



The Think Inclusive Podcast

Season 3, Episode 4

Debbie Taub | Alternate Assessment and Inclusion

Tim Villegas (00:00:00):

In 2012, Carly's Acon and Danielle Weisberg founded the skimm from their couch. Now six years later, their morning newsletter gives over 7 million subscribers, the news and information they need to start their day. When they started the company, they got a lot of advice from other female entrepreneurs. Now they're sharing those conversations and more on their podcast, skimm from the couch. Every week you'll hear from women like Arianna Huffington, the founder of the Huffington Post, and thrive on why she puts her phone to bed at night or Melanie Wheeland, CEO of soul cycle on why she has a millennial mentor or how actor Taraji P. Henson got over her first rejection and learned how to negotiate for herself. It's a podcast about the real stuff, tips and tricks to launch, grow or change your career. The only rule on the couch, no BS checkout, skimm from the couch or wherever you listen to podcasts

Tim Villegas (00:01:05):

according to my living room and Beautiful Marietta, Georgia. You were listening to the thinking inclusive podcast, episode 10 brought to you by publishing company. I'm your host, Tim Vegas. Today I will be speaking with Cheryl Jorgenson, one of the premier experts on inclusive education with over 30 years in the field. I had the pleasure of visiting with her one evening in January of this year. Cheryl and I discuss why it has taken so long for inclusive education, the catch on in the United States and what needs to happen to bring the barrier for it to become part of best practices for education. She even gives me advice on whether I need to quit my job or not. You will not want to miss surprising answer, so without further ado, let's get to the things inclusive podcasts. Thanks for listening.

Tim Villegas (00:01:59):

I would like to welcome to the thing conclusive podcast. Dr Cheryl Jorgenson. She was a faculty researcher at the University of New Hampshire's institute on disability, focusing on inclusive education for students with autism, intellectual and other developmental disabilities from 1985 until the spring of 2011. She is now in semi retirement and able to focus on the work about what she is most passionate students, specific consultation team, professional development, school wide systems change, policy advocacy, and writing. She particularly likes working with students with down syndrome and their educational teams. Uh, she is author of many, many books and articles, almost too many to count. Looking at your cv, I am very honored and pleased to have Dr Jorgenson here with us. Thank you for joining us today. Oh, you're very welcome. I'm happy to do it. Um, well, go ahead and get right in. You've been doing this your work for many years. Um, and it looks like almost 30 years actually. Um, and uh, there has been a, you know, a lot of progress made in schools in the public schools, um, as far as inclusive education. Um, but, uh, as you've noted before in other interviews and other writings, um, it's kind of piecemeal all over the country. There isn't really a, um, a systematic change going about in the United States. Um, do you think that we should be further along, you know, after 30 years out in providing inclusive schools for all children or is this kind of what we have always expected?

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:03:59):

Yep, absolutely. Yes. We should be further along, but I, I can understand why we're not, and I, I, I've been thinking about this question to him to try to really hone in on why I think the progress has been as slow as it is. Um, and so I can share some of those ideas with you. And I think, um, when you hear those ideas, they'll also sort of provide an answer to what could we do to make the progress go more quickly and more effectively. So I think the primary reason why we're not further along with inclusive education, um, since you know, it sort of started in the US in the early 19 eighties is because we still have two separate systems of education system that we called general education. That's for General Ed students and then this whole enterprise and system of special education and along with those two systems have evolved what people think should be different curricula, different teacher skills and certification standards, different assessments, different instructional methods.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:05:23):

Um, and, and so all of those differences within these two systems keep perpetuating the notion that students with disabilities, and particularly I'm speaking of students with more intensive support needs, needs something different and they can't benefit from that general education curriculum. Um, and so, and part of the system of special education that's evolved over the past almost 40 years now is what I'm sure you're familiar with and many of your listeners is the principle of the least restrictive environment. Um, and somebody will say the least restrictive environment means inclusion when really it doesn't. And it's sort of a quote from the Federal Special Education Law, is that students with disabilities should be in the least restrictive environment in which they can meet the goals of their iep. But the decision of what the least restrictive environment is for each child is left up to that child's individual education plan team.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:06:40):

And there are still fast differences, um, certainly from state to state, but even within a state from school to school, from district to district in sometimes even within the same school district, there are radical differences in how teams make those placement decisions. Even from school to school and the least restrictive environment principal, although it was based on the idea that, and certainly we can support the idea that children need a very individualized approach to their education El Artery, which is just the abbreviation for least restrictive environment continues to justify segregated education for some students. So I think there's sort of two separate systems of education. Um, the, um, you know, the components of those systems which is still sort of say different for kids with disabilities and particularly that least restrictive environment and principle mean that for example, in the state of Hawaii, and I'm not picking on Hawaii, I'm just kind of reflecting the data.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:07:52):

About three point nine percent of students with intellectual disabilities spend 80 percent or more of their day in a regular class compared to Iowa where 60 percent of students with intellectual disabilities spend 80 percent more of their day in a regular class. And so it just prompts us to ask the question, are those kids in Hawaii all that different from the kids in Iowa? And in fact they're not. They're not different enough to justify that. That huge discrepancy. And there are many other states that, that kind of follow that pattern, you know, tons of states that are in the single percentages, many states that are in the forties, fifties, and sixties. But it calls into question whether the least restrictive environment principle is really sort of a real thing that, um, that can be done in a scientific way consistently from student to student in district two district.

