REVITALIZING SPECIAL EDUCATION

Revolution, Devolution and Evolution

JAMES M. KAUFFMAN

Revitalizing Special Education

This page intentionally left blank

Revitalizing Special Education: Revolution, Devolution, and Evolution

EDITED BY

JAMES M. KAUFFMAN
University of Virginia, USA

United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2022

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80117-495-4 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-80117-494-7 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-80117-496-1 (Epub)

ISOQAR certified Management System, awarded to Emerald for adherence to Environmental standard ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Table of Contents

Dedicated to the memory of three colleagues whose work is indispensable in revitalizing special education, as they exemplified the best thinking and practices of the profession:

Barbara D. Bateman
Gary M. Sasso
Richard L. Simpson

This page intentionally left blank

List of Figures and Tables

Chapter 8

List of Contributors

Nicholas A. Gage	WestEd, USA
Cecelia A. Gloski	The Pennsylvania State University, USA
Betty A. Hallenbeck	Aspergers/Autism Network, USA
BeckyAnn Harker	Kent State University, USA
James M. Kauffman	University of Virginia, USA
Timothy J. Landrum	University of Louisville, USA
Tricia McCollum	Kent State University, USA
Melanie S. Meyer	Johns Hopkins University, USA
Paul L. Morgan	The Pennsylvania State University, USA
Corey Peltier	University of Oklahoma, USA
Jonathan A. Plucker	Johns Hopkins University, USA
Angela Tuttle Prince	Iowa State University, USA
Paige C. Pullen	University of Florida, USA
Mary Rose Sallese	University of Alabama at Birmingham, USA
Jason C. Travers	Temple University, USA
Kimberly J. Vannest	University of Vermont, USA
Yangyang Wang	The Pennsylvania State University, USA
Andrew L. Wiley	Kent State University, USA
Adrienne D. Woods	SRI International, USA
Mitchell L. Yell	University of South Carolina, USA

This page intentionally left blank

Foreword

This book is about revitalizing special education so that it becomes universally accepted and provides students with educational disabilities (SWED) with the most effective education for optimizing their social, educational, and vocational outcomes and ensures their maximum inclusion in their communities postschool. The book is considered to be needed because special education appears to have been "devolving" rather than "evolving" due to disparaging comments made about it over many decades, and these have damaged its public image.

It is suggested that revitalizing it may require a "revolution" in thinking about what it means – thinking clearly about what special education is and does. This will require a recommitment to its scientific base, focusing on Enlightenment thinking and research evidence at a time when these concepts are being challenged as universal requirements for civilized societies.

It is considered that the challenges to special education have come about because of "zombie" ideas (Krugman, 2020), that is, ideas that go on and on and just won't die, regardless of lack of evidence or sound logic or any redeeming value. They're ideas that are clearly wrong, illogical, and inconsistent with what we know. Yet these ideas live on, maintaining adherents and often gaining popular support.

An example of a political zombie idea is Trump's "big lie" that the 2020 US election was stolen from him, which lives on and on, and is believed by millions of Americans despite extensive undisputed evidence that it is not true. A consequence of this was that many believers of this zombie idea stormed the US Capital in an attempted coup.

A zombie idea in education, that goes on and on despite zero evidence supporting it, is that full inclusion of all children with SWED in mainstream classes can successfully replace all special education provision. This zombie first appeared in the 1970s and has persisted ever since, even though attempts at establishing full inclusion have not produced any evidence of its successful implementation or evidence that it has been able to provide effective education for all children with SWED in mainstream classrooms (e.g., Fuchs et al., 2022). As a consequence of the continued promotion of this zombie idea, some countries that have well-developed special education systems, such as Ireland and North Macedonia, are reported to be considering abandoning these in favor of implementing full inclusion.

These zombies live on typically because vested interests promote propaganda campaigns aimed at making sure that reasoned voices challenging them are

silenced, for example, by smearing these voices with unsavory slurs. In the case of special education this includes accusing it of denying children with SWED their human rights.

It is essential to fight the zombies, hoping logic and evidence – Enlightenment truth – will keep them quiet for as long as possible in order to weaken their abilities to influence people. A key aspect of fighting zombies is producing books like this that challenge them using logic, science, and evidence. The contributors to this book provide logical insights, scientifically based theories, and research evidence to help in this fight.

The book is forward-looking, with an aim to change the trajectory of special education toward greater, more generalized progress. It accepts that reforms are needed, but considers that these reforms must be based on a logical scientific approach with a specific focus on evidence-based practice, not on unrealistic ideological visions such as full inclusion.

