



## The Think Inclusive Podcast

### Bonus Episode

#### The Best of the TI Podcast (Volume One)

##### Tim Villegas (00:00):

Hello and welcome to a very special bonus episode of the Think Inclusive podcast presented by MCIE. I am your host, Tim Villegas. This podcast features conversations and commentary with thought leaders and inclusive education and community advocacy. Think Inclusive exists to build bridges between parents, educators, and disability rights advocates to promote inclusion for all students. That's right, y'all. All Means all. To find out more about who we are and what we do, go to [thinkinclusive.us](https://thinkinclusive.us), the official blog of MCIE. Check us out on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

##### Tim Villegas (00:55):

Today, I'm coming to you from my neighborhood culdesac. Like many of you out there in listener land, the Coronavirus pandemic has caused me to change some of my habits. And one of them is to go walking around my neighborhood. I try to do it every day, but there are some days where I get too engrossed with my work. And I even forget to take a lunch from time to time. As I moved into my new role as director of communications for MCIE this year, I had to be intentional about making time in my day to get some steps in. What new habits have you made this year?

##### Tim Villegas (01:35):

Well, today we are bringing you clips from four previous interviews and one previously unpublished interview. In fact, it was my very first interview. Essentially, it's a "best of" episode. Today, you'll hear from Paula Kluth, Dan Habib, Julie Causton, Nicole Eredics, and my friend and colleague Scott. I'll set up the clips before they play. But before we get to that, I want you to do something for us: become a patron of the Think Inclusive podcast. And when you do, you will get access to patron-only posts, unedited interviews, and more go to [patreon.com/thininclusive](https://patreon.com/thininclusive) podcast. That's [patreon.com/thinkininclusivepodcast](https://patreon.com/thinkininclusivepodcast) to become a patron today. Help us reach our goal to reach 50 patrons, and we will produce one additional podcast episode per month only for our patrons. Your contribution helps us with the cost of audio production, transcription, and the promotion of the Think Inclusive podcast. Thank you for helping us equip more people to promote and sustain inclusive education. So stick around, after the break: the best of the Think Inclusive podcast.

##### Tim Villegas (03:18):

How do you know you're an inclusionist? In 1997, Ellen Brantlinger from Indiana University first used the term "inclusionist," which for many means someone who wants to get rid of special education. Decades of research show better outcomes for people with disabilities when they are included and authentic inclusion is happening in schools and districts around the country and the world, some nearing 90% inclusion rates or above for many years. This progress did not just happen, but is the result of careful planning led by educational visionaries and the implementation of strategies that promote effective

inclusive education. It's time to bring back the moniker of inclusionist to meet a collaborator for inclusive practices. Not simply someone who wants to throw the whole system away without replacing it with something better. If this resonates with you, you are an inclusionist. And do we have the newsletter for you! The Weeklyish is for inclusionists. Subscribe at [weeklyish.substack.com](http://weeklyish.substack.com).

**Tim Villegas (04:54):**

In 2013, I spoke with author, speaker, and all around amazing person, Paula Kluth about her book, "Don't We Already Do Inclusion?" Here is a clip of our conversation.

**Tim Villegas (05:09):**

Well, let's get right into it. The reason I asked you to be on the program on the podcast is to talk about your book. Of course, we have a lot of other things that, you know, we can talk about. But first I'd like to say I love the title of the book, "Don't We Already Do Inclusion?" Do you find that in your trainings or in conversations, that you were answering this question a lot and what would be like the impetus for you writing this book in the first place?

**Paula Kluth (05:43):**

Well, you know, first of all, I do love kind of like clever titles and they're memorable, but a lot of them do come out of conversations that I've been having. And this, you know, came up a lot in doing a lot of work with teachers and administrators, where, especially when I was having the privilege of working with schools that were sophisticated, that had been doing the work for quite some time. And so I had been spending a lot of time, a lot of my career helping folks move out of, you know, settings that were segregated or self-contained and moving into inclusive environments. But I began to realize that, you know, that sometimes that I wasn't having a discussion with folks who were already sort of seen as having inclusive models. And I thought, you know, it's time to maybe address some of the work that is happening or not happening in schools that already have an identity of being inclusive, but, you know, may not realize or may not have the tools or may not have the awareness that, you know, that really in the work of inclusive education, like in the work of education in general, like in the work of parenting or, you know, that the work has never really done.