Tim Villegas (00:08:59):

That's, that's an interesting point because I've, I've spoken with other people about that, about this idea of a, of Ire and whether we need something different in the federal law to really realize, you know, full and authentic inclusion. Um, so for what I'm hearing you saying is that Ire actually is holding us back as, as a country because there isn't a real strict standard on how we develop that, you know, that concept of, of how, um, um, uh, of, of the least restrictive environment. Because, you know, even in my own district, there's the, there's a wide interpretation of what that, what that is. Um, so I can see if we had something more specific, you know, that that would, uh, that would help you don't go ahead.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:09:55):

The other thing is there's no either incentive or there's no incentive for states to improve their placement of kids in, in more, more percentage of the time in the General Ed class. Nor is there a disincentive from the federal government sort of accountability purposes. I mean the federal government will, it, every state is allowed to kind of identify their own statistical goal. So the state of Hawaii could say our goal is that next year four percent of our students with intellectual disabilities are in regular class 80 percent of the time the year after it's four point one percent the year after it's four point two. And as long as they meet that the federal government doesn't ever say no, you're really behind the curve. You don't, you really need to catch up to Iowa. There's just no national kind of policy legal policy that translates into everyday educational policy that will move, you know, those states along.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:11:04):

And if you sort of go on historical data, you could take us a hundred years before for most students if we've got, if we keep going at the same rate, you know, for most students to be spending most of their time in general Ed. And yet I understand parents who feel like that, that, that their influence over their child's placement, maybe one of the only sort of sources of influence that they have, you know, and, and parents feel like if their child's getting a substandard education, what are the only things they can do is say, I want my child out of district. So it's a dilemma. I wish I had, you know, a great alternative for Ire. But I just know it's really, I'm really standing away really a barrier

Tim Villegas (00:11:58):

now. I wonder, do you think that school districts are actually edited, you know, um, or actually not benefiting from this concept of Irap because because of what you're talking about, about, about parents? Because, um, because when you go to the meeting with what the school district is concerned about, in my opinion, is not getting sued, you know, not going to due process. And um, you know, and this happens in districts all over the country, I hear it all the time, you know, anecdotally, of course, but it's the parents that really advocate for their child to be included in general ed or you know, x, Y, Z related service. Those parents are, you know, the squeaky wheels are the ones who are getting, you know, what they feel like they need for their children. Whereas the parents who either don't know how to advocate for their child or just maybe are indifferent or you know, whatever reason they don't. And so you have a, there seems to be a lot of hypocrisy or double standards. You know, there are double standards within every district because why is, you know, so and so getting this service or being included with this service and you know, the other person is not. And that, I believe, creates a tons of mistrust and no wonder why parents are so defensive when they come to, when they come to meetings.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:13:52):

Yeah. You know, you, you, there's a lot that we could unpack from what you just said. Um, I, you know, I, I go into meetings where I'm consulting with schools, whether it's the school who've asked me or the parents have asked me, I go in trying to prove the presumed everyone's positive intentions because I just, in my role, I'm not a lawyer. I'm not the person that's, you know, there to hold their feet to the fire of crossing every t and dotting every i around regulations. I'm advocating for the child and for best practices. But I absolutely agree that there's such a, Oh, an inequity in what kids, the quality of education that the kids are getting even within one school building. And, and if, when it comes down to it, it's often the parents either knowledge or their advocacy or their own sort of resources that they bring to, to advocating for their child that can make the difference. Um, I was in the meeting the other day, um, family wants their third grader who has autism to be in general education. I had done a consultation and you know, and given them 30 pages worth of suggestion for how to do it. And I went to the meeting with the mom and there were 14 professionals around the table and the mom, you know, and she was highly educated. She does advocacy work herself and yet couldn't or didn't know how to sort of argue against those 14 professionals that were in the room.