The authors accept that inclusion of *many* SWED in general education is important, when it is appropriate. However, Kauffman and his colleagues are clearly under no illusion about the seriousness of the zombie threat to special education throughout the world. The chances of special education's survival as a distinct and separate part of public education have been diminished by statements from the United Nations and other agencies that have supported an international emphasis on inclusion of all students with disabilities in regular public school classes. As a result, disenchantment with special education has led many to give up on it rather than retain it as an idea that needs development and working to make it everything it can be.

After decades of withering criticism from its own scholars and practitioners and the unrealistic assumption that including literally all students in regular public school classes is going to be best, it's time for revitalizing special education. Rational educators recognize both special education's indispensability in public education for *all* as well as its areas for improvement. They seek, as Kauffman urges in this book, to make special education the valuable and effective service it should be by focusing on special *instruction* rather than on where exceptional students are placed, which is a key aspect of a revitalized special education.

Garry Hornby,
Emeritus Professor,
University of Plymouth, UK

References

Fuchs, D., Mirowitz, H. C., & Gilbert, J. K. (2022, June 17). Exploring the truth of Michael Yudin's claim: The more time students with disabilities spend in general classrooms the better they do academically. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1177/10442073221097713

Krugman, P. (2020). *Arguing with zombies: Economics, politics, and the fight for a better future*. W. W. Norton.

Preface

Special and general education must come to terms with realities involving students, classrooms, schools, and systems. Both special and general public education have serious faults, and both need substantial improvement. Neither will be improved by abandoning or ignoring the other, nor will combining them make public education better. General and special educators sometimes seem engaged in a shared delusion or *folie à deux* that the two can be successfully combined. Those who believe "general" and "special" are terms no longer needed are sadly deluded. General education needs to change, too, but this book is about revitalizing *special* education, not general education.

For far too long, education has been built on fantasy, speculation, philosophy, and admirable intention grounded in neither reliable empirical data nor rational thought about the data we have nor the problems we face. Those who comprehend the real worlds of students and teaching understand that the probability of transforming general education so that it serves *all* students well without special education is vanishingly small. Those who understand the nature and range of disabilities do not get caught up in the fantasy that *all* students who have them can be incorporated in ordinary public education classes for at least part of the school day or that most SWED can most appropriately be placed in such classes *all* of the time. Facing these realities is difficult but necessary. It is time for Enlightenment thinking and reliable scientific data to better implement what we know and to find out more about what we don't.

A basic premise of this book is that special education has been devolving rather than evolving. The devolution – reversal, slow decay, or unraveling, the opposite of evolution – is not uniform throughout the world. Some nations only recently or only now are developing universal public education systems. They are being urged to construct fully inclusive education without the mention of special education, appropriate education, alternative placement (or education), or least restrictive environment (Anastasiou et al., 2018). In all nations, the idealized or intellectualized vision of total inclusion is being confronted by the reality of the need for special education, specialist education, or alternative education for some exceptional children (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020).

Both the concept and the practice of special education needs to be evolving, but that will require revolutionary changes in the way they are talked about and done. Disparaging comments about special education over many decades have damaged both its public image and its ability to help exceptional learners. Inappropriate comparisons of special education to racial segregation have been

particularly illogical and nefarious. Such criticisms of special education reveal catawampus conceptual models.

Some models of special education are decidedly nonscientific or even antiscientific (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2011, 2013; Kauffman et al., 2017). Although writing about genetics, Harden (2021) had some comments relevant to models of special education:

> Ultimately, *all* interventions and policies are built on a model about how the world works: "If you change *x*, then *y* will happen." A model of the world that pretends all people are... the same... is a wrong model of how the world works. The more often our models of the world are wrong, the more often we will fail in designing interventions and policies that do what they intend to do, and the more often we will face the unintended consequences of not investing in something more effective.
>
> (pp. 184–185)

In too many instances, special education has strayed from the scientific model (to which Harden, 2021, refers) of figuring out difficult educational problems. Scheibel et al. (2022) described the probable economic costs of ignoring scientific evidence, compounding the ethical and moral costs of implementing interventions that lack the support of reliable empirical evidence.

This book is about revitalizing special education so that it provides more obvious and reliable help to students with disabilities regardless of their color or other excuses for discrimination. Revitalizing it will require a second revolution in thinking about what it means – thinking clearly about what special education is and does. After decades of derogation, roughly corresponding in time to the "Reagan Revolution" in the United States (i.e., the late 1970s to early 1980s), special education needs revitalizing in America and elsewhere to become more consistently the helpful service deserved by those who need it. Special education needs examination, including self-appraisal. Many questions about special education arise, including these:

- Is it something that should be jettisoned, or is it something that should be saved and improved?
- Is it something that should be merged with general education? Why, or why not?
- When does the unfairness called discrimination involve withholding needed services?
- Is special education oppressive, and if so how?
- Under what conditions is it appropriate to call something "segregated" rather than "dedicated?"