**Paula Kluth (06:56):**

And you know, so some of the things that came up in the writing, you know, the sort of impetus for writing were, you know, being in schools where, you know, that the school was known for inclusion sometimes for a decade or two, and it had that reputation. Yet, there were kids with certain labels who had never been brought back from private placements and who were never thought of as candidates for inclusion, you know, that kind of thing. Or I would be in a school where they would have a lot of great energy around certain elements of inclusivity so that they were maybe great supports and good co-teaching models and things like that. But some students sort of received a lot of education in a room called the inclusion room. So I used to joke and say, "if you have a room called the inclusion room, you're probably not an inclusive school." But you know, just things that are, you know, just for all of us, you know, things that all of us said, no matter what part in the journey we're at could probably sit back and be a little reflective. And that's really what the book is about.

**Tim Villegas (08:02):**

What I think is interesting about what you said about systems, schools, districts that have had a history of being quote unquote "inclusive," is that those systems kind of have their own idea of what inclusion

is, you know, and so they play it out, they play it out. However, however, that culture I guess, deems fit. I remember when I was doing my teacher training and we went to a school this was when I was living in California in Orange County. And we went to a school that was, that was a model for inclusion. Yet they did not have any students with significant disabilities. And at the, at the time, I didn't even think that was weird because I never I had never worked with any students with significant disabilities. So it was just like, "Oh, okay, well, you know, they go somewhere else." But it is interesting that, that certain schools I guess define inclusion a particular way. Do you have a, this isn't, you know, this isn't necessarily something that I was going to talk about, but do you have a definition of inclusion?

**Paula Kluth (09:31):**

Well, I think about inclusion, you know, I, this is not, I wouldn't say this is my definition alone, but I think a way that a lot of people think about inclusion in this that had been involved in this movement, think about it with what I would call "the big I." So instead of thinking about inclusion, like inclusion is bringing kids with disabilities out of segregated environments, into welcoming common environments, inclusive environments, that's sort of the, our original sort of way of thinking about this. But I think a lot of people, it's just not mine, but this "big I" is about inclusion. In other words, inclusion around race and ethnicity and sexual orientation and disability and ability and gender, and really thinking about inclusion is really about making schools you know appropriately challenging, safe, welcoming for every student.

**Paula Kluth (10:27):**

And part of that, you know, part of that definition is that students are educated together. They're educated, side-by-side with their neighbors and their, you know, siblings and classmates in this, in these common environments. And that we don't have classrooms only for certain kinds of learners. That doesn't mean that we can't have small group instruction. That doesn't mean that we can't have you know, students working independently on projects. It doesn't mean that we can't have kids grouped in really interesting ways, including across grade levels and things like that. Kids can still get all kinds of personalized instruction, but that we don't want to see spaces that are designated just for certain learners that other kids can't access.

**Tim Villegas (11:17):**

In 2014, filmmaker Dan Habib was promoting his film, "Who Cares About Kelsey?" which documented the lives of students with emotional and behavioral challenges. Here is a clip of my interview with Dan.

**Tim Villegas (11:35):**

I'm hearing a lot of different kind of buzzwords for those who are very familiar with inclusion. You know, I'm hearing positive behavior, intervention supports, I'm hearing universal design for learning you know, I'm hearing person centered planning. Those are all things that as believer in inclusion, you know, for all kids are really, really important. How did this particular high school get all of that support all at once. And you know, like you said, Kelsey was a lucky recipient of being in that environment. And then also you being involved with this film, you know, highlighting the changes, you know, that affected her and the school. And so how, I mean, how does, how does that happen exactly?

**Dan Habib (12:25):**

Sure. Well, it can happen in a lot of different ways, depending on the school. One thing I will say is, as I've talked, a lot of people around the country, money is not the biggest factor here. Schools, transformation, inclusion. I mean, yes, education needs money. No, there's no doubt about it, right? So

you want to be able to have a good staffing ratio. You want to have properly trained staff. You want to have the technology, of course. And that's just about good education. What I think I found makes the biggest difference is great leadership. And sometimes that is a great principal. I think it's very difficult to have this type of positive transformation and progress without strong leaders. And you also need an attitude within a school that we are just, we're about supporting every kid and not giving up any kid. And we're going to presume that every kid is competent. We're going to make sure everyone in that building knows that every kid can be successful. And then all of us understand that, listen, a lot of us struggle when we're younger, whether we have a disability or not, it will creep in our life, really struggled. And you know, you got to get kids through those bumps.

**Dan Habib (13:26):**

So specifically in Somersworth, they did have, there was a New Hampshire department of education grant that incentivized other supports because that's an approach that seen as a practice that's effective across the country. And maybe we can talk to us about what, what it is in the minutes, but once that was incentivized, they were able to get some training for their staff and that was certainly helpful. I mean, the fact that there was somebody who helped facilitate the process from young age student with a disability was extremely helpful.