Tim Villegas (00:15:29):

Very tough. I wanted to talk a little bit about, I guess incentives to change because it seems to me that the only thing that school districts that are concerned about our, um, well most anyways, budgets and, and not only budgets but money that you know, is coming from race to the top, which is tied to the two common core implementation and test scores. I mean that seems to be the major conversation. Like if you open up education week, right? We're not talking about inclusion, we're talking about, we're talking about test scores for standards and the assessments that go with those. Right.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:16:19):

Again, I think here I can point to really just a lack of knowledge about what it is that helps students with disabilities achieve. There's a history of belief that, and in some early research that said, the only way children with disabilities, any child with disability can achieve the high standards is if they're taught in a separate setting with a separate curriculum was, you know, specially trained teachers were in the last 20 years. We really do have some evidence that, um, students with disabilities, even students with the most complex disabilities can learn and achieve to higher levels within general education. But that piece of knowledge is just, doesn't seem to have enough power to cause people to change. It's more complex. It's that, you know, each one of those 14 professionals around the table. As I sort of learned a little bit about them. They came through their educational career and their teacher training programs at a time when people weren't even thinking about inclusion.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:17:31):

They themselves don't know people with disabilities as, you know, as colleagues, as friends, um, unless I haven't have a particular family experience. And then it's interesting how those people's attitudes that are different. Um, so it's more than just giving people knowledge because that's what I spend a lot of my time doing and nobody sort of changes just for that reason. Um, you know, it takes a shift in attitude. It takes a principal of the school p, a o of the school who is, you know, a vibrant persuasive and from instructional leader that says this is the way that we're going to go. Takes lots of professional development in rewarding for people. And it takes the knowledge of um, at the local school level how we can take the general ed resources, the people, the money, the equipment and the special ed resources and just put them all in the general ed classroom to benefit all students. Um, so it's, it's more, it's more than just the budget question and it's more than just the concern about standards and

assessment question. It's just a lot of historical beliefs and practices that are very stubborn and difficult to unseat.

Tim Villegas (00:18:49):

Um, that, that brings up a question that I had not previewed with you, um, because what often gets tied together when we talk about advocacy for people with disabilities is a kind of the parallels between the civil rights movement and the disability rights movement. Um, and so a lot of what, you know, uh, the people that I know that are in the disability rights movement, you know, use that, use that kind of language a lot. Um, I mean we use segregation, right? I mean that, that, that is a civil rights term. Um, but there are, you know, do you see, do you see them as the same thing or do you see them differently? The reason why I'm asking is, um, I've always seen it, I guess in principle as the same thing because you have people with disabilities and people, you know, uh, uh, different races being discriminated against simply because they have those characteristics.

Tim Villegas (00:20:00):

But you know, a, a, a, you know, a, a Mexican, you know, which, which I am a Mexican American. I'm a, you know, a person with brown skin being discriminated against and a person with intellectual disability being discriminated against or at least not being, you know, I'm allowed quote unquote, to be in a general education room. Uh, they are inherently different because that person with, you know, Brown skin, um, let's say if they're, if they're a typically developing person is no different than anybody else in that classroom, but a person, an intellectual disability is inherently different. Not less of course, but different. And so what, what do you think about that in that conversation are, you know, um, and, and kind of comparing the idea of disability rights and civil rights, does that make sense?

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:21:05):

Yes, I think they're the same. I think the differences that you pointed out that it's sort of a different situation, discrimination against the birth with Brown skin, it's a slightly different situation that then discrimination against the person with an intellectual disability is a matter of degree because, I hate to say this to him, but if we survey hate everybody in the United States and said, among the racial group, how would you rank them in terms of intelligence?

Tim Villegas (00:21:37):

I don't do, I don't need to. I don't need to finish this does.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:21:42):

Oh, it's in the last, you know, it's become more unpopular to admit that and to say that, but you will still hear people who work in urban school districts say just about kids of color. They just can't learn as much as those white kids. So I think they're some of the same prejudices about competence, inability, sewing on, um, there are truly similarities in terms of prejudice against groups that historically haven't had much power. And you know, white people have controlled people of color and um, intellectually non labeled. People have controlled the lives of people with disabilities, including children with disabilities and have, you'll have reported to say, my professional opinion is that this is what your life should look like, you know, and so I see them as very similar and is, is, you know, I mean we're still struggling with race in this country and we're still out there after 150 years and only 60 years with brown versus the board of Education. So when I say I wish we were further than we are with inclusive education, I, I, I sort of say the same really entrenched societal institutions that are perpetuating racism are, are the societal

institutions that perpetuate discrimination against children and adults with disabilities are just as ingrained.

Tim Villegas (00:23:20):

Yes, I can see that. I can see that if, because it is really well, it's a false assumption that you know, given who, whatever characteristic that, that this person is more intelligent than the other. I mean, I remember going in my teacher training, I'm learning about, and I may be completely setting this wrong, so correct me if I'm wrong, but the, the idea that an Iq scores on Iq tests that, that um, you know, black people, you know, scored low, lower than white people, right? And so that was used for so many years as well. They're, you know, they're not as intelligent as white people. I mean, I've got scientific data here, you know, until we started to realize that, okay, those tests are biased because they were made of.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:24:18):

I agree. You know, if you, have you ever read the book, the mismeasure of Man,

Tim Villegas (00:24:25):

I can't say that I have. Who is right?