This book is not an attack on people or their intentions. Good intentions underlie the work of those proposing general education for all and the elimination of special education. Extremely important is recognition of the fundamental

goal – making the education of *all* students as appropriate and effective as possible. The important questions are about how best to do that and whether it can be done always or only in general education environments or without special education.

Neither is this book an attempt to silence anyone's expression of alternative views about what education, general or special, is or does by necessity. People have a right to express their ideas as best they can, and heterodoxy, not orthodoxy, is something to be prized. Nevertheless, this does not mean that all ideas are equally good or useful, and it is not an appeal to be nonevaluative or nondiscriminatory of propositions. It is an appeal to logic and empirical evidence in the Enlightenment tradition, not an appeal to mindlessness. If logic and Enlightenment ideas about the constitution of knowledge are rejected as "orthodoxy," then "bullshit" (Frankfurt, 2005) is undetectable and truth is unknowable (Blackburn, 2005; Neiman, 2008; Rauch, 2021).

Certainly, improvement of general education would make the work of special educators easier. However, the inclusion of more SWED in general education also makes general educators' practice more complicated. Perhaps the inclusion of *all* SWED in general education will make general education teachers' tasks impossible for the vast majority – especially, if *all* children are to be taught *well*.

This book is intended to refute ideas that will not bear the careful scrutiny and logical thinking that a science of appropriate education for all requires. It is intended to do this in plain, straightforward language. Psychologist Dutton wrote, "The function of language, we shall learn, is actually extremely basic. It is, fundamentally, to differentiate 'this' from 'that.'" (Dutton, 2020, p. 11). Better thinking about what we describe, conclude, say, recommend, and write is what this book is intended to encourage. Too often, our thinking about education issues is not as clear, logical, and evidence-based as it should be and is, instead, based on emotions, biases, or ideologies defended with religious fervor (Kauffman et al., in press). Lloyd (2022) pointed out a common delusion of those of us who have a scientific orientation and try to be logical: believing that we have explained the cause of something because we have described that something. We must be careful how and what we think.

Unfortunately, language – whether plain and straightforward or obtuse and convoluted, and whether written or oral – requires citing the works of individuals who promote or promoted bad ideas. The chapters of this book attack bad *ideas* that refuse to die (what Krugman, 2020, calls "zombies"; see Kauffman & Hornby, in press, for discussion of zombies in special education). Separating persons from ideas, just as separating persons from disabilities, is difficult but necessary to achieve actual social justice. Nevertheless, people should be accountable for what they say and write (Krugman, 2020; Rauch, 2021).

This book is not an appeal to "return to the good old days" of special education. It is not the nostalgia that Applebaum (2020) describes so bitingly. It is not a rejection of the notion that change can be very good, nor is it an assault on progress. Neither is it a denial of the fact that progress has been made in some areas of concept and practice.

Rather, this book is forward-looking, meant to change the trajectory of special education toward greater, more generalized progress. It is an attempt to lessen the chances that change is mistaken for progress. It does recognize that change is necessary, but also that change is not necessarily progress and that some changes are actually regressive, even if they seem progressive at first blush. It is about changes needed to make special education substantively better, not necessarily to make it more palatable to everyone regardless of their beliefs.

This book is not antireform or antiinclusion. Reforms are needed, but reforms that are movement toward better education, not just change. Inclusion of *many* SWED in general education is important, and it can be appropriate (Hornby & Kauffman, 2021). Inclusion of *all* SWED in general education is not only illegal in the United States under IDEA but an extreme idea that is bound to be counterproductive anywhere in the world (Anastasiou et al., 2018; Kauffman, Ahrbeck, et al., 2020; Kauffman, Anastasiou, et al., 2020). Probably, it is good to keep in mind that the number of cases required to refute the claim of literally *all* is precisely one. More than a single student for whom a separate, dedicated educational environment is most appropriate can be found among school-age youngsters. Probably, there are many such students, enough to demand the continuation of a continuum of alternative placements for education.

The authors contributing to this book help us understand the true meaning and necessity of special education, and its wise ideas and practices that need to be revitalized. The contributors to this volume understand the reality of the threats special education faces and are committed to making special education better for students and their families. They are neither Pollyannas nor confirmed, biased pessimists. All, except myself, are among those most likely to influence special education's future.