**Dan Habib (13:59):**

But I'd say really it has to be, the capacity has to be built internally. And ultimately that's what happened so much because they weren't relying on outside consultants for years. They were, they, they took this on themselves and they learned that really what it's about when you look at positive behavioral supports with PBIs is looking at the school and saying, listen, 80% of the students here are going to be successful. If we have a really positive, healthy school climate and culture and good instruction, right about 80% of success. Now that's easier said than done. So a lot of the focus of their implementation of PBIS was about working on that school culture and making it a place that kids felt safe. The staff felt safe. They felt like a strong sense of community. There was a feeling that the spec, it was consistency around this plan and language around discipline and all those important things.

**Dan Habib (14:48):**

And there are, then there are maybe 10 or 15% of who need something more, you know, they need extra instructional support. So they might need to check in with someone in the morning and check in with someone at the end of the day, you're just check in, check out. That's what PBIs language is called, kind of that, that yellow tier of support, and kids who might need something extra. And then there are the Kelsey's of the world who have everything going against them, and they're going to need intensive supports where they will either drop out of school. In many cases are going to farm them out to, you know, a quote unquote "special schools" because of behavior problems, which is often, you know, just around lots of kids with really challenging behavior. And that's just not a really good roadmap.

**Dan Habib (15:31):**

So, you know, Kelsey with a kid that has severe ADHD, she also deals with depression and anxiety. She was very public about the fact in the film that she was sexually abused as a kid, she was self mutilating you know, eighth grade, ninth grade. Her mother was very heavy into drugs so that kind of emotionally disconnected all of her siblings pretty much. You know, many of them had teen pregnancies or didn't make it through school. So she had, there was a lot going on in her life that was putting on her on a direction towards dropping out, probably incarceration, public drug abuse and pregnancy. And the film

is really about how the school worked with her to change her trajectory to the point now where she's taking college classes trained to be a firefighter and traveling around the country with me on this film tour you know, hopefully opening people's minds.

**Tim Villegas (16:29):**

Also in 2014, Julie Causton and I discussed a research project called "Schools of Promise" and why it was so important to understand how systems change is vital for promoting and sustaining inclusive education. Here is a clip of our conversation.

**Tim Villegas (16:52):**

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

**Julie Causton (17:33):**

Yeah, definitely. So schools of promise began a while ago, almost maybe eight years ago. And my colleagues at Syracuse University and I were teaching about how to create inclusive schools with our undergraduates. We teach teachers how to teach general and special education in inclusive settings. And we were placing our students in city schools nearby Syracuse University. And we were finding that we weren't seeing very good models of inclusive education locally. So what the concern was that we were teaching them something that they couldn't see in practice. So right away, we decided that one of the best things to do would be to begin to look at the schools that were currently placed, where we were placing our students and look to see if we could work with the schools to become more inclusive. And so what we did as we went to the superintendent of Syracuse city schools at the time, and we asked if anybody was interested in being involved in our project.

**Julie Causton (18:34):**

We ended up getting a lot of schools that were interested and we worked with those schools that had 80% or more of the teachers really onboard with becoming more inclusive. And we had done some surveys and things to figure that out. So we ended up starting with two different schools in Syracuse. And basically when we say school reform, what we mean is that we worked with the entire school staff. And it was a pretty typical school, Tim. It would've been, you know, a school that had pull-out classrooms where kids would be pulled out like resource rooms. And then there were segregated classrooms in those schools. And then there were also some, some classrooms that were more inclusive. And in order to be involved in the partnership, we said that they would be willing to get rid of their segregated classrooms and their resource from pull-out programs and all children with all disability labels would be included in the general education content curriculum.

**Julie Causton (19:31):**

And so we'd be, we began work with those schools and we spent about three years, well, more than that three to five years with each school. And we worked alongside them as they restructured their school. And they got rid of their segregated or pullout program. And all the kids with disabilities were in the general ed classrooms. And the work that we did mostly was about professional development and teaching teachers how to create inclusive classrooms, how to differentiate content, how to support kids

with challenging behaviors and how to collaborate effectively with their colleagues. And so that was the work that we had done and it was great work and we really, the schools looked different in terms of no children were segregated any longer, but what surprised us with the research was the academic results.