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:24:27):

So that's your assignment

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:24:30):

called the mismeasure of Man and it's written by a recently deceased Harvard professor named Stephen Jay Gould, Gould. and she actually goes back to the early development of Iq testing in the late 18 hundreds, early 19 hundreds and shows how those tests which are supposed to be, you know, scientifically based, not culturally biased. We're from the very get go based on some preexisting or a priori assumptions about how different intellectual or different racial groups would perform and that the people who did some of those like tests 100, you know, African American soldiers compared to 100 white soldiers to see what their Iq is, looked like. They fudged the data support there already because it wasn't that they'd already drawn. So I to testing I just think is worthless and really worthless.

Tim Villegas (00:25:39):

Well, you know, let's, let's talk about Iq just for a little bit longer. That is, that is a big determinant of our eligibility categories. Yes, it is. I mean, I think back when I was in California, when I was writing my iep by hand, you know, a part and buggy horse and buggy days, you know, we still had, we still had, you know, the Mr category or no, I, I remember sitting in a meeting with a parent who is irate because we still had that category and I said, I completely agree with you, but there's nothing I can do about that. You need to write a superintendent. You need to, you know, write your congressperson. Yeah, exactly. Yeah, exactly. So fortunately I don't have to do that here because we do, we do have intellectual disability categories, but even still, you know, the, the whole idea of Iq and, and um, you know,

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:26:45):

I do, when I do workshops, I do an activity and I take a piece of painter's tape masking tape and I lay it down on the floor and I draw a line right down the middle of the room, but I'm presenting him and I have people line up so that half of the people are sort of lined up on one side of the line. It has people on the other and I say, okay, the very first person on the lefthand side of this line, you are not mentally retarded because your score was 71. The very first person on the other side of the line, your ice cube is 69. You are mentally retarded. Let's think about the logical. Yeah.

Tim Villegas (00:27:28):

Even if

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:27:29):

believed that intelligence and the, you know, the, a gradation of intelligence could really be relay or reliably measured, which I don't, isn't that silly that we almost determine a child's whole educational career based on those two points, different, you know, just, just doesn't make educational sense to me and it just doesn't seem right.

Tim Villegas (00:27:57):

So let's, you know, let's say you are, let's say you are a benevolent dictator of and um, and you know, let's get rid of ICU. Yeah. As, as an eligibility, a determiner or how, how would you, um, a sign services to a student with any particular need? We're talking any learning disability or you know, or more intensive needs.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:28:27):

Okay. There is a big answer to that question. Okay. And I'm going to tell you not just my ideas for this, but what is actually happening in many parts of the country right now. Perfect. Have you heard of the, um, large national grant called the swift project?

Tim Villegas (00:28:49):

Absolutely. All right. I'm a big fan.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:28:52):

Let me just briefly outline it for your listeners. The US Department of Education Office of special education programs, um, issued a \$25 million dollar grant to the University of Kansas and a bunch of other universities to see what it would look like if a school could take all of the resources, all of the monetary resources date, get both the resources that are kind of tagged as general education because it comes from the regular school district budget as well as all their special ed money and resources and put it into one big pot and then just do really great learning assessments for all the children. Not just the kids who were suspected of having disabilities, but just do great, you know, a math and language arts and communication assessments and ability to use technology and you know, all those kinds of assessments to tell you who this kid is, a learner, what their strengths are and what their needs are.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:30:04):

And then be able to draw from that pot of money in that pot of personnel. Special Ed Teachers, speech pathologist, title one teachers, ELL Teachers and put all those people. Just disperse them throughout the building in regular ed classes. And provide supports to kids, just whoever needs what, not by the label of

the teacher, but like if I want to, if you understand what I mean, not by the way teachers label. So it's not like only special ed teachers can work with kids with disabilities. But if Mary Jane Needs Extra Support Math, who is your greatest math teacher? Who's part of that fifth grade team? Okay. She's going to work with the kids who were struggling in math for some small amount of time during the day. So that process of breaking down the silos that have arisen in these different systems of education and passive money in grants. Um, and, and devoting them all to the academic, behavioral, social, and communication needs of all kids. If what the swift grant is testing out in a number of schools across the country and they will come up with a, um, a tool kit or a guidebook for how a school that's not part of their project can begin to do this.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:31:32):

So unfortunately what swift cannot control is the fact that the special ed law still exists and we still need to label kids. I don't think, I don't know why we need to label kids if we really had a system of describing kids learning characteristics really well and then being able to provide whatever services they need.

Tim Villegas (00:31:58):

No, I mean is the reason why we even started to create eligibility categories and stuff like that is because there was nothing like special education before. I mean, I would, I don't even know the year. Nineteen 75, 1975. Thank you. Well, I guess that would be the law that the.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:32:19):

Yeah, there was special ed before and certain states began providing sort of their own version of it, special ed law back in the sixties. Um, and I don't, I think, oh gosh, we're getting into real history and philosophy here, Tim.