In the opening chapter, I sketch the difficulties special education has faced since the 1970s, how special education has fallen into disrepute, and the revolutionary changes in thinking needed for its revitalization. This is followed by Vannest, Sallese, and Peltier's explanation of how special education must be a visible, identifiable part of a system of public education. It continues with Yell and Prince's observations of special education law and why appropriate education for all requires a continuum of alternative placements. Landrum addresses the foundations of special education and explains why they must include both scientific evidence and logic. He explains not only what science is but also why science is often rejected as our best bet for making progress. Pullen then explains why science and logic must be the basis for instruction. Individualized, appropriate, effective instruction is the foremost idea of special education. Travers notes why special education includes things neither needed by nor appropriate for *all* students and full inclusion is both illegal and unwise. Wiley, Harker, and McCollum describe how tiers could be made things we won't end up seeing as just another fad or a way of getting rid of special education. Gloski Woods, Wang, and Morgan provide a study of special education's effectiveness, which is very difficult, if not impossible, to assess with irrefutable statistical rigor (see Kauffman et al., 2022 for further discussion of a similar problem). Nevertheless, Gloski et al. found a way to make the best possible statistical comparisons that used various

experimental designs. They found that SWED who received special education, compared to SWED who did not receive it, were better off. These findings should give pause to those who want to rid schools of special education. Meyer and Plucker detail how students with advanced learning needs, but not having a disability, have been neglected. Hallenbeck gives us her personal perspective on how special education has deteriorated since she began teaching and what changes are needed to make the lives of individuals with disabilities better. Finally, Gage speculates about the possible, alternative futures of special education. He ends by referring to Vonnegut's (1961) brilliant short story, *Harrison Bergeron*, illustrating the pig-headedly cruel and illogical notion that all diversities are the same and deserve the same treatment – naturally, a notion propounded in the name of equality or equity.

Together, we hope we will see the incremental changes that will make special education's future more certain to improve students' lives. We hope special education will become what it should be, not an ill-defined, unidentifiable, or veiled aspect of all public education but a well-defined, valued, even treasured part of making public education appropriate for all, focused on appropriate instruction and including all SWED. Special educators should be unafraid, even proud, to speak special education's name. Changes like these would be revolutionary in the best sense of that word – radically progressive. Such changes are more likely to occur if appropriate, effective instruction regardless of where it occurs, not the place it is provided, is special education's clear focus and its pride.

JMK
Afton, Virginia
March 2022

References

Anastasiou, D., Gregory, M., & Kauffman, J. M. (2018). Commentary on Article 24 of the CRPD: The right to education. In I. Bantekas, M. Stein, & D. Anastasiou (Eds.), *Commentary on the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities* (pp. 656–704). Oxford University Press.

Anastasiou, D., & Kauffman, J. M. (2011). A social constructionist approach to disability: Implications for special education. *Exceptional Children*, *77*(3), 367–384.

Anastasiou, D., & Kauffman, J. M. (2013). The social model of disability: Dichotomy between impairment and disability. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, *38*(4), 441–459. https://doi.org/10.1093/jmp/jht026

Applebaum, A. (2020). *Twilight of democracy: The seductive lure of authoritarianism*. Doubleday.

Blackburn, S. (2005). *Truth: A guide*. Oxford University Press.

Dutton, K. (2020). *Black-and-white thinking: The burden of a binary brain in a complex world*. Farrer, Straus and Giroux.

Frankfurt, H. G. (2005). *On bullshit*. Princeton University Press.

Harden, K. P. (2021). *The genetic lottery: Why DNA matters for social equality*. Princeton University Press.

Hornby, G., & Kauffman, J. M. (2021). Editorial for special issue, Special and inclusive education: Perspectives, challenges and prospects. *Education Sciences*, *10*(9). https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11070362

Kauffman, J. M., Ahrbeck, B., Anastasiou, D., Badar, J., Felder, M., & Hallenbeck, B. A. (2020). Special education policy prospects: Lessons from social policies past. Exceptionality. https://doi.org/10.1080/09362835.2020.1727326

Kauffman, J. M., Anastasiou, D., Badar, J., & Hallenbeck, B. A. (2020). Becoming your own worst enemy: Converging paths. In C. Boyle, J. Anderson, A. Page, & S. Mavropoulou (Eds.), *Inclusive education: Global issues & controversies*. *Studies in inclusive education* (Vol. 45, pp. 73–88). Brill Sense.

Kauffman, J. M., Anastasiou, D., & Maag, J. W. (2017). Special education at the crossroad: An identity crisis and the need for a scientific reconstruction. *Exceptionality*, *25*(2), 139–155. https://doi.org/10.1080/09362835.2016.1238380

Kauffman, J. M., Badar, J., Wiley, A. L., Anastasiou, D., & Koran, J. (2022). Uncertainty in education: Policy implications. *Journal of Education*. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220574221090283

Kauffman, J. M., Burke, M. C., & Anastasiou, D. (in press). Hard LRE choices in the era of inclusion: Rights and their implications. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*.

Kauffman, J. M., & Hornby, G. (2020). Inclusive vision versus special education reality. *Education Sciences*, *10*(9), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10090258

Kauffman, J. M., & Hornby, G. (in press). Special education's zombies and their consequences. *Exceptionality*.

Koertge, N. (Ed.). (1998). *A house built on sand: Exposing postmodernist myths about science*. Oxford University Press.