**Julie Causton (20:24):**

So we went in, you know, much like you, Tim, kind of at your gut level, you think inclusion might be the best idea for children you know, on lots of different levels. I, I knew that to be true, but what we didn't expect in our research was that there was such a great big academic gain for not only children with disabilities, but their peers without disabilities you know, did better in these classrooms. And so that was kind of the bigger surprise in our research study; across reading, across math, across social studies, across science, across state tests, everything we found that kids actually did better academically when they were included. So this research project took us from kind of the social justice reasons of including kids to really academic performance reasons in terms of including kids. And what's interesting is since the schools have promise schools, we've had, I mean the school has been recognized as schools of excellence and things like that, which is great. But the thing that has been really interesting is that we've been able to replicate those same results in multiple schools across the country. We're not calling it schools of promise, but we're doing a lot of school reform work like that, and we're finding the same academic achievement results. And so now what's interesting is a lot of times when I'm talking to administrators about why to include students, I'm actually using the academic achievement gains as the number one reason to include kids with disabilities.

**Tim Villegas (21:58):**

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

**Julie Causton (22:06):**

Definitely. I mean, so everybody right now is interested in, you know, the bottom line, their test scores, their cut scores, the common core, making sure that everybody has access to that. And so when we can actually show with real numbers and real children and real schools, and I don't want to say these schools are perfect, they're still not perfect. They're decent schools with great teachers working hard. But the point is, I'm getting a lot of leverage around inclusion because we've got hard data that shows that children do better when they're in inclusive classrooms than they do when they're sent down the hall or whether they are really segregated and separated where they're in for an hour and then out for another hour and then back in, and then back out, because what we find is students missed so much during those transition times in and out of the classroom. And so it only makes sense, right, that students that spend their days in the common core, learning along with their peers and really creative, interesting ways they're going to do better academically.

**Tim Villegas (23:15):**

One of my first guests on the podcast was fellow blogger and podcaster Nicole Eredics. In this clip from 2012, we discussed one thing that worked for her in her inclusive classroom.

**Tim Villegas (23:31):**

Maybe there's a teacher out there listening who's kind of trying to try and get this started here in, in the US and maybe they're trying to do some inclusion or maybe they are an inclusion teacher in a co-taught situation. Is there one kind of thing that just really worked for you when you were in the classroom that you could share with all of us?

**Nicole Eredics (23:57):**

I have a lot of strategies, but I would say that the one thing that really worked for me, you have to bring the parents on board. You have to start the school year off. Don't wait for that back to school night, you know, get a newsletter out to your class parents right away, invite them in. I would have what I would call an intake conference, actually, every classroom, my school had it. And you just sat and you listened to the parent talk for about 10 minutes or so about their child. And they would tell you about the child. Mike's strengths, weaknesses. You know, you got to explain your program. It was a face to face. And then right off the bat, they feel as you know, they're your partner in the child's education.

**Nicole Eredics (24:41):**

And parents have a lot of as you know, you know, have a lot of influence in the school and in your classroom. And if you can get them on board and behind you with inclusion and, you know, they can support you in so many ways and, you know, be there to help you as you differentiate your lessons, be there to support you on a field trip, or be there to help you create materials for, you know, the various children in your class. So they're really your extra support system that you have access to. And you know, I use parents all the time in the classroom. I don't know how, what type of participation you have in, in, in your own classroom. But I find that, you know, once you get them in there and show them that you, you know, you want to be partners with them and you appreciate their help and you want their input and you're, you know, both working to the success of the child and, you know, you definitely have their, have their trust and their interest and their support for the remainder of the year. So that was the big one for me, you know, and it was a continual communication too through the school year. It wasn't just a one-off deal. So there's no doubt about it. Inclusion, I mean, it takes a lot of, a lot of energy, a lot of time and, you know, but it's worth it. And the more support you that you have the better.

**Tim Villegas (26:19):**

Finally, when I started the podcast, I did a test interview with my friend and colleague Scott, who was, and still is a general education PE teacher for an elementary school. We talk about what he learned about students with significant disabilities being in his class. Here is our conversation.

**Tim Villegas (26:41):**

What you were, what I heard you say before was you normally never saw kids that attended my room in general ed PE up until a couple of years ago. Is that right?

**Scott (26:56):**

Correct.

**Tim Villegas (26:58):**

And so how has having the kids in my room be in gen ed? How has that changed your perspective of them? If at all?

**Scott (27:14):**

I don't know if it's changed my perspective of them. I mean, it's obviously gotten me more, more exposure with them and I think, I feel, I think I can understand them better and have a better sense of what they're going to be able to do and how they're going to be able to do it. And then I can, I can help their assistants that come in. They're para pros that come in with them with sort of the strategies of

what I feel like they, you know, can do or can't do, or, you know, I adapt it, you know, "Hey, you know, instead of rolling this kind of ball, I'll give you just kind of a ball and, and roll this kind of a ball," or, you know, whatever.