Tim Villegas (00:32:37):

I'm sorry. No

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:32:40):

special education has its roots in medicine actually. Right? Disability historically has been considered an illness, so to speak, but, but something's gone wrong in this person kind of thing. It's something that's diagnosed and that's a medical term. Right? Right. It's something that we just like in medicine in order to treat you, I need to know, do you have appendicitis or do you have gallbladder recitals? So the Special Ed, early Special Ed folks really came from the medical world and they brought with them that need to label and diagnose and then the idea that a certain treatment only a certain treatment or set of treatments go along with each layer. One of the reasons we've gotten to where we are today.

Tim Villegas (00:33:32):

Yeah. Yeah. I often hear, I often hear when, you know, in the of the jargon of, you know, teachers speak, uh, the old versus new model or the medical model, you know, versus you. I mean, I'm not sure what you call it now, but, um, and, and the, the pushback of that medical model, um, uh, so it is interesting they kind of mess that we've made for ourselves. Um, especially now that we want to. Well, some of us, some of us do want to change, you know, um, um,

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:34:06):

yes. I'm going to just jump in with one more

Tim Villegas (00:34:09):

trance.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:34:09):

Historical deeply, deeply held beliefs and I kind of, I mentioned it a little bit just a minute ago, is that um, the belief is still that people who have a difference that we call disability, there's something wrong with them and that may need to be fixed. Right? And so, you know, so the medical model is there's a pill, there's a program, there's a place that will fix this person to make them normal. A different view of disability is that society sort of creates or socially construct that idea that there's, here's this line and on one side of it is the normal people on the other side of the abnormal people. And, and I think, um, I think parents are under terrible pressure from, from the time their child is born, if their child is labeled with a disability at that point there under terrible societal and familiar familial family pressures to do what ever they can to make their child more and more. Because you need to be normal to have a good life. Yeah. Yeah. You want the best for your child. No more services, more speech pathology, more discrete trial training to eliminate that autism.

Tim Villegas (00:35:32):

Yes.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:35:34):

There in lies the pickle that we are in or in my view. Yes.

Tim Villegas (00:35:38):

Yeah, no, I, I share that view. Um, you know, and um, what's, you know, I, I guess I haven't always thought the way that I did, you know, when I first got into special ed into the fields, I guess, um, I was a behavior therapist for students with autism and I've, I found, you know, kind of fell into the job because I was a psychology major and you can't get a whole lot of jobs with a BA in psychology and while I was deciding do I go, you know, two masters because I wanted to be a counselor and a therapist. Um, I decided to do this thing and I just fell in love with, you know, kids with autism. I mean I just, it just, um, it I've realized, Oh, I think this is what I should be doing. And um, and so I had a very different mindset when I first started working that we're working with them and it was definitely, okay, well, how can I make this child more normal, you know, how can I see, you know, I wonder what the cure will be for autism.

Tim Villegas (00:36:48):

And uh, I remember my parents would be, you know, trying all these different diets and, you know, other kinds of therapy. And um, it was, uh, it was very interesting, you know, and the only thing that changed, the only reason I changed was because of course my teacher training, I had really great professors, um, and he were, you know, tash members, a little plug for tash and that started opening my eyes and then meeting autistic adults. And that is really what made me go, oh, they don't want to be, you know, they don't want to change. They don't want to be like, Hey, well how come I haven't heard of this before? And then it just kinda snowballed after that. And, and, and so the, the inclusion, you know, the idea and the philosophy of inclusion. Um, and this idea of, of the disability is natural, right? Isn't that cheated snow? I saying that right?

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:37:56):

Uh, Kathy,

Tim Villegas (00:37:57):

Kathy snow, sorry. The wrong snow, that the disability is a natural part of the human experience and that it really shouldn't be looked at as something that needs to be fixed in that way. Like, like, like having cancer, you know what I mean? Um, and so anyways, go ahead.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:38:21):

Yeah, just a couple of resources for your listeners. If they're, if you know this idea, particularly if you're a parent or teacher, this idea of autism is a natural thing or you know, how can that be? I agree. It takes, you know, it's not easy to wrap your head around. So if people want to kind of go online and, and poke around and read some, um, you know, provocative essays about this, there's a couple of online sources. One is called the autistic self advocacy network. I assume you can put this in print somewhere on your blog so people can find it in. The abbreviation is a f a n and it's a group of autistic adults who were very much involved in really political advocacy and advocacy. Um, and they say, yeah, no, thank you. I mean, I, there's sometimes I wish my life were easier, but it's not, but I also have so much good that I experienced as a result of having autism, but I wouldn't want to not have autism. And then there's another online website called the autism acceptance project. Again, sort of a, a, a mom who does blogging and has lots of resources about this idea of we don't need to be cured. We need to be included and supported.

Tim Villegas (00:39:40):

Absolutely. Absolutely. Yes. I feel, I feel like we could talk about that for a long time to go back to. I want to get back to you. Um, uh, some of the questions we had about, um, I guess systems change and, and what people can do that are in situations that I guess are less than inclusive. And so I have a question for you. I am, and I don't think you know this, but I am a self contained teacher. Oh, I didn't know that. Yeah. So, and it's surprising to most people. Yeah, I know, right, exactly, exactly. Um, I, you and I have been a self contained teacher for 10 years and uh, when I got into the feet when I got into working in a, in schools and my teeth, my training was so far different than what I experienced in schools and the, the, you know, the job I got was a, you know, a self contained teacher for students with autism.