Krugman, P. (2020). *Arguing with zombies: Economics, politics, and the fight for a better future*. W. W. Norton.

Lloyd, J. W. (2022, February 16). Descriptions and explanations: When does simply characterizing an event count as explaining why the event happened?. Special Education Today https://www.specialeducationtoday.com/p/descriptions-and-explanations

Rauch, J. (2021). *The constitution of knowledge: A defense of truth*. Brookings Institution Press.

Scheibel, G., Zane, T. L., & Zimmerman, K. N. (2022). An economic evaluation of emerging and ineffective interventions: Examining the role of cost when translating research into practice. *Exceptional Children*. OnLineFirst. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F00144029211073522

Vonnegut, K. (1961, October). Harrison Bergeron. *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *21*(4). https://archive.org/stream/HarrisonBergeron/Harrison%20Bergeron_djvu.txt

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to many people for helping me prepare this book for publication. My advisor in my doctoral program at the University of Kansas, the late Richard J. Whelan, inspired me to be a special educator when I started teaching emotionally disturbed children in 1962 at the Southard School, the children's division of the Menninger Clinic. He later encouraged me to choose special education as a career and to become an advocate for appropriate education of children with disabilities years. Many colleagues at the University of Virginia and other universities, including many of my former students at UVA, have helped me understand more about teaching and what various disabilities require for appropriate instruction. I thank the many individuals who read previous drafts of my work and gave me suggestions for improvement. Most prominent among these is my wife, Jeanmarie Badar, whose quarter century of teaching special education, knowledge of the field of special education, and facility with language, grammar, and clarity of expression made her help invaluable. Garry Hornby was gracious in his agreement to write a foreword for the book. Kim Chadwick was steadfastly wonderful and delightfully pleasant and positive in her encouragement and help in making the book possible.

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 1

This One, Not That One: Toward Revitalizing Special Education

James M. Kauffman

Abstract

Concern about special education's future is widespread. Now there are calls for special education's abandonment or its nonexistence in any environment other than general education (i.e., for full inclusion or some form of general education only). Some advocates for reform consider special education obsolete, to be rejected in favor of newer ideas known as inclusionary education, and they advocate abandoning special education.

Now may be the time for a second revolution in thinking about what special education is and does so that it evolves into a service that more consistently realizes its promise. Special education is likely to become extinct if its devolution continues. Its collapse would hasten the abandonment of public education. Alternatively, it could evolve to become a viable part of public education, a distinct entity, a clearly identifiable and viable part of educating all children appropriately in public schools.

Among the many causes of special education's devolution, some stand out prominently: (1) confusing must and may; (2) accepting illogic and imprecision of language; (3) responding to all diversities in the same way; (4) spurning science; (5) confusing attribute and person; (6) putting the worst possible face on special education; and (7) misconstruing least restrictive environment.

Better thinking and clearer communication are required to achieve special education's revitalization. These include calling things what they are and relying on new, younger leaders. Clear and wide understanding – consensus – about what special education is and does and acceptance of the idea that we must have it as a separate and distinct part of universal public education would be revolutionary.

Keywords: Inclusion; thinking; questions; segregation; continuum; diversity

Revitalizing Special Education, 1–41

doi:10.1108/978-1-80117-494-720221001

Many children, including many with disabilities, can be helped without special education. Making education better for most children does not require special education. However, helping *all* children, including all those with educational exceptionalities, do better in schools and in life more generally does require special education.

In 1975, the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (EAHCA, also known as Public Law 94–142) became law. It was breakthrough legislation (Martin, 2013) that in 2022 is called the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), last revised in 2004. That law is neither immutable nor eternal, nor is it immune to change(s) in interpretation by the US Supreme Court that subvert its purpose or to revision(s) by the Congress of the United States that do the same.

The law can conceivably be subverted and made a mockery by other means proposed by ostensible advocates for students with disabilities. Placing *all* children with disabilities, without exception, in general education will accelerate the demise of public education, making a mockery of any special education law that remains. Abandoning special education will make general education an inevitable failure. That is, teaching *all* students effectively in general education is so incredibly difficult that most competent teachers will simply give up. They will give up because they understand the impossibility of teaching *all* their students well when inclusion has no limits. Nevertheless, since as early as the 1980s, some professed advocates for all children have apparently given up on the idea of special education, assuming that although they cannot make special education work if it exists as a separate entity, they can, instead, create a general public education so transformed that it obviates special education.

In a popular pipe dream, people imagine that all teachers will be fluent in both signing and Braille, and be competent as well in instruction of all students who hear and see but have other disabilities of any description or combination. For some, this pipe dream has become a waking delusion sans hallucinogenic substance.

