got some pens, highlighters, different colors, and then the, the, the clear, um, I guess, uh, sheets to put the paper in there.

Renay Marquez (33:13):

That's what it's called. I had to go leave a box if I knew anything else. Uh,

Renay Marquez (33:25):

I actually have a pretty big fan of the IPAD. There's an app out there called a mass mod and it, it's basically graph paper and it has all these symbols built in mathematical symbols. It stops around early trigger in terms of mathematical symbols, but it helps. It helps students keep things aligned and that's a really big deal in the, in the middle till late, um, early secondary program. So from that fifth through eighth grade, it's really mathematically speaking, if you miss a line, a number, uh, your, your math equation will be off, but math mod helps students with that and keep things aligned and uh, but gives them enough space to work on or that's just for writing, like direct equations, not necessarily for graphing, unfortunately.

Tim Villegas (34:29):

Okay. That's a good tip though. I like that. I haven't heard math. Um, so speaking of technology, are there any other pieces of technology that you have found extremely useful as far as helping with either modified curriculum, like you said, for math or maybe communication? Um, I know that something else that people ask all the time as, you know, what are you using and, you know, can I try it in the classroom?

Renay Marquez (35:01):

Um, just having access to either Google suite or office is, is pretty important.

Renay Marquez (35:18):

I've taken out had for years. I've actually carried a laptop around with me. I'm fortunately in the past three years. Our district is friendly, ponied up and more laptops so I can take one out of one of the classrooms or bring it with me to class. And so I had a student working on an assignment that was modified. I'm making slides, Google slides for this assignment instead. And uh, one of the things I had him do was actually then take the chromebook out and his job was to figure out how to use the chromebook camera and take pictures of rocks were on campus, which there were actually surprisingly a lot of different varieties on campus.

Tim Villegas (36:06):

Yeah. Yeah. That's actually, that's a great idea to have a student go with if, if they, if they do need that support, that additional support with a, with a paraeducator, um, to have the paraeducator have that technology with them, um, to assist the student. I think that that's a great. So, you know, it's a, it's actually a really simple. I'm a suggestion, but I don't think many people think that. Um, so that's a great example. I like it.

Renay Marquez (36:37):

Yeah, you have, you also have to have someone who is able to handle the conversation with the student, okay, this is how we're going to use this piece of technology. It's not just to look up Disneyland trips.

Tim Villegas (36:53):

Right, right. Yeah. You, yeah, there needs to be some sort of a skill set. Needs to be there for sure. But that's great. I like that a lot. Um, what, what advice, um, is we, we get this a lot is I'm just moving inclusion forward wherever you are. So we, we have a lot of teachers who ask us, um, you know, how they can move inclusion forward where they are, uh, and we also have parents, but as an educator, a

peer educator, but as an educator, uh, where, where you are, what would be some maybe a specific thing that someone can do to, to move inclusion forward where they are, where they're at,

Renay Marquez (37:48):

to be mindful that all the activities that are provided to the students are activities that all the students should be participating in, even if it's just for a little while. So at secondary the big thing is rallies and for students with sensory needs a rally is a nightmare. Yeah. But this is also, this is also a time to be with their peers, to look around and, and be a part of a rally no matter how long. So for some students we've been utterly surprised that they've been fine, but nothing is, nothing bothers them. They enjoy being in the, in the rally, um, for other students. Um, it's not about making the call of, hey, let's pull them out. It's making the call of what is our point here is a plan that you can tell someone I want to leave when it gets too much for you.

Tim Villegas (38:57):

MMM.

Renay Marquez (39:01):

Yeah. That is, that's in place. Yeah. Instead of, hey, you're not going to the rally,

Tim Villegas (39:10):

right. Instead of making that decision for them saying, oh, they can't handle this, you know, give them a way to indicate that it is too much for me.

Tim Villegas (39:24):

Yeah.

Tim Villegas (39:26):

Yeah. No, that's great. That's great advice. Um, well, I, I want to thank you for being on the podcast and for having this conversation. Before we sign off, uh, could you tell us where they can find more information about you and paraeducators and all the resources that you have to offer?

Renay Marquez (39:49):

So every Thursday during the academic school year between August and May, you can find a weekly blog from us at blog dot [inaudible] dot com. Uh, we are on facebook and twitter at paraeducator. Um, and all of our books are available on Amazon. So if you look this up as a, as an author paraeducators, uh, you'd find us there.

Tim Villegas (40:22):

Awesome. Awesome. And that, you know, props to you for putting out a weekly blogs. I'm telling you, I've tried and it's so hard.

Renay Marquez (40:32):

Uh, uh, some weeks I think, uh, I have, I've hit it the nail on the head and other weeks I kind of, I feel like it's being phoned in and then that's, those are the ones that get the most common sort of, of how brilliant this was a frightens me sometimes. We're actually in the middle of a series right now of

teaching people I'm in high school, how to talk a student through writing an essay modified or not. So, uh, we'll look more about that when we get back next week.

Tim Villegas (41:11):

That's great. That's great. Yeah. I think maybe we were just all overthinking it, right? Oh, thank you. Yeah. Thank you very much.

Tim Villegas (41:29):

That is our show. We would like to thank renae Marquez for being a guest on the conclusive podcast. Make sure to follow them on twitter and facebook as well as their, as on their website, [inaudible] dot com. Follow think inclusive on the web. I think inclusive.us as well as twitter, facebook, Google plus. And instagram, you can subscribe to the inconclusive podcast via apple podcasts, Google play, stitcher, or anchor dot FM. The easiest way to start a podcast if you're using the anchor app to listen, please leave us a voice message. You may be featured on our next podcast. You can also favorite us and slash or use the applause button while listening to the show. We love to know that you were listening. Also a reminder that you can support the think inclusive podcasts via Patreon or anchor.fm with the monthly contribution so that we can continue to bring you in depth interviews with thought leaders and inclusive education and community efficacy. Thank you to Patreon dot I for their continued support for the podcast from Marietta, Georgia. Please join us again on the inconclusive podcast. Thanks for your time and attention.

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