Tim Villegas (00:40:44):

And now I'm in Georgia in the same, in the same sort of situation. Um, but, uh, but now, uh, I've kind of come out of the closet and, and um, now I just went, I can't shut up about it and I know people are probably tired of me hearing either, especially at my school. Um, but, um, I, you know, I, I often have this kind of cognitive dissonance every time I go to work. Um, so, and I've, I've asked, I've asked a few different, you know, of the people I interview about this. Um, so should I quit my job as a self contained teacher at my school and move to another school or district, you know, because of my, for inclusion or should I stay in my job and try and influence the system within because there's only so much I can control. I can't control who my principal is, I can't control who my superintendent is or my supervisors, but I can't control what goes on in my classroom. So what would your advice be? You know, because I'm not the only one. There's plenty of people who think and feel the same way and that they're in the same situation. I think

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:42:12):

I would need to know more about you and, and to know, sort of like at the end of the day, at the end of the year, what do you feel like you need to have done in order to feel like you've made the difference you want to make now? Some people would say, if I feel like I change five little moments in my students' lives to give them five little slices of joy during their day, you know, then I will feel as if I have made enough of a difference in their life that I've held true to my own beliefs. And then I think I've, that that change has made enough of a difference in their life. Another question I would ask you, or any other teacher who's sort of pondering this dilemma is, um, what are the chances and have you tried to really develop a core group of allies in your school community so that you are not alone because you'll never do it alone. I mean, in probably even convincing one, even if the other one other person who convinces the principle that person has to convince a whole bunch of other people, well, I don't know what kind of effort and resources you've sort of brought to bear to try to systematically get a group of allies and that could. And how long can you work on that and not throw the towel in?

Tim Villegas (00:43:50):

Right. Well, you know, before, before you hang up on me, I will, I will say that, um, I have been systematically in every job I've been on systematically including my students in Gen Ed, you know, as much as physically possible. And uh, just a few years ago I actually work with a consultant and a mentor of mine to include as a student with significant disabilities in general ed for a, and we, it was, it was a, it was a gradual process, but he currently is in a, in fourth grade, you know, pretty much for all day and I work with his or his paraprofessional and General Ed teacher to modify those activities. And, and so those, you know, I mean, that is wonderful and I'm very happy that, that I, I've been able to do that. Very blessed to be able to do that. Um, but that in and of itself, um, you know, is one story, you know, and I would love to do more, but I feel, you know, and you know, and I am a strong inclusion advocate and everybody knows it.

Tim Villegas (00:45:03):

Um, uh, but, but I, I do feel like my hands are tied sometimes because um, you know, I can't do everything. Um, and um, so anyways, I guess I don't really have a, you know, the, I don't really have an answer for the people who were in my position except just to keep going, keep believing, keep talking, you know, that's part of the reasons why I started this website was because, yeah, because I couldn't find anything out there that would support me, you know, I couldn't, I could not find any resources or any, any teacher that was trying to do the same thing I was in and have some sort of, you know, encouragement or you know, saying, Hey, I'm not the only one, you know. And so that's what I'm, that's what I hope that thinking inclusive does that the, that, these podcasts do you, is that the people and the teachers and the parents who listen can say, okay, I'm not the only one I can do this, you know, I can create a professional learning network on twitter, on facebook. I can have that support. And even if I don't get where I want to, I have a roadmap, you know?

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:46:26):

Oh, I just want to sort of screen when I hear that when you were teaching, you couldn't find those resources because they've been around since 1985. But those of us putting them out there, I haven't done a great job of it. I guess, you know, like if, if you being sort of the assertive and smart and creative person you work, couldn't find those resources. What a terrible job those of us in the field have done. I'm serious and that's a problem. We have not learned how to take these little islands of inclusive excellence and, and spread them. And that's what, that's another thing the swift project is trying to do. It's not that we've not known how to do it, it's that we've not known how to spread it on a large scale and sustain it. So swift is as much interested in those questions as it is on what kind of assistive

technology will help this kid read better, you know? Um, Golly A. Yup. So I of course, want to consult with you now and try to get, give you ideas,

Tim Villegas (00:47:35):

but you haven't bought for moving your school. That's probably for another conversation. Another conversation. Exactly. I think the, the biggest um, barrier that I run across is, it's not just from my colleagues, the colleagues in my, in my school building, because, you know, when you were talking about allies, I have, I have created a nice, you know, I'm a nice group of allies that I talk about with and we know we can put our heads together and, and you know, do the things that we have control over. Um, but when I, when I have conversations, you know, in the global sphere is that they just, people are weary about this because they just don't know how to do it. They don't know what it looks like. And, and like, you know, like what you said at the swift schools, I really think that that's going to be a really nice way to show people. I know Dan had been visited, was a guest on a few months ago and I know that he's doing the filming for this fifth school, so really excited about that. Um, and um, and you know, to, to show people that, that, that because they just don't believe it. No,