Scholars have noted that basic learning principles apply to all organisms (including all human beings). Some have argued, therefore, that "all learners benefit from a common set of strategies, even if they have to be adapted to take account of varying cognitive, emotional and social capabilities" (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020, p. 7). That is likely true. However, it does not therefore follow that all competent teachers can make all adaptations required for successful instruction of all students with all exceptionalities – especially if they are also expected to teach a class of typical size comprised of other more typical students.

In short, claims that special education is not needed are inconsistent not only with current law but also with what Rauch (2021) calls the reality-based community. Yet, these claims are made without apology by some who speak for education, even those who speak for education of exceptional children.

Claims That Special Education Is Not Needed

More examples are given later, but here is an initial illustration of the denial that special education is needed for any child. It is an example of the effort of those opposed to the very idea of special education to undermine even the recognition that special educational needs exist, including in some cases needs that are extremely unlikely to be met in a general education setting. This quotation is from a book by Slee (2018, p. 84):

Catia Malaquias exposes three common myths of special education:

- Your child has special needs;
- Children with special needs do better in "specialist" settings;
- Special schools are needed – and parents need to be able to choose them – because one size does not fit all.

Some who profess advocacy for exceptional children portray special education as an ugly, unneeded, unwanted, stigmatizing, discriminatory, exclusionary, embarrassing and antidemocratic appendage of public education. They see special education as a vestige of the past, something best discontinued. In the words of one person opposed to the very idea of special education, "…inclusive education is a call for a reformulation of schooling wherein 'special' and 'regular' are jettisoned and the segregation of students with disabilities is seen as a relic of a bygone age" (Slee, 2018, p. 82). Many nondeluded parents, teachers, and scholars believe neither Slee nor Malaquias.

True, special education is an old idea, invented in a bygone age. So are many good ideas (e.g., democracy as a form of government; aseptic surgery; Enlightenment science, appropriate education of advanced learners as well as those with disabilities). Winston Churchill is reported to have said in 1947 that democracy is the worst form of government – except all the alternatives. Special education has its faults, limitations, dangers, and problems. But, like democracy, it may be the worst possible feature of public education – except all the alternatives.

Responses to Criticisms

When special education is critiqued, criticisms should not be dismissed out of hand but be taken seriously as observations of its faults. Recognition of special education's faults should prompt strenuous efforts to correct them. However, criticisms and proposals for reform should also prompt questions about the likely consequences of actually doing whatever is proposed. For example, questions like these are fitting:

- How and why is special education any of the negative things it is said to be?
- Could special education possibly be fair and morally justified?
- Does "appropriate" or "best" change with a person's age, circumstances, or characteristics?

- How do we best assure the appropriate education of children with various exceptionalities?
- What is our moral obligation as educators to children with the most complicated disabilities and the most unusual gifts and talents?
- What is our moral obligation as educators to children with disabilities that are not immediately obvious to all observers?
- How can we best meet the moral obligation to ensure appropriate public education of *all* children?
- If we identify only some students for different education, how do we best do that?
- Are some ideas better than others for meeting our obligation to provide appropriate education for all?
- Is being included (i.e., physically present) in a regular class in the neighborhood school the most important thing or always necessary for appropriate education?
- Why do we call some deliberate groupings, but not others "segregated"?

Many similar questions could be asked, and all of them could be vastly elaborated. Answers could then be judged in the "marketplace of ideas" (Rauch, 2021). But doing so requires willingness to engage intellectually in asking questions and weighing the answers with the tools of science and reason (see Maag, 2021).

Particularly in the second and third decades of the twenty-first century, a pandemic of what philosopher Norman (2021) calls mental viruses (bad ideas and mental immune systems' failures to detect and fight them off) have swept the world – much like the COVID-19 virus, but "infections" of the mind. Viral falsehoods and misleading assertions have affected many aspects of civic life, including politics (consider Trump's "big lie" about the 2020 presidential election, as well as his many other false claims and the millions of people who believe them).

Distrust of science and reason has become common (Oreskes, 2021; Pinker, 2018). Misleading comments about and condemnation of special education are decades old but the current sociopolitical environment may accentuate and promote them. Bad ideas about educating exceptional children have a long history and have been incubating for decades (e.g., Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994; Kauffman, Hallahan et al., in press).

Propaganda and distorted thinking about special education did not happen all at once, but the metastasis of bad ideas was accelerated by relativist thinking, such as the philosophies known as postmodernism or relativism and their spin-offs. The unmooring of thinking from reality became obvious in special education in the 1980s and was fed by the popularity of postmodernism and its variants.

Unmoored thinking may become a new normal of the twenty-first century. Characteristics of such cognitive slippage include unwillingness to yield to better arguments, rejection of the idea of objectivity because objectivity can never be pristine (neither can subjectivity), unflagging adherence to an ideology, incuriosity or twisted thinking about moral issues, and assertions that "lived experience" and

subjective judgment are somehow adequate and more reliable than scientific evidence and logic for critical thinking about disabilities and education.