**Scott (27:50):**

And even though they use that use different equipment still doesn't mean they have to be on their own. They can still be in, you know, if we split up into groups, so I don't know, four or five, whatever, they can be in a group of five with other gen ed kids. And when it's their turn, or when the ball comes to them, we can just use a different ball. Or a lot of times the group that they're in, your student and the other four general ed students, they'll just use, they'll all fine using whatever ball that we have to adapt it to. And, you know, when they're fine with that, that means the kids don't care, the kids are happy to help out. And that is, I think the general ed kids get as much, if not more out of, you know, your kids being in there than I think your kids do. It shows them that there are different, you know, differences and you have to help people with differences and you have to adapt and change and you have to be okay with that.

**Scott (28:49):**

You know? So I think it's, I think it's a good situation all around. I will tell you, you know, my first experience with any sort of, any sort of kids with disabilities, I was a summer camp instructor at, over in Tucker. And there were several a wheelchair that was there. And I remember I'll never forget this because I just, I felt like such a, such a small little person, but I had to take all one of the students in a wheelchair to the bathroom. I've never done it before. And I said, okay, I'll do it. You know, let's go. And he was a bright kid, got him in there. I had to pick him up, had to, you know, help him with his pants going down and holding him and, you know, all this kind of stuff. And I put him back his chair and I kind of jokingly said, "Oh, how did I do for my first time?" And he looked at me like I was the biggest klutz in the world. And he looked at me and said, "Oh, pretty good." And, and I knew I didn't, I mean, I was horrible at it. And I was like, I'm doing it. And here's a, here's, here's a child in a weird wheelchair trying to make me feel better about myself. I said, I said, my gosh, you know, I think I'll never forget that because I mean, you know, I not to be too graphic, but, you know, there were some, you know, sprinkling here and there and on stuff. And, you know, he's trying to make me feel better about myself. And I was like, okay, that just puts me in my place. So, you know, that was a great experience for me.

**Scott (30:29):**

And that's what, that's what I think the kids at Kincaid get by being around so many kids with so many disabilities and special needs and challenges, and, you know, it's just, it's eye-opening and it's great. So when they go out in the real world and they, you know, see someone who might be a little different, they're not going to think that much of it. So I think it's great.

**Tim Villegas (30:52):**

Right. Right. So I mean, you, and I know that Kincaid is is a very unique place not just in Cobb County, but really kind of, with my experience and what the stories I've heard from all across the country. Kincaid is a very, very unique place and how we deal with inclusion, what we're actually willing to, to make it work. What do you think is vital for any school? Like if you were to give, if a principal is listening or if an assistant principal or a superintendent, or if someone in administration is listening to this podcast, what is one or two things that you think is just vital if they want inclusion to be successful at their school?



**Scott (31:56):**

Well, I think you have to, you know, the word inclusion you have to include, you have to, you, you can't, you have to make their lives in that school and their school experience as close and as mirror image as you would any other student, you know. And I think, I think the adaptive PE teachers, you know, not that whole thing changing, I think that forced us to do more. Obviously, I think it's forced a lot of other schools to do some, you know, getting those kids in there. And, and you know what I mean? I mean, you know, I'm sure you've some stuff on your website about what you're doing in your classrooms, and you're taking your kids and getting them out into other general ed classrooms. And, you know, this, this, this past year, we've seen a huge difference in some of your students just by putting them out there and putting them in there with kids and letting them take whatever they're going to take from it. I mean, it's been an amazing result of what they absorbed and how they can relay what they absorb to us if you give them the chance. I think you try and make it as mirror image of any other student, their experience, their lunchtime, their enrichment time, their recess time. And you just get them involved with the school as much as you can.

**Tim Villegas (33:38):**

That will do it for this very special bonus "best of" episode of the Think Inclusive podcast. Subscribe to the Think Inclusive podcast via Apple Podcasts, Google Play, Stitcher, or on the Anchor app. And while you're there, give us a review so more people can find us. Have a question or comment, email us at [podcast@thinkinclusive.us](mailto:podcast@thinkinclusive.us). We love to know that you're listening. Thank you to patrons, Tori D, Veronica E, and Kathleen T for their continued support of the podcast. And just a reminder, help us reach our goal to reach 50 patrons by going to [patreon.com/thinkinclusivpodcast](https://patreon.com/thinkinclusivpodcast). This podcast is a production of MCIE, where we envision the society where neighborhood schools welcome all learners and create the foundation for inclusive communities. Learn more at [mcie.org](https://mcie.org). We'll be back in January with our next podcast of season eight. Thanks for your time and attention and Merry Christmas, happy Hanukkah, happy Kwanzaa, happy winter solstice, mele Kalikimaka, and happy holidays.

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