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:48:58):

no. And I think video's really help. But I think even Dan would say that one of the reasons, um, he just had what he feels his success with his film, including Samuel, is that, um, people just, you just don't say, okay, we're showing including Samuelson from 7:30, eight, 30, Thursday night come if you want. And that's the end of it. It's the beginning of a conversation,

Tim Villegas (00:49:23):

right.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:49:24):

Needs to be a very intentional conversation with people over multiple years with lots of professional development, you know, attention to that infrastructure in the school that provides common planning time. And you know, it's not just one or two people. I mean, it's really looking at what schools need in order to make a change and sustain the change. And we really put to be talking about math curriculum. Uh, you know, it's, any change in schools is really difficult and maybe inclusive education for a little harder, the math curriculum because it gets at some basic human values about humanity and so forth. But um, you know, we're still really learning how to, how to spread the process beyond little islands of excellence.

Tim Villegas (00:50:15):

I like that, that kind of visual metaphor. Yeah. Yeah. Because I, I think that's what it is, is it's, you know, um, I, you know, I'm going to put it out there. I am looking those little islands of excellence. Please come. Please come and tell me. I will share them with the world, you know, I mean, that's the whole point. You know, I like, I need, I want to show people I, I want to, I want to be able to have that for myself as well. You know, that this is what it looks like. This is how, what it feels like, and I'm sure.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:50:49):

No, I don't know anybody in Georgia. Are there tash members in Georgia?

Tim Villegas (00:50:53):

Well, I think, I think I might be the only. Holy Moly. No, that's not true. No, you know, Connie, connie, layla bralyn genre Brian or injured in Georgia and I have connected with them, although only just, uh, very briefly we keep saying we're going to do something else, but I know they're very busy. So, um, you know, we don't have a, I'm attached chapter. Um, I, I tried to start when a few years ago and I, it didn't quite get off the ground, but you, you know, you know, Georgia is not the only state that doesn't have a chapter and I think part of the reason is you have so many different disability disability rights organizations within a state. You know, Georgia has a bunch and they're all kind of the same people, you know. So adding another one is there's not a whole lot of incentive, especially when it's not very powerful. I mean we have, you know, the centers, I'm on a, I'm going to say this wrong. And the Center for leadership on disability at Georgia state,

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:52:01):

it's George's institute on disability that I used to work for.

Tim Villegas (00:52:03):

Yes, yes, exactly.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:52:05):

City Center on developmental.

Tim Villegas (00:52:08):

Yes. Yes. Georgia State University. Yes. That is still up and running. And you know, it's still very, you know, a powerful advocacy group and then you also have, um, uh, the Georgia Council on developmental disability and then you also have, um, the arc and you have, um, you know, just there's various groups and it's just like that all over, you know, all over the country. Um, so, you know, if we could get everyone together, you know, but that's just so hard to do when everyone has their own agendas and stuff like that.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:52:44):

I'll tell you the number one thing that New Hampshire did 30 years ago, 25 years ago to get inclusion going. Um, are you familiar with what's called partners in policy making?

Tim Villegas (00:52:57):

Doesn't stop it from there, but

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:53:00):

actually you can google it. Partners in policy making. I think they're based in Minnesota. Most states have, um, it's a parent leadership theories that occurs over the course of a year and it teaches parents of school aged kids with disabilities about community organizing best practices and like legislative advocacy in 87. I'm New Hampshire's had their first partners in policy making things for families and that got inclusive education off the ground. I will email you the contact of the woman who runs New Hampshire's and if you could, starting in 2014 slash 15, run a partners in policy making for families around inclusive education. There is your start statewide education that has served to be the biggest pressure point in our state. Bar none. I will email that to you.

Tim Villegas (00:54:05):

Well that makes sense. You know the, that come from a parent. Yeah. Well, yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean you don't know how many times I hear know parents get what they want around here. So

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:54:18):

our parent leadership series, our governor, he's a graduate of our parent leadership series 25 years ago. We have school board chairs, um, because there's a very much. It's not just sort of the people who come can't just want to make change in their own child's life. They need to really be a, want to be a community organizer and make a difference in policy. So we have state representatives and legislators in school board members in school board chairs and um, you know, business people who happen to have a child with a disability and they had found their power.

Tim Villegas (00:54:54):

That's great. That's great. This has been a very, very interesting conversation. I am so glad I'm. This is the kind of conversation I wish, you know, I would be recorded again. I am recording it. So this is awesome. Um, when, you know, we're kind of getting up to an hour here and I just want to make sure I wanted to talk about the, about the common core. It's a very hot topic, you know, just in the general education sphere. And so I wanted to know your thoughts about common core and if special educators in particular should be worried about that and he believes it or not. I've gotten emails and you know, wondering what I thought about it and whether you know, they, they think whether I thought it was going to leave our kids behind, you know, because of the rigor or whatever. So what are, what are your thoughts on that?