The "virus" of bad thinking includes the inability to see how disability and giftedness have implications for education that are far different from many other kinds of diversity. Part of the difficulty in which special education finds itself is what Sasso (2001) called "willful ignorance" and Krugman (2020b) said is obviously intelligent people's not wanting to understand. Such apparently purposeful ignorance and incomprehension are mystifying and discouraging.

Special Education's Emergence and Future

The positive changes, illustrated most clearly by the revolutionary, breakthrough federal law in the US in 1975 (Martin, 2013; Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022; Yell, 2019; Yell et al., 2017), were soon challenged. Before 2021, the special education literature included calls for special education's abandonment, its nonexistence in any form, and complaints of its obsolescence. These included charges that special education is demeaning, discriminatory, and ineffective and proposals for its merger with if, not disappearance into, general education (e.g., Goodlad & Lovitt, 1993; Lipsky & Gartner, 1987, 1996; Stainback & Stainback, 1984).

A second revolution of special education does not require new laws, but it does require recognition and reassertion of foundational ideas by its leaders and practitioners. Leaders must explain what special education is, the fundamental things it *must* do to exist, and how it is different from general education (e.g., Zigmond & Kloo, 2017). Then special education can evolve – become better and more effective in doing what it must for *students with educational disabilities* (SWED) as well as those having unusual cognitive nimbleness or other special gifts or talents with or without disabilities.

Unfortunately, special education is not evolving but devolving. *Devolution* is the process of chipping away at the central features or elements defining something. The eventual consequence of devolution is nonexistence.

In the early twenty-first century, ideas known as full inclusion, inclusionary education, and disability studies continued the call for special education's abandonment (e.g., Anastasiou et al., 2018, 2020; Kauffman, Anastasiou et al., in press). Some have called special education dangerous because of the way special educators think about disabilities and education, although the dangerous ideas and better ways of thinking are not specified, other than something other than Enlightenment science. For example, Connor (2020, pp. 24–25) asked, "How can we forge different ways of thinking about disability and education without defaulting to the limited – even dangerous ways – of special education?"

- What are those limitations, and how is thinking about special education dangerous?
- Is there a least dangerous, if not danger-free, and unlimited way of thinking about disabilities?
- What should we do about dangers and limits when we see them?

In spite of any limitations or dangers, some studies have indicated that special education aids students' achievement (e.g., Hanuschek et al., 2002; Hurwitz et al., 2020; Schwartz et al., 2021). Special education's benefits must be recognized, as well as its limitations, dangers, and faults. All, or nearly all, laudatory endeavors have their dangers and limits, and apparently anything that can be abused will be, regardless of how much good its sensible use may do.

Anderson (2020) described the slow devolution of many things in American culture: "As it turned out, the 1980s were the '30s but in reverse: instead of a fast-acting New Deal, a time-release Raw Deal" (p. xxi). He was comparing economic conditions and social programs of the 1930s to those of the Reagan era of the 1980s. Changes often start very gradually, then seem to happen very suddenly because a tipping point is reached. Even US policy regarding science followed this course. Thorp (2020) described the deterioration of government science policy: "It gradually built up over 40 years, beginning with the election of Ronald Reagan, but suddenly reached a tipping point in the chaos of 2020" (p. 639; see also Krugman, 2020a). Special education is not immune to such processes (Kauffman, Hallahan et al., in press). Moreover, special education seems to have fallen for some totally discredited ideas and misstatements of fact (Kauffman & Hornby, in press).

Really terrible things often have an insidious onset that is hard to discriminate from the "noise" of the background and ambiguities of any change. Often, ultimately harmful or fatal changes are hard to detect because they are presented with excitement and fervor by someone we have no immediate reason to distrust (Mercier, 2020). Often, people don't seem at first to be aware of where things are headed, and for good reason. They thought what they were observing was going to be, at worst, inconsequential, if not actually good. But what they were witnessing was slow, unrecognized deterioration. Often, people are not aware of the fact that they are on a path to perfidy until it's too late (Anderson, 2020; Bryant, 2021; Kauffman et al., 2021; Kauffman, Ahrbeck et al., 2022; Kauffman, Anastasiou et al., 2020; Thorp, 2020).

The Nature of the Problem

Special education is one among a class of problems familiar to students of ethics but often poorly understood by individuals without a philosophical bent. Without going into great detail, the problem begins with a proposition about an issue under consideration, typically one considered very important. Let us call it proposition X (which might be, for example, voting rights, abortion, the right to bear arms, universal public education, nonaggression, and so on). The proposition then is considered in two forms: absolute (yes, *always*; no, *never*) and contingent (it depends; yes under certain conditions or circumstances, no under others). That contrast or level of argument may be the point at which the issue is settled. If the decision is in favor of the absolute, then a mandate with no exception whatever or a total prohibition with no exception is the resultant law or

policy. If, however, the matter is considered contingent, then those contingencies are at issue.