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:56:01):

I don't think it needs to, but I'm worried that it will. Okay. And I have some evidence just anecdotal, but the evidence, the incident that makes me most worried is that people will say it'll, it'll be used as another excuse to separate kids with disabilities, kids without disabilities that unless you are pursuing, but you know, unless you're in that 10th grade English class to master all those regular common core standards, you can't be in the English class now that's against the special ed law. But I'm hearing that that's happening, that people are saying to parents, um, you know, what alternate assessments are based on alternate achievement standards that are still very closely linked to the common core regular ed standards. I'm hearing people say from different states, if you have a child who's working on those alternate achievement standards and taking that alternate achievement test, you can't be in regular Ed. So I'm really worried about that. I don't, I don't think the common core standards need to ne need to leave with disability behind. I think if they, if people had the right attitude about kids with disabilities, it would help raise everybody's achievements,

Tim Villegas (00:57:25):

but only. Yeah,

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:57:26):

if people think that kids with disabilities can achieve to those high levels and provide them with multiple means to get there. Right. So the university designed to me, we should be saying common core state standards taught through universal design for learning. I mean they should sort of go together. Um, and, and there's just no evidence that students with disabilities who are in regular classes where, you know,

people are learning the common core standards. There's no evidence that they will bring down anybody else's scores. But I hear that worry all the time.

Tim Villegas (00:58:02):

Do you. I remember, I remember listening to Leah Brown talk a few, uh, a few years ago, I think it was the, his DVD and he mentioned that he's like, um, he said something like, um, if, uh, you know, if all the scores went down to the whole school district, you know, because, because you know, the, Oh, those, those people that students with disabilities, you know, then you would have to say the same thing if the, if the student's scores went up for disability. Yes, exactly.

Cheryl Jorgensen (00:58:34):

Again, I think people have a conclusion already in their mind and then they're just sort of coming up with the rest of the house to support that. That's a forgone conclusion. No evidence at all. And lots of evidence that universally designed instruction in inclusive classrooms approve, improve. Everybody's achieved.

Tim Villegas (00:58:53):

Absolutely a hundred percent agree. Yeah. In, in my view with common core, I'm not as concerned, um, uh, but I think it's more like what you said because of my own attitude, you know, I can't control other people's attitudes, but I can't control mine. And I always thought, you know, specifically with, with alternate assessment that it made more sense to teach, you know, standards that were aligned to the common core in the general ed setting as opposed to a self contained setting, which I've tried to argue many times with my colleagues because what ended up happening I think is that, you know, like, oh, we have these alternate achievement standards, great. We can go into our special rooms and just teach them, right? We can, yeah, we can teach the standards. They're a, which doesn't work. It doesn't work. And um, and is very, and you know, it's frustrating for me because I want to give access to my kids and I want to get, you know, give them access to the general curriculum.

Tim Villegas (01:00:02):

And I have, you know, w when I have k through five and um, and they, you know, they want me to teach a lesson that is k through five. And I mean, it is, it is nearly impossible. It's so hard. And you know, and I'm in, I'm not educator, I'm not against alternate assessment know, like I write, but I am, I am. The way that we're kind of doing it, especially in Georgia, I'm showing my hand, you know, the, the Georgia Department of Ed if you're listening, but this is, you know, it's, it's definitely very difficult and I know that other states are feeling the same the same way.

Cheryl Jorgensen (01:00:45):

Yeah. There's some states whose altered assessments are very rigorous and, and you know, there's the two national consortia that are developing a new alternate assessments based on the common core standards. They're very rigorous. You almost can't tell them apart from the course, you know, the Gen ed standards, but kids are given a variety of ways. They're taught them in a variety of ways and they're given a variety of ways to show what they know. So universal design.

Tim Villegas (01:01:12):

Absolutely. Okay. Well, um, this has been a wonderful conversation, cody Jorgensen. Thank you so much for taking so much time and really developing that, the topics and stuff and

Tim Villegas (01:01:25):

uh, I wish you all the best and love to have another conversation. Teachers. Great. I would look forward to it. Excellent. Okay, good. All right. That concludes this edition that the police had podcast. For more information about. Cheryl Jorgenson, you can visit her website, Cheryl Jorgenson.com, or search for her. Ask Cheryl posts on thinking inclusive. Remember, you can always find us on twitter at think, underscore inclusive for on the web. Had seen conclusive data us. Visit our sponsor at Brooke's Publishing Dot Com and received 25 percent off your order using the Promo code t I m b e d 25, and today's show is produced by myself talking to USB headphones, a Mac book pro, Garageband and a skype account bumper music by Jose Gomez with a song press. You can find it on itunes. You can also subscribe to the podcast via itunes music store or podomatic.com, the largest community of independent podcasters on the planet from Marietta, Georgia. Please join us again on the thinking collusive podcast. Thanks for your time and attention.

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