Contingencies present further problems: (1) What are those exceptions? (2) How are those exceptions determined? (3) Who is empowered to make those exceptions? In short, contingency allows, indeed requires, further, difficult, arguable decisions (e.g., Kauffman, Burke et al., in press). Law may provide guidance in making those decisions (e.g., IDEA in the case of special education), but law is open to interpretation and subversion, and ethical interpretation and implementation are not guaranteed. Moreover, contingencies may be so narrowly drawn that they are tantamount to the absolute, so restrictive that choices are essentially nonexistent.

One of the problems encountered in education, special and general, is the meaning of the word *all*. The word has been at the heart of controversies about many things for millennia. People writing about education and other matters have often used *all* to mean, literally, *most* (*all* they want to consider or talk or write about, *not literally all, meaning each and every, no exceptions*). However, *all* has become a contentious word in proposals for education reform, and the meaning of the word has been arguable for decades (e.g., Kauffman & Hallahan, 1993). People reading Hirsch (2020), for example, understand that his references to all or all children cannot be taken literally, to include those with obvious educational disabilities.

Both *all* and exceptions (i.e., not all) can be used destructively and illogically (see Bateman et al., 2015 for further discussion). Exceptions can be used to deny children effective instruction (e.g., Hirsch, 2020). However, "all means all" (i.e., *all* in a literal sense, such as the use of the word by SWIFT Schools, 2022; Slee, 2018) is obvious nonsense used to undercut IDEA and the very idea of special education. However, attributing malevolent motives to all those who use *all* in a literal sense is itself malevolent. People can intend something good while thinking very poorly about it – have good intentions but think poorly about their intentions.

Moreover, people can be good thinkers about things other than that about which they think poorly. It is entirely possible for a person to be a competent or even renowned scholar (perhaps in physics or philosophy, e.g.) yet stumble cognitively over the demonstrated falsity and logical absurdity of something like "facilitated communication" (by whatever name it goes; e.g., see Engber, 2015). Because someone is hoodwinked or "blinkered" about one thing does not mean they are about everything. So, again, bad thinking, especially when it is about one particular issue, does not mean bad person or poor thinker in general. And all ideas deserve careful consideration, which does not mean that all ideas are good or of equal value.

The difficulty special education faces is not, for the most part, bad people or bad intentions, but bad ideas about education and disability. Lukianoff and Haidt (2018) described the stark differences between intentions and ideas. Good intentions are not enough to make school practices what they should be. Everyone is seeking the same goal – appropriate and more effective education for *all* children,

whether they have exceptionalities or not. However, good intentions must be built on sound ideas if those intentions are not to founder (Norman, 2021; Saad, 2020).

Unfortunately, less-than-careful thought and rigorous thinking about public education, both general and special, has made public education a tragicomedy (Kauffman, 2010). Reforming general education to meet the needs of all SWED would be extremely difficult, if not impossible (e.g., Engelmann, 2007). Reforming or improving special education – a relatively small, distinct part of public education – seems a more reasonable, realistic, achievable goal.

The reform of special education is needed, but that is possible only with careful, rational thinking, including the use of accurate and precise language. Unfortunately, much of the language of radical reform has been based on conceptual and linguistic structures that fail with close scrutiny – structures Koertge (1998) would call "houses built on sand." Of course, like pigs in fables, some simply do not understand the vulnerabilities of their "houses" – their ideas.

The Causes of Special Education's Devolution and a Way Forward

Following are several notions revealing a lack of careful, logical, linear thinking about realities. *Most or all are partly true but misleading, applying sometimes but not always.*

(1) Special education doesn't work as it should because it is done in the wrong place. The problem is the separation of special from general education. If educators were to change *where* special education happens, it would work much better.
(2) General educators should be teaching SWED with help from special educators. General and special educators should *coteach*, doing each other's work and switching roles as needed.
(3) Special educators have inadequate training, so their failure is unsurprising. They should have training in general education, too. Furthermore, general educators should have training in special education. If both have *training in the others' field* (it need not be much longer or much more extensive) and they work together as a team, then *all* students benefit.
(4) Special educators can "work themselves out of business" by showing general educators how to do what they ought to do but do not. Special educators know how to teach SWED very well and can *teach general educators*, too, to become good at teaching SWED.
(5) General education teachers will use science-based instruction and behavior management in tiers 1 and 2 so effectively that tier three (perhaps called special education, perhaps not) will be needed less often or not at all. Special education as tier three (or higher) will work better, too, because it will be only for those who actually need it. If there is a tier or level of instruction and behavior management that is "sort of" but not completely special education, then all of education will work better. Furthermore, a